



The Journey

For Families of Fallen Firefighters

ISSUE 125 ~ SEPTEMBER/OCTOBER 2025

*Your present circumstances don't determine where you can go;
they merely determine where you start.*

~ Nido Qubein

When the National Fallen Firefighters Foundation expanded its criteria to include some firefighters who die from occupational cancer, it changed the demographics of the Fire Hero Family community. Historically, most of the firefighters honored at the National Memorial died suddenly, from cardiovascular and trauma-related causes, although some lived for months or years with line-of-duty injuries and illnesses. With the addition of cancer deaths, now the community includes many more family members whose firefighters endured weeks, months, and often years of serious illness, treatment, remission, and relapses associated with a cancer diagnosis.

The way a person dies can affect the way survivors grieve and heal. Sudden death can be jarring—in an instant, the world as we know it changes forever, with no time to prepare. It takes time and work for our brains to understand this, to really believe that the person who walked out the door this morning will never be coming back. The suddenness of it becomes part of the grief experience. There may be words unsaid, tasks unfinished, dreams unrealized. The family may have to make decisions by guessing what their loved one would have wanted. The need for a support system materializes in a moment, and friends and family may not know what to do or what to say. Life can be messy on the best day, and it certainly is on the worst day.

When someone dies from an illness, the trajectory is different. There are likely many ups and downs on the way to get there—moments of despair, moments of hope, adjustment to the new landscape of daily life, the exhaustion of caregiving. With illness, there are often many smaller losses along the way as a person's health changes over time. The dynamics within the family shift to accommodate those losses. There may be time to prepare—to have important conversations, to get affairs in order, to understand the wishes of the person who is dying. There are often support systems within hospitals, hospice organizations, and community resources to assist families dealing with serious illness.

Even when we know it is coming and we have tried to prepare ourselves, when death comes, it can still feel shocking and disorienting. When someone we love dies, it may feel like we have been dropped into an alien landscape without a map. We have to learn to live in an altered world. And hopefully, we find others who know the landscape or have the navigation skills to help us begin to find our way.

This is the second of two issues of *The Journey* dedicated to the voices of Fire Hero Families impacted by deaths from occupational cancers.

My Dad, My Hero

By Henry Morrison (age 15), Son of Eric Morrison (2019-AR)

My dad, Eric Morrison, was a professional firefighter in Fort Smith, Arkansas. He died in 2019 from pancreatic cancer. His death was considered a line-of-duty death, as his cancer was determined to be a result of the exposures

he endured during his 16 years of firefighting. My dad loved being a firefighter; it was his passion. While he was sick, my mom asked him if he would be a firefighter if he had it to

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Henry Morrison *continued from page 1*

do all over again. His response was, “Of course. It is the best job in the world.” That’s how much he loved the job.

Now, I might be a little biased, but another thing he loved was me. I was his only son, and he did everything for me. I was just seven years old when he was diagnosed and nine years old when he passed. He was the best dad I could have ever asked for. He loved to mess with me and make me laugh. I have so many great memories of him. We hunted together and rode mountain bikes together. My family also traveled a lot, and my mom and I still do. Some of my favorite memories of my dad came from those trips. We once ate crickets at a Seattle Mariners game, stuck gum on the gum wall in Seattle, rode bikes over the Golden Gate Bridge in San Francisco, and hiked all over Rocky Mountain National Park.

Another special memory I have is how he used to play all types of music to help me go to sleep. It became a tradition and sparked my love for music. When my parents told me

my dad had cancer, my first response was, “Oh, he will beat it.” I knew how strong my dad was. Losing him was the hardest thing I have ever had to go through. He was everything to me.



Henry and Eric Morrison

For a long time, I sort of blamed myself for his death. I had gone to see him every single day while he was in hospice, but on the day he died, I was too tired after school to visit. I used to think that because he didn’t see me that day, he stopped fighting. Looking back now, I realize how wrong I was to think that. Over the years, I’ve come to understand that his death wasn’t my fault and that God has a plan for everything.

I’ve become involved in many wonderful programs that have connected me with other kids who have lost their dads. Through these programs, I’ve made so many great friends and learned a lot. It’s amazing to know that I’m not alone and that other people are going through similar things. My mom tells me, and I truly believe that my dad would be so proud of me. I know he’s watching over me from heaven. His love, his strength, and his spirit will always be with me.

By Mary A. Seavey,

Wife of James P. Seavey (2018-MD)

I held Jim’s hand as we walked into the chemotherapy lab for the first time in April 2013.

We both gazed at a large room filled with 30 cubicles, each station with two chairs—one for the patient, one for the companion—30 IV poles with tubing and multiple bags of fluid, strategically hung in order of infusing. Each cubicle was full, and it was only 7:15 a.m. I looked up into his big brown eyes and whispered, “We can turn and run now. We don’t have to do this. Let’s leave, get back in the car, and head to the beach.” Of course, we

did not leave. Instead, his strength and our faith won over my immediate first reaction.



Jimmy Seavey

Five long years later of treatment, doctors, hospitals, chemo, rehab facilities, wounds, infections, surgeries, pills, mouth sores, etc., his body could not fight any longer. The decision to grant his wish to be at home with family, in his own bed, with our dog Maddie—his cancer companion—by his side, was finally the answer that felt the most gratifying in months. For the first time in a long time, control of his destiny was in our hands.



Our journey ended in the early morning of September 4, 2018. We were surrounded by family and friends, and the bubble of love and support that enveloped our home could be seen from outer space. Pain was no longer the enemy; his spirit was free.

Jim never questioned, “Why me?” He commented often that he never wanted to be forgotten. Through the Lavender Ribbon Report that he co-authored in the last year of his life, we will preserve his goal to bring awareness to the fire service—both current and future members—about job-related cancers and prevention. This shall remain the capstone of what he would leave behind to be his true calling as a public servant, and he will never be forgotten. His Facebook banner, a quote from Joseph Campbell,

summarized his final campaign most appropriately—*We must be willing to let go of the life we had, so as to have the life that is waiting for us.*

Although non-Hodgkin lymphoma is an acknowledged occupational cancer, my husband has been honored as a line-of-duty death by the State of Maryland, but not by the PSOB program. We continue our appeal efforts to have them grant him this benefit.

I am thankful for the continued care, love, and support from our fire service family and know that he will be in our hearts forever. Rest in peace and know your legacy will carry on.

This was our journey.

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>.



Fire Hero Family Tree Lighting

Each holiday season, the **National Fallen Firefighters Foundation** honors our nation’s fallen heroes with the **Annual Fire Hero Family Tree Lighting**. The Memorial Chapel and its trees are decorated with ornaments, cards, and heartfelt notes from families and friends, creating a lasting tribute of love and remembrance.

We invite you to **send an ornament** in honor of your loved one to be placed on the **Fire Hero Family Trees**. Each ornament will be lovingly displayed in the **National Fallen Firefighters Foundation Memorial Chapel** throughout this holiday season — and in the years to come.

Please send your ornament to:
National Fallen Firefighters Foundation
c/o Fire Hero Family Tree Program
PO Drawer 498
Emmitsburg, MD 21727



**View the Ornament Gallery—
See How Other Fire Hero Families
Remember Their Hero**

**Learn more
about the
Tree Lighting**




Support and Connection for Fire Hero Families

Join one of our ongoing 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>

Holiday Grief Support

We will host two virtual groups specifically to talk about grieving during the holidays. Please join us for some extra support and to share ideas and experience about navigating the holidays. All adult Fire Hero Family members are welcome, whichever holidays you celebrate and however long it's been since your firefighter died.

 **Monday, November 24, 2025 8 PM (Eastern time)**

 **Sunday, December 21, 2025 5 PM (Eastern time)**

Register for one or both sessions at:

<https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/HolidaySupport2025>

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



When someone we love dies, it can feel like we have also lost ourselves, or at least the version of ourselves that we used to know. It's one of the reasons grief and loss can feel so disorienting.

Have you ever thought, *I miss the old me. Before this happened, I could never have imagined doing what I'm doing now.* How has your firefighter's death changed your identity? You can use these questions as a starting point—*Who was I before my loved one died? Who am I now?*

To share your story, please email the wording and a high-resolution photo to jwoodall@firehero.org by December 15, 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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