One of the trickiest issues for people who have been widowed is navigating new relationships. First of all, is a new relationship something you even want? If so, how do you go about the dating game, a game you thought you’d never play again? If you have children, how does that complicate the process? How will this affect your relationship with your in-laws? And what happens if you decide to remarry? If you have experience with these issues and would like to share your thoughts with others who might be asking themselves these questions, we would love to hear from you!

To submit a piece for an upcoming issue, please send it by December 31 to:

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In this holiday season, the presence of those we love is evident all around us. This can be especially painful for anyone who is grieving. Families come together to celebrate traditions, which accentuates the fact that someone is missing. One of the most powerful ways you have to take care of yourself this holiday season is through your connections to other people. Connection is a powerful antidote to sadness and despair.

If you are feeling lonely, reach out! Let people know what you need. Find ways to connect with others who have experienced loss. Many hospices and hospitals have community memorial services in December to remember people who have died. You can also connect online with other people who are grieving. Contact the NFFF if you would like to be in touch with another fire hero family member by phone or e-mail. These people get it; they have that understanding that only comes from living through it.

And if you are feeling stronger this year, reach out! There is someone who needs you and the hard-won wisdom you have to offer. Life is hard. People are suffering; they feel alone and afraid. They need other people to reach out to them with kindness and compassion, people who are not afraid of tears and who know they don’t have to try to make things better. You can encourage them and bring them hope.

This issue features stories of connection, one that seems almost magical and another that shows how we can make intentional connections to keep the memories of our loved ones close as life moves forward.

Note: If you have little ones in the house who still believe in Christmas magic, you might not want to leave this issue out on the coffee table.

Santa Claus Delivered

By Mark Steffy, son of Edward Steffy (2011-PA)

When I was young, one of the things I always looked forward to at Christmas was my father playing Santa Claus at various Christmas parties. He had his own Santa suit, filled it out quite well. Once I was old enough to realize it was my dad in that suit, it was neat to see other kids interact with him, knowing it was my dad.

After Dad passed away in November 2011, it was difficult to get into the Christmas spirit. As we were preparing for the holiday in 2012, my mom, daughter, and I found ourselves making a last-minute trip to Park City Mall in Lancaster, Pennsylvania, on the Saturday before Christmas. As my daughter Gabi and I were going from store to store, she looked at me and said, “Dad, I never got to see Santa Claus.” We were rushing to finish and meet back up with Mom; I wasn’t sure we would have time. I explained to her that we were on a time schedule, but we would be passing through center court. If the line was short, we could stop and see him.

As luck would have it, when we arrived at Santa’s castle there was only one other child in line. As we waited our turn and the child in front finished and was leaving, Santa turned to Gabi and said, “Young lady, come over here. That continued on page 2
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organization on your shirt is my favorite charity.” We were both wearing our NFFF t-shirts. After my daughter gave Santa her list I asked Santa, “How do you know about the NFFF?” He paused and looked at my daughter, asked if he could break character for a moment, and introduced himself as Charles Brack from Allentown, Georgia.

Charles proceeded to tell me his story. His son, Steven Brack, was killed while responding to a fire in 2004 and was honored by the NFFF in 2005. We were in complete awe that someone actually understood where we were and helped us to move further along our path of healing. As we walked away to meet up with my mother, Gabi looked up at me and said, “It is nice to know someone gets it and understands what it is to lose someone.”

I make it a point to visit Santa Charles every year when we are at the mall. He delivered Christmas back to me!!

By Bonnie Hall, Wife of Sid Hall (2007-IN)

On May 13, 2017, my son, Matt Hall, married Tiffany Gardner. Their wedding was a firefighter wedding wrapped in firefighter tradition, and they also remembered and honored fallen firefighter Sid Hall, my husband and Matt’s father.

When I arrived at the wedding venue, Matt called to me, and we went over to where pictures would be taken. Matt had my wrist corsage. When he showed it to me, he explained that the reason he had asked months earlier for one of Sid’s work shirts was because that material was used to make the flower. This was such a touching surprise. The leaves on Matt’s boutonniere also had some of the material from Sid’s shirt.

That was not the only surprise, for I had a wedding wish embroidered on a handkerchief for Matt. Pinned to the handkerchief was a lapel pin that Sid had worn—it had an American flag and a firefighter flag beside each other. I pinned it to the lapel of Matt’s Class A uniform.

When it was time to walk down the aisle, my escort was Steve Lichtman, who was our escort at the National Fallen Firefighters Memorial Weekend when Sid was honored. The aisle was lined with a fire hose, and up front was another hose behind Sid’s turnout gear. Walking down the aisle I held a picture of Sid that I placed near his turnout gear and then lit a candle.

The wedding started with the bridal party arriving in an ambulance (Matt is a Firefighter and EMT; Tiffany is a 911 dispatcher and EMT.) The groomsmen were firefighters, and all were dressed in their Class A’s; the flower girl also wore Class A’s. Joining them were the bridal party, their dog Nozzle who was their ringbearer, and Tiffany’s and Matt’s families and friends.

The wedding was outdoors on a beautiful sunny day. When it was over, as husband and wife, Matt and Tiffany walked back up the aisle followed by the wedding party. They all loaded into the ambulance and, as the siren started, they left to cheers and applause.
Sid’s picture was included in many of the wedding photos, and then it was placed on a small table at the reception, with a place setting on it and his turnout gear placed beside it. We knew he was there and in our hearts.

The cake at the reception looked like a firehose, with cupcakes representing water squirting at fire. When it was time to cut the cake, a fire axe was used. The reception gave us all time to spend with the firefighters, medics, survivors, friends, and family who had come. How grateful we were that they were there. But, most of all, it let us wish a wonderful life ahead for Matt and Tiffany Hall.

A Note of Encouragement

Connection with other people is powerful! When you are going through a tough time, a simple note of encouragement can make such a difference and give you the boost you need to put a little more bounce in your step. And reaching out to others is good for the giver as well. In this age of instant and mass communication, it can be really nice to receive a personal note by mail or e-mail letting you know that someone else is thinking of you.

Would you be willing to volunteer your time to send notes to people who need encouragement? If so, please e-mail or call Ashley Whitmore at awhitmore@firehero.org or 301-447-1365 and let her know if you are willing to send notes by mail and/or e-mail.