



The Journey

For Families of Fallen Firefighters

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What you leave behind is not what is engraved in stone monuments but what is woven into the lives of others. ~ Pericles

The National Fallen Firefighters Memorial in Emmitsburg, Maryland, is sacred ground to many Fire Hero Families. We hear from families that they feel the presence of their firefighter at the Memorial and are comforted knowing that their loved one is remembered in the company of other fallen heroes.

Constructed in 1981, the 7-foot stone monument features a sculpted Maltese Cross, the traditional symbol of the fire service. At the base of the monument an eternal flame symbolizes the spirit of all firefighters, past, present, and



future. Plaques encircling the monument list the names of the men and women of the fire service who have died in service to their communities since 1981. A brick Walk of Honor® connects the monument site to the historic National Fallen Firefighters Memorial Chapel.

The monument is so much more than stone, the plaques greater than bronze, the eternal flame not simply fire. Love, sorrow, honor, remembrance, loss, connection, pride, and comfort—these too are a memorial to the brave Fire Heroes honored here.

What does the National Fallen Firefighters Memorial mean to you?

David M. Morse

Father of Peyton Lane S. Morse (2021-NY)

July 2018 found my family of four in Gettysburg, Pennsylvania, on what—unbeknownst to us—would be our last family vacation together.

A family of history lovers, this was our first trip to this area. We came to learn more about the Civil War and pay our respects to all whose lives were lost during this tragic time. We didn't know what to expect and certainly did not realize what a significant role this area would soon play in our lives.

On our first night in Gettysburg, while waiting for the hotel elevator, my eyes were drawn to a pamphlet for the National Shrine of Saint Elizabeth Ann Seton. I never grab these tourist pamphlets, but for some reason I picked this one up. That night we made plans to visit the Shrine

in nearby Emmitsburg, Maryland, a place we had never heard of.

On our drive to the Shrine, we passed a sign for the National Fallen Firefighters Memorial. My younger son, Peyton, immediately called from the backseat, "Dad, can we stop at the Firefighters Memorial?" Calculating the time we had in our schedule, I didn't answer right away. "Dad," Peyton said, "I really feel compelled to visit the Memorial. Can we please stop?"

Peyton rarely asked for anything and never asked twice, so I knew we had to stop.

continued on page 2

Morse *continued from page 1*

After an amazing visit to the Shrine, I made the quick turn onto the grounds of the National Emergency Training Center. After clearing security, we were soon at the National Fallen Firefighters Memorial. Peyton was quiet, respectful, and contemplative. Then he did something else he rarely did; he asked us to take his picture, just him, in front of the Memorial. He felt compelled to visit here, and we all felt a strange connection to this sacred place.



Peyton Morse

Less than three years later, on March 3, 2021, Peyton was killed during training, a senseless line-of-duty death. The next year, on October 6, 2022, three of us would return to Gettysburg

and Emmitsburg, this time to honor OUR fallen firefighter.

This return visit cemented our connection to the Memorial and with the incredible people of the NFFF and our newly found Fire Hero Family. The Memorial, the NFFF, and the Fire Hero Families have all helped us navigate this tragic experience and keep us going. We would be lost without them.

We return at least once every year and will continue to do so as long as we are able. Thank you to the NFFF and our Fire

Hero Families for all you do each and every day to keep us all moving forward, day by day, minute by minute, and for remembering our loved ones.

Eve Roush

Wife of Allen L. Roush (2022-DC)

Because of Allen's 40-year career in the Air Force Fire and Emergency Services, I have so many memories of this place. I remember the first time I was there with Allen in 2011. The ceremonies were so full of tradition and so heartfelt, I couldn't help but shed a few tears. In one of the cases in the Chapel, I found a picture of Allen and several fire chiefs who had helped raise money for the NFFF. Allen didn't even know the picture was there, so he thought it was funny that I wanted to take a picture of him standing beside his picture in the case.

Through the years, I attended several ceremonies and activities there with Allen. It was such an honor to be able to attend these events and see the impact that the organization had on all the families and the honor that was given to our fallen heroes.

When Allen retired in 2014, I had no idea that I would be returning ten years later and experience the other side. This time my tears were for my fallen hero. It is a blessing to have him forever honored and remembered at this special place. Thank you to everyone at the NFFF for all that you do.

Genesis Chester

Wife of John Chester (2017-GA)

My husband died in the line of duty on May 18, 2017, and was honored at the National Memorial in 2018. When we went to the Fire Hero Weekend for him, our family was treated like royalty and were taken care of with kid gloves every second we were there. For us, seeing him honored the way he was gave us comfort knowing that

people were grateful for his sacrifice. I don't have all the words to describe what an honor it was to be there for him. I found myself not able to speak due to the aura that is in the air when you walk onto the grounds. It was a beautiful ceremony, and we will forever be grateful for all that was done for our family.

Alice Strickler

Mother of Ian Strickler (2023-VA)

The National Fallen Firefighters Memorial means so much to our family. Our son, Ian, died during the second day of firefighter training. Even though Ian was unable to fulfill his dream of being a firefighter, he is recognized by the NFFF as one of them.

Ian did not have any children, and this memorial ensures that his name will continue, and he will not be forgotten. He walks with and among the heroes, and that is so comforting. We truly are humbled that he is memorialized on this sacred ground.



Sandra Clinton

Wife of Madison “Maddy” Clinton (2018-OK)

Before my husband, Madison “Maddy” Clinton, was killed in the line of duty, I never knew of the National Fallen Firefighters Foundation or the National Memorial. I had to find Emmitsburg on Google Maps. That changed in October 2019, when he was honored and added to the Memorial. That weekend left me feeling humbled, respected, and part of a community that would always support me and my family.

Since then, I have returned to Emmitsburg to volunteer for the Memorial Weekend and for the Winter Retreat and Tree Lighting. Each time I step onto the campus I have a sense of belonging. Maddy’s name is forever etched on the plaque

for all to see and remember. He’s now a permanent part of the Memorial, and since he is a permanent part of me, I am connected as well. By helping new survivor families, I have a chance to share the significance of the Memorial in their lives. Having the Family Programs staff, who do so much for the survivors, located on campus helps create that feeling of acceptance and belonging.

For some, the Memorial is just a group of names. When you have a family member, friend, or colleague represented, the National Fallen Firefighters Memorial becomes more significant and revered. You become a member of a large, supportive family when that name is added to the Roll of Honor.

Susan Wright

Wife of Horace “Dan” Wright (2023-TX)

My husband, Horace “Dan” Wright, was a volunteer for Abbott VFD and was killed on April 14, 2023, while on a call for a stranded motorist. His last act of kindness was making sure the young lady’s grandfather was safe. He was my hero.

The National Memorial means comfort. It reassures me that my husband, and all the others who have died in the line of duty, will never be forgotten. It means pride, that all the brave men and women are part of a brotherhood that loves their fellow firefighters. It means sorrow, that those honored will never be part of their earthly family’s lives again. It means joy, because I know that every single one of those honored wouldn’t have it any other way, and they all gave their lives doing what they loved.

The Larondas

Family of John Ross Laronda (2017-VA)

We lost our precious son in 2017 at the young age of 28. Our lives have been forever changed. Of course, we were always proud of our son. When we arrived at the Memorial and saw his name on the wall alongside other heroes, we couldn’t have been prouder of him. Our son died while he was doing the thing he loved the most, helping people. To be recognized by the National Fallen Firefighters Foundation gives us validation that our son will never be forgotten.



Sabrail Davenport

Mother of Jared Lloyd (2021-NY)

My son, Firefighter Jared Lloyd, from the Spring Valley Fire Department, was honored at the National Memorial in October 2022. During my visits at the Memorial, I find that when I’m walking the paths of the memorial grounds, I feel the presence of peace. It’s a sacred place that confirms that Jared’s sacrifice, along with his fallen

brothers and sisters, was not in vain. This memorial is their testimony that represents their bravery, courage, and honor to be a servant who risked their lives as firefighters to save others. Because of Jared’s LODD, the National Memorial in Emmitsburg will forever be a place for me and my family to visit so that we can continue feeling the peace we all deserve.

Support and Connection for Fire Hero Families

Join our private Facebook group for Fire Hero Families.

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


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 behavioral health 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



Grief can be a surprisingly physical experience, affecting sleep, appetite, energy, breath, pain, overall health, and stamina. How have you dealt with the physical aspects of grief? This might include movement, nutrition, rest, mindfulness, exercise, medication, and other forms of self-care. What has worked for you?

To share your story, please send it, along with a high-resolution photo, by December 1, 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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