



The Journey

For Families of Fallen Firefighters

ISSUE 118 ~ JULY / AUGUST 2024

At the rising of the sun and its going down, we remember them.

~ Rabbi Sylvan Kamens and Rabbi Jack Riemer

Anniversaries can be joyous. They mark the milestones of our lives—births, marriages, the day we met. We anticipate them for months and celebrate them with joy and triumph. Another year around the sun, another year of memories. When tragedy comes, anniversaries can take on a darker hue—the day of the accident, the diagnosis, the last time I saw her, the last day of his life. And even those days that once brought us joy can remind us of another birthday, wedding anniversary, holiday without our person. Joyous anticipation may be replaced with dread.

We know that people often experience a surge of grief and distress around those anniversaries after a loved one dies. It's a time when extra support and extra care are needed. Hearts may feel especially tender, even many years after a death.

The NFFF has two programs that focus on providing additional support during the anniversary month of each firefighter's death. About 100 Fire Hero Family members volunteer their time to write personal Remembrance Cards to families of firefighters who died during each month. It's a simple way to let people know that we remember with them. We also have a virtual Remembrance Group via Zoom each month so people remembering firefighters who died that month can connect and share with one another. It is a sacred space in which to pause, reflect, grieve, and remember in community.

Here are some of the thoughts people have shared during these monthly Remembrance Groups over the past few years.

Tell us about your firefighter.

- ♥ His smile is what I think of first
- ♥ He was such a great kid
- ♥ He was my big brother
- ♥ He had the biggest heart
- ♥ He was the life of the party
- ♥ He inspired me to become an EMT
- ♥ He was my partner, the person who I could bounce ideas off
- ♥ He was a social butterfly
- ♥ He looked like a linebacker, but he was like a big teddy bear
- ♥ He loved celebrating everything
- ♥ He was just good to be around
- ♥ He was a stoic marshmallow—firm on the outside, soft underneath
- ♥ He was a prankster
- ♥ He was an eternal kid
- ♥ He was a quiet giver
- ♥ He was the guy who fixed up the house
- ♥ He helped quite a few people on the sly
- ♥ Every night before we went to bed, we danced together in the kitchen

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Remembrance *continued from page 1*

Tell us about your grief.

- I was not prepared for this
- I feel lost
- The first funeral I ever went to was my father's
- Where is my person?
- I miss him every day
- I'm trying to live a life that doesn't exist anymore
- Don't tell me God has a plan; right now, God's plan sucks
- The hardest part is being a single parent
- Everyone has somebody; now I'm alone
- For some reason, this year is harder
- The love is still there; it just has nowhere to go
- Every time I hear a siren, I offer up a prayer
- It's hard being the sole surviving child, dealing with aging parents
- The most frustrating thing is not being able to communicate with him
- I'm still adjusting to not being part of a couple
- People move on
- I want to be strong, but I don't want people to think I've gotten over it
- Dead animals were never my job, but now, when a bunny dies in the yard, I go get the shovel
- It's the loneliest feeling in the world not to have your spouse on Christmas morning
- Every single facet of my life changed when he died

What helps you?

- These Zoom support groups
- Therapy
- Morning workouts
- Journaling
- The Memorial Weekend helped us realize we were not alone
- Receiving a Remembrance Card moves me to tears
- Creating new holiday traditions
- Channeling my firefighter's extroversion

- Fundraising and scholarships
- Martial arts
- Volunteering at a children's hospital
- Looking through old family photos
- Getting out in nature
- My granddaughter
- Making sure the next generation knows the stories
- My dog
- My husband's fire department always honks when they go by with the fire truck
- Having cremation stone jewelry that I wear every day
- Gentle yoga
- I take it one day at a time
- I'm able to connect with him a lot through meditation, talking to him like he's here
- Knowing that he belonged to the community, and they are grieving, too
- For the first time, through the NFFF, I am talking with others who understand what I am going through
- We have gained family through our loss

What would you tell others who are new to grief?

- Take time to grieve for yourself
- It doesn't matter what other people think about how you grieve
- Everyone has their own timetable
- Accept that the pain never goes away
- It's important to be around other people who know grief
- Sometimes you have to ask the fire department for help when you need it
- Asking for help and letting people help you is a way to pay tribute to your firefighter
- Talk to people; resist the urge to isolate
- Don't make decisions based on pressure from other people
- Don't be ashamed of your feelings
- Talk about memories and tell stories
- Embrace your feelings, whatever they are



- Accept offers of help
- Write it down so you can read back over it and see how far you have come
- You are not always going to have the energetic capacity for other people's issues
- You have to do what works for you
- Be kind and gentle with yourself
- You are only responsible for your 50% in a relationship
- Make sure you are surrounded by positive people who let you be yourself

What do you do on the anniversary of your firefighter's death?

- For me, it's the week before the anniversary that is hardest—those memories leading up to the moment when our lives changed forever
- Every year on the anniversary of his death, I'm 13 years old again, and I'm heartbroken
- On that day, I can't be home alone
- I try to incorporate the spirit of him
- I stay busy on anniversary dates
- I donate blood in his memory
- On the anniversary, I like to be by myself
- We go for a hike in a beautiful place
- We try to honor him that day by paying it forward to others
- On the anniversary of his death, I go inward. I don't want to talk to people

- We go away for the day, take day trips
- I just take time to think about him

I'm proud of:

- I ask for help when I need it
- I'm trying to let go of my anger
- I talk about my dad every day
- I finished building our dream home after he died
- We settled his affairs as he would have wanted, with kindness and humility
- I'm trying to hold our family together
- I work to keep the family connected; if I don't do it, nobody's going to do it
- I raised my children on my own
- I've learned how to repair a lot of things
- I put up a Christmas tree again, even though I had to force myself to do it

I'm grateful:

- For my loved one and the people who help us
- For my beautiful children
- That this loss brought our family together
- That God chose me to be his mother
- That my firefighter pushed me to do things I didn't think I could do
- That some of the hard steps we have to take through grief turn out to be OK

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Did you know?

You can find issues of *The Journey* at www.firehero.org/news/newsletters going all the way back to 2003.

Past issues cover topics including:

- How Pets Can Help Us Through Grief (Issues 9 and 108)
- Signs, Dreams, and Touchstones That Connect Us to Our Loved Ones (Issues 36 and 101)
- Songs of Love and Remembrance (Issues 48 and 96)
- Legacies (Issues 35 and 99)

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 of fallen firefighters, 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/FireHeroTeens>

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 who specializes in providing trauma-focused support

 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; hosted by NFFF staff

 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/X3JMT93>

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.



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



Death and grief bring a whole new vocabulary: mourning, angel-versary, widow, death date, moving on (or moving forward), the new normal, post traumatic growth, grief surge, acceptance, normal (or complicated or traumatic) grief, closure. If any of these words triggered a response for you, you are not alone! Tell us from your perspective about the grief words that get it wrong, the ones that get it right, or about words you have had to invent to describe an experience that you didn't have a word for.

To share your story, please send it, along with a high-resolution photo, by October 15, 2024, to 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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