



# The Journey

For Families of Fallen Firefighters

ISSUE 117 ~ MAY / JUNE 2024

Home is where somebody notices when you are no longer there.

~ Aleksandar Hemon

A death in the family can change the meaning of “home.” Especially if you lived with the person who died, the rooms that felt like a sanctuary may now feel haunted by memories of what was and what will not be. Or maybe home is the only place you feel at peace—in the space that you shared and where you made memories together. While the rest of the world continues to spin, your home may be where you retreat to remember the world that existed within those walls.

In deciding whether to stay in a house after a loved one dies, the considerations may run from the emotional—*Do I want to live in this community where people know the story of my past and reminders are everywhere?*—to the practical—*Can I keep up with the demands and cost of this property and house?* Do you live close to family and friends who provide support? If you are re-partnered after being widowed, how does it feel to be in a new relationship in this space that holds so much history?

Staying in your house, you may begin to feel stuck, while thinking about leaving may feel like a betrayal. These are tough choices. Like so much with grief, there is no set of rules and regulations, no right or wrong. It’s a decision

that each person has to make based on their own situation, resources, and priorities. Grief and loss change us, and the way you feel about your home may also change over time. Here are a few questions to consider if you are struggling with this decision:

- ♥ If I’ve been away for a few days, how do I feel when I think about returning home?
- ♥ When I picture my life 5 or 10 years from now, does this house fit that picture?
- ♥ Do I have the resources to devote to living here? And do I want to put my energy into upkeep?
- ♥ Is the desire to move more about moving away from something or toward something?
- ♥ If I decide to stay, are there changes that would help this house fit my new situation?
- ♥ If I decide to move, how will I incorporate the comforting memories of my loved one into my new space?

In this issue, Fire Hero Family members share their stories of home, then and now, and how they have found peace with their choices.

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By Diane Turner

*Wife of George A. Turner Jr. (2013-NY)*

My husband, Captain George Turner Jr., had a massive heart attack in our driveway after he had called in to the response line saying he was coming to calls. Hours later, he was found lying in our driveway.

Some people thought I should sell the house soon after George died; I refused, saying this was OUR home. It was

the home we built together, and I wasn’t ready to leave it. By staying in the house, my emotions ran the gamut from happy to sad, but I always felt his presence there. One Saturday morning about five months after George died, I was debating about going to the basement to put laundry in before I left to do errands. Something made me go down

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**Turner** *continued from page 1*

to do it, and it was a good thing. George left the battery chargers for his portable tools on top of a freezer in the basement. When I got down there, I heard popping and sizzling, and I looked over to see one of the charges sparking right under the gas pipe. I believe George was the one who made me go down there that morning.

Four years after he died, I started looking for a new house where I could host family holidays. My parents' house was too small for the kids, grandkids, and their significant others, and I could see my mom getting tense with all the people in the house. Plus, I figured after one parent died the other would end up living with me. In May 2017, just before the NFFF Wellness Conference in Charleston, South Carolina, I saw a house I really liked, and I put a bid on it. While I was at the conference, I received news that my offer was accepted! About three months after I moved in, I was walking around the new house, and I stopped dead in my tracks in the living room. It suddenly dawned on me that I had bought our dream house! It was everything we said we wanted before we got married, but we couldn't afford it at the time. I love my new house, and I even started decorating for Christmas again.



*Diane Turner*

I feel George in this house whenever I attempt to do something I've never done before. I've had to fix toilets, replace a shower head and curtain rod, hook up and unhook cable boxes, and deal with issues with my hot

water tank. I also had to re-set my garage door opener, which entailed me going more than two steps up a ladder! I'm afraid of heights, and two steps is my limit. I have a Little Giant ladder, and I figured out how to open it and raise it so when I was four steps up, I still had ladder to hold on to. I'm learning how to "put my big girl panties on" and do things around here I've never done before.

I've learned to ask for help when I need it, but I also want to learn to do some things myself.

I've also learned to stand up for myself when purchasing large items (car, windows, etc.). If the salesperson treats me with respect and not like a woman who doesn't know anything, I will usually deal with them. I've had salespeople ignore me because I'm a single female and ask me, "Don't you want to bring a male friend for their opinion?" I tell those people I'm a widow, and I don't need a man to validate me or my choices, and I walk out. I would say the "superpower" I've developed is standing up for myself.

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**By Catherine DeFlumere**

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*Wife of Albert "Foxy" DeFlumere (1996-NY)*

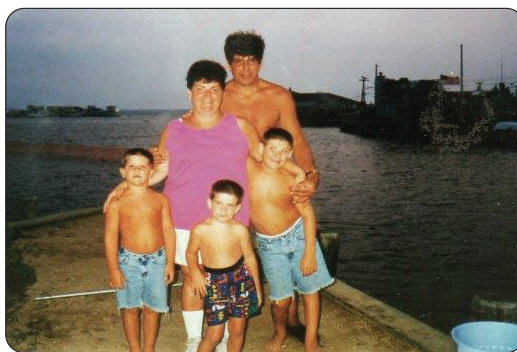
**M**y situation was different from most people. My husband, Foxy, a volunteer firefighter, and our six-year-old son, Matthew, died on October 26, 1996, in a fire in our own home. My husband led me and our two other sons, Ryan and Travis, to safety and went back in for Matthew. We not only lost them, but we lost our house, our clothes, our family photos, our memorabilia. After the fire, the three of us moved in with my parents.

Eleven months later, my sons and I moved into our new home around the corner from my parents. It was a blessing. Thankfully, my mom was the one

who always had her camera, so we were able to decorate our new home with family photos. In 2018, after my

parents' passing, my brother and I renovated our childhood home. I sold my home, and my sons and I moved in with him. Our living situation worked.

In 2021, as my brother was approaching retirement, we started to talk about relocating to a warmer area. I started questioning, how could I leave New York, and how could I leave Foxy and Matthew (the cemetery)? On the other hand, I did not have the best relationship with my



*The DeFlumere family*



husband's firehouse, and it was good for me to finally get away from that situation which just tore my heart more.

We decided to have a house built in Little River, South Carolina. My oldest son, Ryan, stayed in New York, and my youngest, Travis, made the move with us. I have not looked back. I love my new life, my new friends, and the wonderful community we have moved to.



Matthew DeFlumere

I have two special family photos in my living room, and they will always be there.

After the loss of their husbands, many widows ask themselves, "Should I stay in 'our' home, or should I sell and move?" It is a very hard decision to make. Moving to a different state worked for me, but you have to listen to your own heart, as I did.

### By MaryRose McNamee

*Wife of Steven J. McNamee (1993-IL)*

**M**y husband, Candidate Firefighter Steven J. McNamee of the Chicago Fire Department, died November 24, 1993, as a result of injuries sustained in a training accident at the fire academy two weeks before graduation. Our family—Steve, our daughter Anne, son Steven Jr., and I—had just moved into our new home two days before the accident. Many of his classmates from the academy helped with the move.

I recently shared a memory of this experience on my Facebook page.



The McNamee home



Steven J. McNamee

Thirty years ago, we moved into our house, armed with many hopes and dreams for our future. Who would have known that, just a few short days later, everything would change forever. The kids and I had to acclimate ourselves to a new life, trying to heal from a loss that rocked our world like nothing we had ever known before. Through it all, we persevered. And I came to love this wonderful place I call "HOME." It's been changed and transformed over the years, as have I. But it continues to be my safe haven, my shelter from the storm, always warm and inviting. I will never regret my decision to stay.

*Pieces featured in The Journey may not be reprinted without written permission from the authors.*

*Let your home be your mast and not your anchor.*

~ Kahlil Gibran

### Did you know?

You can find issues of *The Journey* at [www.firehero.org/news/newsletters](http://www.firehero.org/news/newsletters) going all the way back to 2003. Issue #41: *Dreams* features stories about how Fire Hero Families found ways to make their dreams of home come true even after the death of their firefighters.

## Support and Connection for Fire Hero Families

Join our private Facebook group for Fire Hero Families.

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/NFFFFireHeroFamilyPrograms>

Find resources that support adults and children who are grieving.

<https://www.firehero.org/resources/family-resources>

Join one of our virtual support groups hosted via Zoom. These groups are provided for family members of firefighters honored or approved to be honored at the National Fallen Firefighters Memorial in Emmitsburg, Maryland.

### Fire Hero Teens Support Group

open to children, stepchildren, and siblings, ages 13-17, facilitated by a psychologist who specializes in providing trauma-focused support



**1st and 3rd Tuesday of the month, 7-8 PM (EDT)**

Register at: <https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/88CKSYR>

### Facilitated Support Group

open to adult Fire Hero Family members, for those who are struggling with grief or do not have a strong support system; facilitated by a psychologist.



**Weekly, Tuesday, 8-9 PM (EDT)**

Register at: <https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/88CKSYR>

### Fire Hero Family Peer Support Group

open to adult Fire Hero Family members; meet in small groups to share experiences, encouragement, and ideas



**Weekly, Wednesday, 8-9:15 PM (EDT)**

Register at: <https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/87W8ZFY>

### Men Forging Ahead

open to adult men from the Fire Hero Family community; informal conversation and connection



**Monthly, 4th Saturday, 3-4:30 PM (EDT)**

Register at: <https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/X3IMT93>

### Monthly Remembrance Group

open to adult Fire Hero Family members; during the anniversary month of your firefighter's death, join others who are also remembering their firefighters; facilitated by a grief specialist



**Monthly, 2nd Sunday, 3-4 PM (EDT)**

Register at: <https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/PQF7X39>

If you have questions about these groups, please e-mail Erin at [ebrowning@firehero.org](mailto:ebrowning@firehero.org).



**BJA**  
Bureau of Justice Assistance  
U.S. Department of Justice

Toll-free: 1-888-744-6513

Enacted in 1976, the Public Safety Officers' Benefits (PSOB) Programs are a unique partnership effort of the PSOB Office, Bureau of Justice Assistance (BJA), U.S. Department of Justice and local, state, and federal public safety agencies and national organizations, such as the National Fallen Firefighters Foundation, to provide death, disability, and education benefits to those eligible for the Programs.

## Write About Your Journey



Nicknames are a proud tradition in the fire service. Did your firefighter have a nickname, either in the family or at the fire department? Is there a particular quality or a funny story behind the nickname? If you'd like to write about this for *The Journey*, we'd

love to hear more! Please start your piece with this line: My firefighter's name was [NAME], but he/she was also known as [NICKNAME]. Then tell us the story behind the nickname. To

share your story, please send it, along with a high-resolution photo, by August 15, 2024, to [jwoodall@firehero.org](mailto:jwoodall@firehero.org).

If you don't use email, you can submit your written piece and a photo to:

National Fallen Firefighters Foundation  
Attn: Jenny Woodall  
P.O. Drawer 498  
Emmitsburg, MD 21727

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