



The Journey

For Families of Fallen Firefighters

ISSUE 121 ~ JANUARY / FEBRUARY 2025

Unable are the loved to die, for love is immortality.

~ Emily Dickinson

When someone we love dies, how we remember and honor them becomes central to our grief process. How do we carry our memories and their qualities with us? What customs, traditions, and rituals have meaning for us as we move forward?

The ways we remember and pay tribute are endless, as varied and eclectic as the relationships we had. Most memorials aren't as showy as the Taj Mahal or the Pyramids. Some may be so quiet and personal that no one else even knows about them. Personal events that celebrate what our loved ones enjoyed and valued can bring deep meaning into the midst of sorrow. Listening to music they loved, visiting a place where you spent time together, or eating that person's favorite foods can help you feel a continuing sense of connection. Some of the most meaningful tributes are those that improve the lives of others—random acts of kindness, training programs for first responders, memorial blood drives, educational scholarships.

When a loved one serves the public, there are often additional layers of remembrance from the fire department or agency, the community and, in some cases, the nation and beyond. The fire service is steeped in proud traditions and rituals, including those that honor lives lost in service. There may be monuments, remembrance services, public displays, and memorial events.

We hear a lot from Fire Hero Families about how the presence—and absence—of public remembrance influences their grief. For those of you whose loved one

died in a high-profile or multiple-fatality incident, there may be many events, including those that mark each anniversary of the death. Families often describe the mix of gratitude and exhaustion this brings. You may feel pressure to be present at every event to represent your firefighter, even when staying home might be the most healthy choice for you personally.

At the other extreme, some families feel abandoned by communities and agencies when they feel the firefighter's life and service are not adequately recognized. The mismatch between deep personal loss and a world that seems to have moved on can be a harsh and painful secondary loss.

Wherever you find yourself on this spectrum, we encourage you to pay attention to and honor your own emotional reserves. In planning or attending memorial events, ask yourself:

- ♥ What would feel most comforting to me?
- ♥ What would honor the best qualities of the person I loved?
- ♥ What would help me feel a continued sense of connection to my loved one?
- ♥ What would improve the lives of those who are still living?
- ♥ What do I have the energy for right now?

In this issue, Fire Hero Families share the many ways in which their firefighters are remembered.

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By Susan Antonelli

Mother of Alex K. Moss (2022-NJ)

Alex K. Moss, an active volunteer with the Upper Saddle River Fire Department in New Jersey for 30 years, died in the line of duty after returning from his last call on October 30, 2022.

Alex was a loving husband, doting father to three wonderful girls, and loving dog dad to his sweet dog, Lucy. He is greatly missed by his wife, Kelli; children, Nicole, Allison, and Jess; his sister, Carolyn; his nephews, Danny and Sam; his mother and stepfather, Susan and Edward Antonelli; and countless friends.

He lived his life fully and loved fishing, beaches, The Grateful Dead, collecting cars (As he would say, “Life is too short to drive boring cars.”), and collecting an amazing group of friends.

Hundreds of people came to his funeral services. Every friend from almost every state, as well as mayors and congressmen from Bergen County, New Jersey. We received letters of condolence from fire departments as far away as Hawaii.



Alex K. Moss

The memorials are still ongoing—concerts in his memory, trees planted in the National Forest in California from OnStar and General Motors, Fallen Heroes runs. The list goes on. “Mossfest” was an annual event for his birthday, and there was even a memorial “Mossfest” in the summer of 2023.

The memorials are very comforting. The funeral procession of fire trucks, police cars, and motorcycles through several towns, followed by a helicopter flyover by the NJ State Police over

an enormous flag hanging outside his fire station, and the firefighter’s funeral held in his honor—these tributes helped us through this unexpected loss. There were countless people there to honor him.

Having so many smiling photos and videos is also a great source of comfort. The response of so many people who knew him is extremely comforting to all those he left behind.

In every photo he is smiling his amazing smile.

His wings were ready; our hearts were not.

By the Family of Nadar Ali Hammett (2003-MD)

Nadar Hammett departed us on December 1, 2003. He joined the Prince George’s County Fire Department in 2000 and served for three years as an EMT/firefighter. He had plans to become a paramedic, with the expectation to graduate in January 2004 from the paramedic school at the Washington Hospital Center in Washington, D.C.

Prior to his passing we had a conversation about how we would make sure that our family would stay together, what it would be like when we had children and the joys of life period. Nadar was such a divine and loving person. He always had a different perspective on



Nadar Ali Hammett

everything, and that’s what made him such a unique person. One way that we deal with our grief is to continue to cherish the memories we shared with him. One of the things Nadar loved was to embrace nature. One of my brothers started hiking and taking beautiful nature pictures of things that I know Nadar would have loved. My mother makes his favorite meals sometimes and often visits his burial site to talk with him.

We continue to cherish the memories of Nadar. We try to incorporate his beautiful spirit into our everyday lives and within our hearts. We truly miss Nadar.



Their Legacies Live On

By Norene Spoth

Sister of Mitchel E. Spoth (1985-NY)

November 3, 2024, marked 40 years since Mitchel E. Spoth, age 19, of the Transit Fire Department (now East Amherst Fire Department) in East Amherst, New York, got up in the middle of the night to assist in putting out an arson fire. Mitch never thought this would be his last call, nor did we think we would never see him come home again.

It was a carpet store fire, which was deliberately set by the business owner's son. Mitch and his partner, Frank Raquet, were manning the hose together under the overhang. It came down on them both, knocking off Mitchel's helmet and air mask, causing him to breathe the poison gases that were released by the burning carpets. Frank was pinned down by heavy building structure, severely injuring his back and legs. Both men were taken to Erie County Medical Center in Buffalo, New York, where Mitchel fought for 69 long days and sadly passed on January 11, 1985.

Thankfully, Frank survived, but to this day he still struggles walking. He has a beautiful wife and three wonderful children. His legacy will live on.

As for Mitchel, he too leaves behind a few beautiful legacies in our town! First, the fire department keeps his badge number #25 on the side of their ladder truck. Second, the department has a memorial mass



Mitchel E. Spoth



said every January 11 for Mitchel and his fellow firefighters who have passed on. The fire department also named their baseball field at the fire hall the Mitchel E. Spoth Athletic Field, as baseball was his favorite sport.

Lastly, with some assistance from my cousin's wife, Fran, who is on the town board, I was able to get a road named after Mitchel. It was initially started for our devoted father, Melvin J. Spoth, who passed away April 7, 2021. Dad volunteered for 56 years with East Amherst Fire Department, where he served as chief, assistant chief, president and vice president of the board of directors, as well as safety police. He worked for the Town of Amherst Central Fire Alarm Office and was an electrician for the East Amherst Fire Department. He also served for 21 years as a member of the Town of Amherst Planning Board, where he ensured that fire safety was incorporated into the town's development plan.

Melvin and Mitchel Spoth Way leads to the Amherst Fire Training Facility, where firefighters can go to practice their skills to fight fires. I thank everyone who had a part in making all this possible. It is truly perfect! My goal is complete. I know Dad

and Mitchel will always be remembered for their sacrifices to our community.

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

Want to read more about the firefighters whose stories are featured in *The Journey*?

Search for the firefighter's name on the Roll of Honor at <https://www.firehero.org/fallen-firefighters>.

Want to organize or share a tribute or memorial in honor of your firefighter?


Visit <https://www.firehero.org/fallen-firefighters/firefighter-tributes> to see examples of how others have remembered their firefighters. You can use the same link to share tributes and memorials dedicated to your firefighter.

Support and Connection for Fire Hero Families

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.

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 (Eastern Time)**

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 (Eastern Time)**

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; hosted by NFFF staff

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

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 (Eastern Time)**

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

If you have questions about these groups, please e-mail Erin at ebrowning@firehero.org.



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



How is grief different for people who learn and process information differently? What are the unique struggles for those who are neurodivergent?

If you have firsthand experience with this, what are some strategies or tips you can offer to those who are struggling to help themselves or others? Are there books, podcasts, websites, or organizations that have helped you? If you have a story on this topic, we would love to hear from you.

To share your story, please email the wording and a high-resolution photo to jwoodall@firehero.org by April 18, 2025. If you don't use email, you can submit by mail:

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

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