The stories shared in The Journey belong solely to the authors and may not be reprinted in part or whole without the authors' written permission.

If you are looking for general information on financial aid and scholarships, a member of our Fire Service Survivors Network is available to talk with you. Erin Melody, daughter of Martin “Butch” Melody (1982-CT), works as a college counselor and is happy to talk with fire service survivors. You can contact Erin at erin.melody@yahoo.com. If you do not have access to e-mail, please contact Linda Hurley at the Foundation, and she can put you in touch with Erin.

Many thanks to Erin for this generous offer!

Our Stories

On April 1 - 2, 2008, the Public Safety Officers’ Benefits (PSOB) Office partnered with the National Fallen Firefighters Foundation to participate in NFFF's 3rd Annual Survivors Conference. The first day of the event included remarks by the Bureau of Justice Assistance Director Domingo S. Herrait, followed by training for NFFF Local Assistance State Teams (LAST) assisting survivors and agencies filing for PSOB benefits. A roundtable discussion with LAST members on April 2 not only provided vital input on the complex issues members can face in these efforts, but also highlighted the successes teams have already experienced that directly and positively support survivors of America's fallen officers.

We want to hear from you...

Most months we post a topic here and ask for people to write to that topic. But we only do that because we know sometimes people need help getting started or they feel shy about sharing their thoughts. If there is something you want to share about the love or loss or healing you have experienced, please just send it in.

Do you worry that you’re not a “real writer” or that your spelling or writing is not good enough? Do you wonder if anyone will really be interested in what you have to say? Please, put those worries out of your head, and just send it in. We will work with you. We also welcome pieces written by children of any age. We need written permission from a parent or guardian to print them in The Journey.

If you want to share some thoughts about your experiences, please send your story as a Word document, or in the body of an e-mail, to jwoodall@firehero.org. Or, if you don’t do computers, send a typed or neatly handwritten copy to:
The Journey • National Fallen Firefighters Foundation
P.O. Drawer 498, Emmitsburg, MD 21727
(301) 447-1365
firehero@firehero.org

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Educational Assistance

Enacted in 1976, the Public Safety Officers’ Benefits (PSOB) Program provides death, disability, and education benefits to those eligible for the program. The PSOB benefit for eligible deaths occurring in FY 2008 is $303,094. PSOB partners with key national public safety organizations, including the National Fallen Firefighters Foundation, to provide information and support to survivors and surviving agencies of America’s fallen officers.

Did you know?

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When someone dies, our thoughts naturally go to those closest to that person - the spouse or partner, children, parents, siblings. We know that their day-to-day lives are forever changed. But when condolence cards arrive from cousins, classmates, childhood friends, neighbors, we begin to realize just how many people are affected by the loss of a single person.

In this issue, extended family members and friends talk about loss from those outer circles.

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Dennis Reep
Friend and coworker of Donald Dean Myrick (2001-IL)

I lost a friend today, a good friend. He was on his way to help someone, probably a stranger, possibly not. He would never know. After his pager alerted him at 5 a.m. to an accident, he was out the door. His truck rolled over as he was responding. Twenty-one years of service ended this morning.

Tears and smiles come and go as I recall the times we’ve spent together. Hot days, soaked in sweat; cold nights, covered in ice; and pleasant days, when he should have been planting or harvesting. He personified the volunteer firefighter—Drop what you’re doing; someone needs help.

Don Myrick

Many times we shared a couple of Big Oranges after a meeting, playing cards or solving our small problems or the world's big ones. He had a sharp mind, a caring heart, and a gentle spirit. His leadership and versatility earned the respect of all. His tales of triumph and mishap garnered the ears of all.

If you live in or around Ludlow, Illinois, you will miss Don Myrick, whether you knew him or not. His dedication and hard work were unending, his gift to his neighbors. I have no qualms speaking for the entire department. We are proud to have served beside him.

When it came time to help, he gave all he had.

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Tammy Baker
Cousin of Charles Edgar (2005-TX)

28 March 2005
Dearest Charles:

I will forgo the formalities, for I know that you are well, and it is I who am not faring so well. I thought that perhaps by now the pain of your departure would have lessened, but I find the opposite to be true. Over the past week it has intensified until I find myself in tears at the most inopportune moments. Now, please do not chuckle at me. It isn’t funny! You always find humor in the oddest of situations. You know I have always thought that those are the things most uncomfortable for you. Now, that I have you at a more serious moment, listen to me. I know that you are patting my head and telling me that you aren’t worth it; your usual spiel.

continued inside
I know there would be a time of separation, but never had I imagined one so permanent. These past weeks have given to my spending time with those who also are puzzled by your departure. At first they put your back and say, “I’m sorry.” I think they truly mean it. I also think that they believe that once it is over, it is over, and after all goodbyes are said, backs patted, you should be okay, all right. If at that point you are not all right, then obviously you have a problem. If you are teary eyed, heads quickly advert, and retreat is made posthaste. I want you to know I am working hard at being okay, and I know that I will be; just not today.

Don’t laugh at all the silly things I have done or said. You know that I just wanted so badly to keep you close. At the moment, it seemed all the small things I could touch and feel would keep you with me. I do realize that there are no things that will keep you with me. I will have to remember the butterfly, won’t I? I held you out there on my palm, and you soared; you are free.

Two nights ago you were in my dreams, as you have so often been in the last several years. This time I was walking and talking with you, your mom and dad. It was so peaceful and pleasant. Thank you for letting me accompany you.

I remember the last time I spoke to Kenny. It was the night before. Kenny always called too early in the morning or too late at night. This time was at 10 p.m. or so. I answered the phone and was really annoyed as usual. “Hey, Jen, is Eddie there?” I can still hear his voice. I wish I had been nicer, told him how much he meant to me, that he was the best brother-in-law I could ever have. If you are teary eyed, heads quickly advert, and retreat is made posthaste. I want you to know I am working hard at being okay, and I know that I will be; just not today.

With much love,
Tammy

Jennifer Frayne
Sister-in-law of Kenneth J. Frayne (2001-IL)

I have never felt so honored to have known someone until I saw the honor Kenny was shown. I was proud to stand there as part of his family. Hundreds of firefighters came from all around to pay their respects to the firefighter they had never met. The police and fire trucks escorted the fire truck that held Kenny’s casket and took him for one last drive through Channahon. The children came out of the schools to wave flags as we passed. People lined the streets waving in thanks. None of this made the pain and hurt go away, but it did help comfort us.

We know that he is still with us everywhere we go. And that makes life easier. When we do something stupid, we laugh because we can still remember the face he would make. We still ask him to look after us. We ask him for his strength when we have trouble in our lives. We miss him every Thanksgiving, Christmas, Easter, Independence Day, and every day of every year that goes by without him. We live each day hoping that we are making Kenny proud of us.

We now have a son. Kenneth Edward Frayne, named after the uncle he will never meet. We hope he follows in his uncle’s footsteps.

Jennifer Frayne (continued)

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