

The For Survivors of Fallen Firefighters Journey

MAY 2003 ISSUE I

I If you pick up any grief brochure, you will find useful suggestions from mental health experts about what helps when you are

grieving. But we also asked another group of experts, members of the Foundation's Fire Service Survivors Network, what helped them most

after the loss of their firefighters. They shared insights and ideas that come only through personal experience with loss. Here are some of their thoughts.

To ensure privacy, survivors are identified by their relationship to the fallen firefighter and the year of the firefighter's death.

In the beginning, take care of yourself.

Try to get as much rest as you can during this time and eat well even when you don't feel hungry. [mother 1998](#)

Someone told me that in times of acute stress, you begin to dehydrate. I began to drink more water, and I did feel better. [sister 1999](#)

It was very difficult to rest, so I took a few minutes as often as possible to have a "Calgon, take me away!" bath time. In the solitude of my bath, I would relax, think about things, let my guard down, and cry if I felt like it. [wife 1996](#)

Eating alone was hard. I'd call an aunt who lived alone, and we'd chat while I ate. At the time my husband would

normally have come home from work, I walked through the village to the firehouse so I would see people. [wife 2000](#)

If I didn't want to do something, I didn't. I learned to say NO, which made a world of difference to me. [mother 1993](#)



My advice is to be strong and pray a lot! [mother 1999](#)

After receiving word of my husband's death, I received a ride home from our county sheriff. On the way, I closed my eyes and said the Lord's Prayer.

Over the following days I repeated that prayer countless times. It calmed me along the way. [wife 1997](#)

Try to find a focus.

Keeping myself busy and focusing on my son's needs helped me to get through each day. [wife 1999](#)

My cats helped get me through the day. My diabetic, 18-year-old cat was my reason for getting up and keeping to a schedule. [wife 2000](#)

I focused on my son's life—the fact that he lived his life the way he wanted and didn't worry about anything. [mother 1996](#)

Having set plans for a few weeks into the future gave me direction. It was so difficult to remember anything. A close friend bought me a monthly planner—what a help! [wife 1999](#)

We made lists and did things one step at a time. As they say, baby steps, each step brings us closer to the end of the day. And that was all I could handle. Just one day at a time. [wife 1999](#)



We hope you enjoy reading the Journey. Send your comments and suggestions to:

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Find outlets for your grief.

The most important thing I did was to begin a journal to my son. Included were my anger, my pain, and many, many whys. But most important, always beginning and ending with, "Always know that your mom loves you." After 23 years, there are still days I jot something down. [mother 1980&1997](#)

Keeping busy is the secret. I spent a month going through pictures and putting together memory books about my husband's life for our children. I did a book for myself and included cutouts from the sympathy cards I received. In my case, it was therapy for healing. It is two and a half years later, and I still get that album out and add to it. [wife 2000](#)

Seek and accept support.

Take people up on their offers of assistance. One of the greatest things was having someone fix a meal, mow the lawn, fix the leaky faucets, or just come by and check on us. [wife 1996](#)

Take any help offered gladly, because offers of help may dry up in time. [wife 1982](#)

I began to go see a therapist about four months after my husband's death. Family is wonderful, but they are dealing with the death of a loved one, too. [wife 2001](#)

I didn't think I needed a grief support group and believed I was doing just fine on my own. But it ended up being such a good group. It gives you a safe place to cry, to talk about your loved one, to voice confusing feelings, and to find out you are not crazy or alone. [mother 1998](#)

Grief sessions are a good idea that may have helped me release some of my deep sadness sooner. [wife 1997](#)

Talk about what has happened to you. Each person's path is different. It helps to hear each other's stories. [wife 1999](#)

Take whatever time and space you need.

Be patient with other family members. We all grieve in different ways. [mother 1999](#)

You have to know yourself and honor your feelings no matter how long it takes. Everyone wants to rush you along and get you back to the person you had been, but it will never be the same, and you must create a new life. [mother 1995](#)

Don't let anyone rush you through your grief. Take it one day at a time, and sometimes moment to moment. [mother 1998](#)

I know everyone meant well, but I really wanted to spend some time alone with my children. I had friends at my house from 8 a.m. until 11 p.m. I wish friends would have realized it was OK to leave us by ourselves. [wife 1988](#)



I wish I had told my family and friends that I needed some space. I really needed privacy to come to grips with what had happened. [wife 1999](#)

After my husband died, a good friend told me, "Whatever you do, don't make any major decisions such as buying a car or house for the first year." She was so right. I was not able to make those decisions, and to have done so could have been a mistake. [wife 2000](#)

When you are ready, reach out to others.

Seek out ways you can help others in your community. Your loved one would be proud to have you carry on their memory by helping others. [mother 1994](#)

Don't drown in your sorrows. Find something worthwhile and positive, and make things better while you're still here on earth. [mother 1999](#)

Hope for me was helping someone else. [mother 1995](#)