

# The For Survivors of Fallen Firefighters Journey

JULY 2010 ISSUE 37

*We do best homage to our dead by living our lives fully  
even in the shadow of our loss.* ~Jewish Prayer

**H**ow to pay for college? It's one of the big concerns parents have, and it can be a huge worry when one parent is suddenly facing the issue alone. The good news is that there are many sources of help available to children and spouses of firefighters who die in the line of duty. We encourage you to tap into the invaluable education resources that are available to you.

If the firefighter was your spouse, you may want to return to school in order to rejoin the workforce or move into a different field. If you have children who are a few years

away from high school graduation, be sure to talk with them about the options that are available. Even if your children are still very young, please file the information away for later. It may surprise you how quickly they are all grown up and ready to pursue their own dreams.

In this issue, survivors talk about their experiences with the Public Safety Officers' Educational Assistance program. Take a look at the list of sources of educational assistance so you can research further to see which benefits are available to you.

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**By Florence Foti**

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*Ex-Wife of Robert Foti (2001-NY)*

**O**n September 11, 2001, my daughter, Alycia, and son, Robert, lost their father, Firefighter Robert J. Foti. Alycia was 12 and Robert was 11 years old. My biggest fear at that time was whether I was going to be able to send both children to college on only one income. The FDNY arrived at our house with so many papers for me to sign so that my children would begin receiving benefits from the Public Safety Officers' Benefits program, as well as the City of New York. I was told that the PSOB would make a lump sum distribution to the children because their father died in the line of duty, as well as an educational benefit for college. But who could really concentrate on that? It seemed like such a long time off, and I had other immediate concerns to worry about.

As Alycia reached that magical age of 16 and was

beginning to formulate her college choices, I thought, "Oh my God. How am I going to be able to afford the schools she wants to apply to?" I remembered those papers I received so long ago and started to do some research. I began with a phone call, and the person who answered could not have been more helpful. He looked up Alycia's name and said that she was entitled to benefits, providing she attended school full time. Once she was accepted to UCLA, I knew that with the financial help she was going to receive from PSOB, her dream would come true. The same held true for my son, Robert. Once he decided to attend St. Bonaventure, they were there helping to make his dream come true as well.

I now work with a wonderful woman, Martha Williams, who helps me with the reimbursement process. We were

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*Alycia Foti*

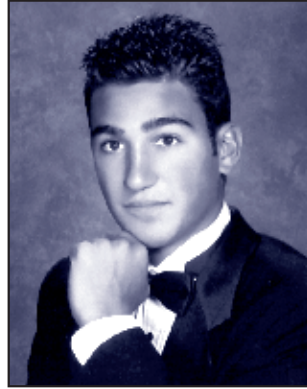
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**Foti** (continued from cover)

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talking one day, and I told her about Alycia wanting to go to medical school. She told me that the benefits that Alycia is entitled to could possibly carry into her first year at medical school. I was relieved. Alycia wanted to study in Spain and Morocco this summer; Martha told me that she is entitled to the benefits for that as well. Another dream come true!

The PSOB benefits cover a fixed number of months at a predetermined monthly amount. Once the proper papers are filed, the funds are deposited



Robert Foti

into our checking account so that we can pay tuition. As you can see, the PSOB's educational benefit is a wonderful way to help defray the costs of college tuitions. The staff goes out of their way to help you file for the benefits and is extremely patient throughout the process.

At the time of Robert's death, he and I were divorced. If it wasn't for the PSOB, I am not sure I could have been able to allow Alycia and Robert the schools of their choices. I am eternally grateful for the help, as well as the friendship I have with the PSOB staff.

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**By Ashley Hanners**

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*Daughter of Robert Hanners (2002-OR)*

**G**oing to school has not always been an easy obstacle to tackle. Once you are done with high school and moving onto college you gain various responsibilities that you may not have had until this point. Rent, utilities, grocery bills, and cell phone bills are just a few of the many things added to one's monthly task list. Loans are not always enough to cover the many expenses brought on by tuition, books, various fees, and living expenses.

With the help of the money provided by the Department of Justice, PSOB Program, I was able to work and pay

for my schooling while taking all my prerequisite classes. Now that I have been accepted into a nursing program, the funds from the DOJ benefits program allowed me to quit my job and put all my attention towards this last part of my schooling. The event that led to my eligibility for the benefit program was a sad one; however, with the help of this program I am able to move forward and create a future for myself. I would encourage anyone who may be eligible to take advantage of this wonderful opportunity.



Ashley Hanners

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**By Melissa Rogan**

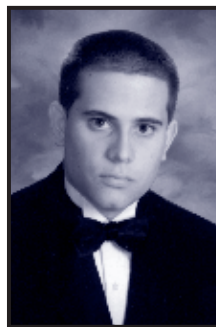
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*Wife of Matthew Rogan (2001-NY)*

**M**y name is Melissa Rogan. My husband, Firefighter Matthew Rogan, was killed September 11, 2001. Soon after that, former Governor George Pataki made available assistance through the State of New York if the children or spouses were to attend schools in the State of New York. Since none of my three children chose schools in New York, we were unable to take advantage of this assistance. Through the Public Safety Officers' Educational Assistance program, Sarah, Matthew, and Monica were able to receive assistance for their colleges.



Sarah Rogan



Matthew Rogan

This was one scholarship fund that requires no essay to be written by the children, and because no essay is required, less nagging occurred. This scholarship can also be used for travel expenses. My son, Matthew, attends Virginia Military Institute, and some of this money was used to fly him home during the school year. My oldest daughter, Sarah, moved off campus her junior and senior years, and the money was used for travel expenses from her apartment to the school. The benefit can also help cover the exorbitant price of textbooks. I am extremely grateful for the amount of assistance my children were able to receive.



Monica Rogan

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**By Sami Johnson**

*Wife of James Straub (1990-MO)*

I never wanted to be a single mom. I did not have a father in my home when I was growing up. My life goal was to marry a great man, have two wonderful children, sing in Branson until I was too old to wear high heels, retire at age 85, and watch my great-grands play at Mimi and Grandpa’s house. Part of that dream came true when I married David Straub in 1980. Our daughter, Mandy, was born in 1982 and our son, Colt, was born in 1983. We were blessed with a great life. We had the sweetest little family. But on March 26, 1990, that dream came to a quick end.

The fact that you are reading this newsletter lets me know that you understand how it feels when you wake up one morning and all is well, only to go to bed that same night and your whole world has changed. After David was killed, I was very blessed with a support group around me—fire department, friends, family, and church family—but what would I do after they all went back to their lives? As you have done, I cried myself to sleep for many months, even into years. As the days and years passed, we began to get into our own groove. It was not easy, but we had to come to grips with the reality of losing David.

When I began to feel like I could breathe again, other things hit me, such as how would I make sure the kids had what they needed, how would send them to camp, to college, pay for their weddings? Bob Hasbrook, our fire chief for Western Taney County Fire Protection District, came to

me with hopeful news. He told me about the National Fallen Firefighters Foundation and all the benefits they offered to those who had lost their spouse/parent in the line of duty. Benefits doesn’t really seem like an appropriate word for all the NFFF does for those of us left to carry on with our lives, but they truly are hope givers.

As the years passed and the kids graduated from high school, we found that the Public Safety Officers’ Benefits (PSOB) program has educational assistance available for spouses and children of fallen firefighters. This was a blessing for our family. Without PSOB, my children would not have been able to attend college at all. Our benefits administrator, Eric Martin, has truly been a friend to our family by helping guide me through the paperwork process and all the details throughout my children’s college career.

In 2003, I met my new husband, Todd Johnson. Our whole family fell in love with him, and he fell in love with us. He has been a great encouragement to the kids and is a wonderful asset to our family. A few years after we were married, he encouraged me to go to college. I contacted Mr. Martin with the benefits program, and he immediately set me up to receive the education assistance. I am one semester away from having my associate’s degree, and I plan to go on and get my bachelor’s degree.

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**EDUCATIONAL ASSISTANCE FOR FIRE SERVICE SURVIVORS**

*See individual programs for more information and specific criteria for eligibility.*

PROGRAM	WHO IS ELIGIBLE?	FOR MORE INFORMATION
Public Safety Officers’ Educational Assistance Program Bureau of Justice Assistance, Department of Justice	Spouses and children of firefighters, law enforcement officers, and emergency public safety officers who received Public Safety Officers’ Benefits	<a href="http://www.ojp.usdoj.gov/BJA/grant/psob/psob_education.html">www.ojp.usdoj.gov/BJA/grant/psob/psob_education.html</a>
Sarbanes Scholarship Program National Fallen Firefighters Foundation	Spouses, life partners, children, and stepchildren of firefighters honored at the National Fallen Firefighters Memorial	<a href="http://www.firehero.org/resources/families/scholarships">www.firehero.org/resources/families/scholarships</a>
W.H. “Howie” McClennan Scholarship International Association of Fire Fighters (IAFF)	Children of firefighters who die in the line of duty while a member in good standing of the IAFF	<a href="http://www.iaff.org/et/scholarships/mcclennan.html">www.iaff.org/et/scholarships/mcclennan.html</a>
State and Local Educational Assistance	Differs by state and locality	<a href="http://www.firehero.org/resources/benefits">www.firehero.org/resources/benefits</a>

Going to college has changed my life. I feel a new inner confidence and have made very good grades. I believe that when I finish this education journey, I will have a strong base to carry me through the rest of my life. Without encouragement from my husband and family, Colt, Mandy and I would not have used this great opportunity. And without the assistance from PSOB, we

would not have had the finances to pursue our dreams.

If you are wondering what you are going to do with the rest of your life, or how to pay for your or your children's education, I think you will be pleasantly surprised by all they have to offer those of us who have lost so much. Things will be good in your life again. Just take one hour at a time, and enjoy every minute and opportunity in your life.

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

## Public Safety Officers' Benefits Programs (PSOB)

Did you know...

**F**rom the start of PSOB's Educational Assistance Program in 1997 through today, close to \$10 million has been provided to assist thousands of spouses and children of America's fallen firefighters, law enforcement officers, and first responders to attend institutions of higher education and achieve their educational dreams. And while the PSOB Office shares information regarding educational assistance in every letter notifying the families of the payment of the PSOB death or disability benefit, many survivors have not yet tapped into this vital resource.

For details regarding the educational funding opportunities available through the PSOB Office, visit [www.psob.gov](http://www.psob.gov) or email [AskPSOB@usdoj.gov](mailto:AskPSOB@usdoj.gov).

### Public Safety Officers' Benefits Programs

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.

## We want to hear from you about...

When someone dies suddenly, survivors are sometimes left with regrets, unfinished business, and guilt. There may be no opportunity to say a final "I love you" or "Goodbye," and sometimes people die when life and relationships are "messy." But there are also things you did and said that let that person know how much you loved him, how proud you felt, how important he or she was in your life. Think for a minute about what you did "right," something that comforts you to remember, and tell us about it.



If you'd like to share your thoughts on this topic or other aspects of your journey, please send a Word document or e-mail to Jenny Woodall at [jwoodall@firehero.org](mailto:jwoodall@firehero.org) by September 1. If you don't do computers, send a typed or neatly handwritten copy to:

**National Fallen Firefighters Foundation**  
*The Journey*  
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Emmitsburg, MD 21727

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