



The Journey

For Families of Fallen Firefighters

ISSUE 128 ~ MARCH/APRIL 2026

There are no goodbyes for us. Wherever you are, you will always be in my heart.

~ Mahatma Gandhi

Grief is not just tears. It is not just missing someone. It is not just for special occasions or significant dates. Sometimes grief is feeling someone's presence in every moment, the imprint that person made on our life, and the tug between how present and how absent they are at the same time.

Grief is remembering.

Remembrance, according to Merriam-Webster, means "to bring to mind or think of again." Grief and remembrance are intertwined. As Rabbi Sylvan Kamens and Rabbi Jack Riemer write in their poem *A Litany of Remembrance—We Remember Them*, we remember those who have died "so long as we live, for they too shall live, for they are now a part of us."

Remembering can be painful. It can be joyful. It can bring us to that place where bitter meets sweet. We want what we had, and it has changed forever. But by remembering,

we keep the people we have loved alive in our hearts, in our daily lives, and in the world.

Some memorials—like the National Fallen Firefighters Memorial—are designed to be shared. We want the whole world to know that these courageous firefighters served their communities, protected our public lands, saved their neighbors, and made our nation safer.

Some memories are so personal that you might be the only person left alive who carries them.

As you choose ways, both private and public, to remember, know that remembering is love's outlet, a way to stay connected to those whose lives will always live in ours. The world is a better place because they lived and because we continue to live.

In this issue, Fire Hero Family members share some of the ways in which they remember.

By Dina Symonds, Amy Kelly, and Stephanie Buis

Daughters of Vincent Fowler (1999-NY)

Captain Vincent Fowler, known affectionately as "Vinny," grew up in Queens, New York. He moved to the suburbs of Long Island with his wife, Mona, to raise their three daughters. Suburban life met his passion for fishing, coaching softball, and other outdoor activities. Vinny was an active member of the



community who was always willing to help a neighbor. He taught his children by example, showing what hard work, determination, and dedication looked like. His positive, optimistic, and happy-go-lucky attitude are just some of the many qualities family and friends

continued on page 2

Vincent Fowler *continued from page 1*

remember about him. He was known for his magnetic and charismatic personality and his ability to make people laugh with his stories. Friends and family all have “Vinny stories” that are still being told today. Above all, he was a man of unyielding faith, which gave him the guidance he lived and died by.

In 1978, Vinny left his lucrative air conditioning and refrigeration business to follow in his father’s footsteps and become a NYC firefighter. He started his career in Ladder 123/ Engine 234 in Crown Heights, Brooklyn. In 1990, he was promoted to lieutenant and assigned to Ladder 7 in Manhattan. In 1996, he was promoted to captain. As an officer in the FDNY, he continually trained and educated the men around him, because he believed there was always an opportunity to learn. His talent for educating while nurturing helped establish his reputation as a well prepared and disciplined fire officer. Vinny was cited for bravery multiple times during his career and was awarded the Medal of Valor posthumously. After a fellow firefighter and close friend passed away in 1987, Vinny spearheaded efforts to update the procedures used for FDNY line-of-duty deaths.

Vinny lost his life from injuries he sustained while fighting a house fire in South Ozone Park in 1999. He stayed behind to make sure that all his men had safely exited the basement of the house. Tragically, his tank ran out of air, and he collapsed in the cluttered basement. Due to the congested conditions and zero visibility, it was extremely difficult for rescuers to remove him from the basement. This ultimately led the department to revise their techniques for removing an unconscious firefighter from an emergency situation. The Captain Vinny Fowler

Knot is now part of the curriculum taught at the FDNY fire academy. This is fitting, because he would not have missed an opportunity to turn a tragedy into a lesson learned.

In May 2000, the NYC elementary school P.S. 108 in Queens was renamed The Captain Vincent G. Fowler School in honor of his heroic efforts and passion for education. Vinny was the first FDNY firefighter to have a public school named after him. In June 2025, we celebrated the 25th anniversary of the renaming.



The celebration was a blend of dancing, singing, and poetry readings. The students in PS 108’s afterschool music program performed an original song, called “We Can Do That,” named for one of the late captain’s favorite phrases, which is also inscribed on the side of Ladder 7’s truck. The enthusiasm, dedication, and hard work from the students and faculty was undeniably evident. The

assembly concluded with a schoolwide parade around the building, allowing guests to see all the creative artwork and school spirit from the students. The school playground was transformed into a piece of art with a beautiful mural of Captain Fowler in the center of the yard.

Captain Fowler lives on because he was able to leave the world better than he found it. The lessons he taught others—whether a fireman he mentored or a child he coached—are being handed down to a new generation. His knowledge is being passed on, and his selfless acts of kindness are being paid forward. This is his legacy. This is how he is remembered. A man of little fame or public influence was able to have a lasting impression on so many lives. He is proof that one person can make a difference.

No greater love hath man than to lay down his life for his friends. John 15:13



By Jennifer Kelley Dickey

Wife of Jason Dickey (2018-TN)

My fireman's name was Jason Wade Dickey. He was called "Dickey" by most everyone in the station. Being a fireman was Jason's dream. When I say fighting fire truly ran through his veins, I mean it. Jason was the strongest fireman in his department. He was the human form of an ox. If there was a tough job, something heavy to lift, or run into a burning house, Jason was the guy. You could always count on him. Jason had multiple lifesaving awards while employed with the fire department.



Jason Dickey

Most importantly, Jason was a huge family man. His children, family, and wife came before anything. Jason dedicated his life to his family!

Jason was killed on February 12, 2018. He left behind three children and his spouse, Jennifer Kelley Dickey, who was pregnant with their fourth child. Jennifer gave birth to their son, Kallon Knox, 30 days after Jason's untimely death.

It's been eight years. Jason is dearly missed and thought of daily.

The Spirit Lives On

By Gregg Turner, uncle of Sekou Turner (2002-CA)

The sun has set on Sekou for over 23 years now, but thoughts of him are still very much alive with his family, friends, and the fire departments he loved.

It is important to acknowledge the incredible support Sekou has received. Thanks go to the Alameda County Fire Department, The Marin County Fire Department, and the San Francisco Fire Department. Special thanks to Sekou's childhood friend, Todd Lando, who served with the Marin County Fire Department and provided the mentorship that launched Sekou's career as a firefighter.

Sekou faced many issues earlier in his life, and those experiences deepened his commitment to give back to the community. He channeled that determination into commitment to service. His journey began as a seasonal firefighter in Marin County, and he became a brave soul driven by a purpose.

I remember calling his mother after hearing about his passing. The voicemail picked up, and it was Sekou's voice I heard. It was an unexpected moment of connection that remains with me to this day.

In October 2003, I flew to Emmitsburg to represent our family at the National Fallen Firefighter Memorial. Being



Sekou Turner

there was a memorable experience. The genuine compassion and dedication of the brotherhood and how they cared for new families let us know that they were there for us. It is something I have never forgotten. For the next fourteen years, I returned as a volunteer. My duties included registering new families and helping them locate and etch bricks. I met new families, shared stories about my nephew, and listened to their stories

about their firefighters.

I have committed myself to keep Sekou's spirit alive. Each May 22, I drive down to Station 16 in Dublin, California, which was the last station he worked at. Then I visit stations that have firefighters from the Class of 2001, Sekou's class.

Every July I have the honor of attending the academy graduation and presenting the Sekou Turner Award. This award goes to the recruit who displays the most enthusiasm, commitment, and leadership.

Academy graduation is the start of a profession that is second to none at taking care of its own.


Sekou is not a memory but a spirit that guides us and is honored by family, friends, and his brotherhood.

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>

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



Some of our favorite stories to feature in *The Journey* over the years have been stories about friends who met through NFFF events. Do you have a BFF, a friend group, or a text thread with people you met through the NFFF? Have you taken a trip or been on a (mis)adventure with pals you first encountered at the Memorial Weekend, a conference, or a retreat? If so, and if you haven't already told your story, we'd love to hear from you and share it with others through *The Journey*. Tell us how/when/where you met and how your friendship impacts your life.

To share your story, please email it, along with a high-resolution photo, to Jenny Woodall at jwoodall@firehero.org by July 10.

If you don't use email, you can mail it to:

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

This project was supported by Cooperative Agreement 15PBJA-24-GK-05527-PSOB, awarded by the Bureau of Justice Assistance. The Bureau of Justice Assistance is a component of the Office of Justice Programs, which also includes the Bureau of Justice Statistics, the National Institute of Justice, the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, the Office for Victims of Crime, and the SMART Office. Points of view or opinions in this document are those of the author and do not necessarily represent the official position or policies of the U.S. Department of Justice