



The Journey

For Families of Fallen Firefighters

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Help others and give something back. I guarantee you will discover that while public service improves the lives and the world around you, its greatest reward is the enrichment and new meaning it will bring your own life.

~ Arnold Schwarzenegger

Being a firefighter is not a typical job. Those who choose the fire service often describe it as a calling. They consider their fellow firefighters a second family. In many cases, fire service is the family business. The Roll of Honor—the list of firefighters recognized at the National Memorial—is filled with proud references to second, third, and fourth-generation firefighters.

So, what happens to a multi-generational firefighting family when someone dies in the line of duty? How do you keep doing your job in the family business? How does it affect your passion for your work and your sense of safety? How do you balance honoring your loved one and taking care of yourself?

In this issue, family members who also serve share their thoughts about how their firefighter's death affected their own service and what they would tell others who are asking themselves those questions.

By Alessandra Morosco-Davis

Sister of Nicholas J. Morosco (2024-NY)

Nothing prepares you for losing your only sibling while you are both in your thirties. It is life-changing and no matter how you look at it, there are no words that can bring comfort or make it okay. The daily unsettled feeling amongst indescribable pain and sadness become the new “normal” and you are forced to find the strength to keep living. I have to say that the hardest part of it all has been continuing to serve in the fire service without my big brother—to continue going out and saving lives when I couldn't save him.



Nicholas and Alessandra

My brother and I grew up in a great neighborhood in a loving home with the best parents we could have ever asked for, but despite all of that, we grew up with something that most kids don't have a chance to experience. We grew up running around the fire station, sitting on the front bumper of a fire engine watching the excitement at fires, and learning the important concepts of

volunteering and giving back to our community. Following in the footsteps of our father, uncles and grandfather,

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my brother and I both joined the fire service as soon as we could as two of the first junior firefighters of our department. Serving our community together made our tight-knit family even tighter. There was rarely a day that I did not see my brother. We worked together, trained together, and planned a future together.

We could look at each other from across a scene and know what the other was thinking. As an assistant chief, he took care of the fire division and as a captain, I took care of EMS of the Yorkville Fire Department. We always met in the middle and worked as a team to lead our department with immense pride and respect for one another and our crew.

On August 27, 2024, shortly after we both left the fire station, I got a phone call that would serve as the turning point between our “before” and “after.” I couldn’t even believe what I was hearing as I grabbed my portable radio and ran out the door. In the minute that it took to drive to my brother’s home, I had radioed into our county’s dispatch center as I asked them to send help. On the drive there, I felt it. I could feel that something terrible was happening. After almost twenty years of running into people’s homes during their time of distress with my brother, I was grabbing my equipment and AED from my car and running through his front door to find him unconscious only a short time after laughing with me at

the station and making plans for Labor Day weekend. In that moment, I was not the captain of EMS; I was the sister of the patient who would succumb to a major heart attack despite every effort made. I was the sister who would see her brother’s casket ride on top of the new Seagrave Tower Ladder that he had designed and put in service just prior. I was the sister that would have to learn how to continue responding without her other half.

I would do anything to hear his voice on the other side of the radio. I would do anything to have our department and family whole again, to not have to see the pain in the eyes of my father or uncles as we continue the job. Quite honestly, there have been so many times that I have thought about walking away from the fire service and eliminating the biggest source of pain, but then I look at the apparatus he designed, and I look at his picture and memorial plaque hanging in the station. I push through the tears to smile and proudly say, “That is my brother.” He would never have wanted me to walk away from something that I have so much passion for, something that brings me so much joy, and something that we shared together. At the sound of every alarm, we hop on those rigs and do it for him. We have so much more work to do. He is with us on every call. I see him, I hear him, and I feel him guiding me through each incident. I will continue to carry him with me until I am with him again some day.

So Your Kid Wants to Follow in Your Footsteps as a Firefighter...

By Joe Woyjeck (Los Angeles County Fire Captain, retired), Father of Kevin Woyjeck (2013-AZ)

As a firefighter and a father who lost a firefighter son, I’m often asked for advice by parents in the fire service whose children want to follow in their footsteps.

I’ve thought long and hard about how to answer, because sending our children into harm’s way goes against the grain of parenthood. Since the day they were born, we made a vow to protect them—from the moment we drove them home from the hospital, slow and careful, to making them wear helmets on their bikes, to worrying every time they were

out of our sight. That instinct to protect never goes away, even when they’re grown.

Having your child want to follow in your footsteps is one of the greatest honors a parent can experience, knowing your son or daughter sees something in your career that inspires them. But along with that pride comes a very real fear. We’ve seen the danger up close. We know what the job can take from you, and we know the cost when things go wrong.



Joe Woyjeck and his sons Kevin and Robert



My advice is simple.

First, support them, but let it be their decision. Don't push them into it, and don't talk them out of it. If they truly have the heart for the job, it will show. What we can do as parents is prepare them—teach them to be humble, to listen, to care for others, and to never stop learning.

Second, be honest with them about the realities. Show them the good—the pride, the brotherhood, the moments when you know you've made a difference—but also the hard parts—the fatigue, the trauma, the calls that stay with you. They deserve to see all sides before they take that oath.

Third, when the time comes, let go. Trust that you've raised them right. Trust that the foundation you gave them—the courage, compassion,

and integrity—will guide them through the same fire service that shaped you.

I lost my 21-year-old son Kevin doing the job he loved. I'll carry that pain for the rest of my life, but I'll also carry pride. Kevin was the ninth firefighter in our family. He was a firefighter through and through—brave, selfless, and full

of life. I'm grateful he found purpose in serving others, though I'll always be heartbroken that it cost him his life.

So when your child says, "Dad, Mom—I want to be a firefighter," take a deep breath, hug them tight, and say, "Then be the best one you can be." Although it's a dangerous job, it's also a proud and noble profession.

And in that moment, you may finally understand how your parents felt way back when.



Joe Woyjeck with his family when he was hired

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.

2026 FIRE HERO FAMILY EVENTS

Hal Bruno Camp – June 26-28

Adult Children's Retreat – September 13-16

Men's Retreat – September 16-19

Winter Retreat – December 2-5

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



If you could have a conversation with your firefighter, what would you want to tell them? What questions would you want to ask them? If you want to write on this topic, you can begin your piece as a letter

(Dear _____,) or just write as if you are having a conversation.

To share your story, please email it, along with a high-resolution photo, to Jenny Woodall at jwoodall@firehero.org by June 1, 2026.

If you can't send the information by email, you can mail it to:

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

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