

NFFF Fire Hero Family Support and Connection

While our in-person programming is on pause due to the global pandemic, there are several ways Fire Hero Families can receive support and connect with one another. Our private groups are hosted online on Zoom.

Join our private Facebook group for Fire Hero Families

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/NFFFFireHeroFamilyPrograms>

Facilitated Support Group with Dr. Angela Moreland

 Weekly, Tuesdays, 8-9 PM (EST)

Register at: <https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/88CKSYR>

Fire Hero Family Peer Support Group

 Weekly, Wednesdays, 8-9:15 PM (EST)

Register at: <https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/87W8ZFY>

State Connections

 Monthly, 3rd Thursdays, 8-9:15 PM (EST)

Register at: <https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/5MHYWMH>

Men Forging Ahead

 Monthly, 4th Saturdays, 3-4:30 PM (EST)

Register at: <https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/X3JMT93>

Monthly Remembrance Group

 Monthly, 2nd Sundays, 3-4 PM (EST)

Register at: <https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/PQF7X39>

If you have questions about any of these groups, please e-mail Erin at ebrowning@firehero.org.



BJA
Bureau of Justice Assistance
U.S. Department of Justice

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...



We are coming up on the 100th issue of *The Journey*! Since the first issue was published in May 2003, we have heard from many people who say they look forward to reading each one. Please tell us what this publication means to you! Is there a particular story that especially moved you or helped you? If you have written for *The Journey*, what was it like to write and share your story?

To share your thoughts on this or another topic, please send them by May 10 to:

jwoodall@firehero.org (preferred) or
National Fallen Firefighters Foundation
Attn: Jenny Woodall
P.O. Drawer 498
Emmitsburg, MD 21727

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The Journey

For Survivors of Fallen Firefighters

ISSUE 99 ~ MARCH/APRIL 2021

« Legacy is not leaving something for people. It's leaving something in people. »

~ Peter Strople »

The fire service is often described as a “second family,” the service itself more of a calling than just a job or volunteer opportunity. In many families, though certainly not all, that service is passed on from one generation to the next. We sometimes refer to these as “fire service families.” The lines, lives, and memories between the first family and the second often become blurred and overlapping.

So, when someone dies in the line of duty, both families are affected, as is the relationship between them. Their needs and ways of coping are not the same. And it can become especially complicated for members of the first family who still serve with the second. When your beloved spouse, partner, parent, child, or sibling has died in service, how do you continue to serve? As the stories in this issue illustrate, there are many ways. Each relationship, each loss, each situation has its own unique fingerprint. The common thread seems to be that the calling to serve lives on.

By Kat Proveaux

Daughter of Randy Hiti (2015-MN)

My dad, fallen firefighter Randy Hiti, joined the fire department when I was two years old and would drop everything to help a person in need. He really mastered unselfish service to others and instilled those values in me from a young age. I'm so thankful I was able to join the fire department and volunteer alongside my dad. While most little girls think their dad is their hero, I didn't know how amazing my dad really was until I saw him in action. The pager would go off, and he would be out the door and in the car before I had my second shoe on. We would arrive on scene, and he would be at the patient's side or pulling hose, confident in what he was doing and working hard to make a bad situation better. He was a completely different person when on a scene than at home. It was his passion to serve his community, and there are no words to describe how much it meant to him. You



Kat and her dad

just had to witness it. I am honored to have had that time with him.

About six months into my service, I went to see why my dad had not responded to a call and found him deceased in the garage, having died of a massive heart attack responding to the call.

Through all the support provided after my dad's death, my commitment and love for my department grew significantly, and I felt more accepted than ever before. I immersed myself in department activities and tried my best to fit in. I began to drink more at events or after meetings with the other members.

It helped me loosen up and feel more belonging because, though we were all moving forward, I still felt two steps back and all alone. I went to therapy for my PTSD from finding dad, and I did CPR countless more times. I even brought a man back.

continued on page 2

Kat Proveaux *continued from page 1*

Over time, I started to respond to fewer calls. I made up lots of different excuses, but really it was that when that pager went off, that adrenaline rush out of nowhere put me back into a place that made me anxious, no matter what I tried. When I powered through, I did OK. I loved helping people in their dark times. But I eventually found that the 24/7 on-call possibility for that pager to go off and that anxiety to start made me too anxious. I began to think that I was letting the department down because I couldn't give my all. I took a leave, I came back, and eventually, almost a year ago, I made the heartbreaking decision to quit the department.

I felt like I let a lot of people down—myself, my dad, my fire family. I thought I had failed at my dad's legacy. But the longer I've been out, the more I've realized that

dreams change and evolve. Now, I am a member of the Critical Incident Stress Management Team for my region and a trainer for MNFire, which educates firefighters on heart health, cancer, and mental health risks in the fire service and how to reduce those risks. I live the legacy, just differently than I had once pictured. I'm not always on call, but I serve those who serve and help in dark moments. I'm a hospice social worker for my day job, and I'm in grad school to become a Licensed Independent Clinical Social Worker so I can soon provide therapy. I am so grateful for all the history my family and I have with the fire department, and I'm so glad I've found my home in the world of service in a way to honor myself and my dad's legacy.

I have found that I could love the department, be grateful for their presence in my life and all the support they gave me and my family. But I had to move on instead of trying to catch up on a path that just was not mine.

By Dwayne Murphy*Father of Kendall James Murphy (2017-IN)*

While working a shift at my career department, returning from a call, I was met by my dad (a 50-year member of the same department), my chief from my career department, and my chief from my volunteer department. I knew something was wrong.

I looked at my dad and asked if it was my uncle. He shook his head no. I asked if it was Mom. He shook his head no. So, I asked what was going on. He said it was Kendall. My son. He said, "He didn't make it." I don't remember much after that.

Somehow, I ended up in our volunteer chief's car and headed home to be with my wife, Katrina. On the 15-minute drive home, I started telling our chief that all our training records are on my computer. OSHA will be getting ahold of us to get them. I started asking about the report to the state of Indiana. You see, I'm assistant chief and in charge of training on our department. I knew all these things plus a lot more was about to be happening. Chief told me not to worry about anything and that I just needed to be with Katrina and my family.



Three Generations

I didn't cry for several days, because I was thinking about our department and what was going to happen with the investigation. OSHA did come in and wanted all training records and such, so I had to go into the station and meet with them. When the investigator found out I was the father, he quickly wrapped up his investigation and said, "No father should have to do this." I was shocked at his response. I felt I could finally focus on my family. My cry came three days later, after a dream I had about Kendall.

I was off work for a month, thanks to all the guys willing to cover for me and my career chief allowing it to happen. I shut my volunteer pager off and just tried to be a supporting husband to Katrina, a dad to our daughter Kelsie, and a grandpa to our grandkids. When I went back to work, it was so hard. I had lost all my gumption to do my job. I have found some of that gumption again, but it's not the same.

When I turned on my pager for my volunteer department, a department I have been on for 32 years, I found it very difficult to respond to calls. The first run I responded to was



an accident close to where Kendall was killed. I drove to the end of the driveway and just sat there crying, listening to the radio to see if anyone else was responding. I finally made myself go to the station, and I got into the rescue. No one else was showing up, so I headed that way. The accident was about 200 feet past where Kendall's had been. I sat in the truck and couldn't move. Chief came to check on me and hugged me as I cried.

I still have a hard time responding to calls, and I know Katrina really has a hard time watching me go out the door. The rest of the guys on our department are as supportive as they know how to be. They help with fundraisers that go

to a scholarship in Kendall's name, but sometimes if I bring up something to do in Kendall's memory, it makes me feel like I am pushing it on them.

It has been three years, and it is still difficult, but it's getting a little easier to go on runs. I worry about Katrina, Kelsie, and my grandkids every time I go out. I know they worry about me, and I also know I don't want to put them through this again. There is no perfect answer on how to handle a situation like mine. I say Kendall's name every day. I have friends and coworkers that are comfortable to let me talk about him, but most importantly I have faith in God and know that one day I will see my son again.

By Cindy Tuttle

Ex-wife/friend of John Kelly (NY)

I was your typical firehouse brat, having grown up in the firehouse. At 16, I joined Junior Firefighters Explorer Post 2089, becoming a third-generation firefighter in our family. I was following my grandfather and father, who both belonged to our rescue company, and my mother, who was a dispatcher for our fire department. Back then, having women in the fire service was still a rare thing, and I had to prove myself a lot, so it was nice to have my dad by my side through this journey.

Through the fire service and mutual friends, I met and married John, adding another person that had my back and gave me his support as one of the few female firefighters in our area. Even though we belonged to different departments, we both gave 100% to our departments and each other. Looking back, I guess I always knew that one day the fire service would take his life, but I pushed it to the back of my mind, because I am not the kind of person that lives in fear. Little did I know that it would take him at such a young age, leaving me to raise our children alone.

By this time, he was my ex-husband, but he was still my best friend, the guy who was always there when we needed anything. The guy who came running when my dad died or when my mom had trouble with her heat or any number of things. I was lost. My two main supports were gone now. First my dad, then John. How was I going to get the kids and myself through this? How could I now go on calls, knowing I might not come home, leaving the kids with no one? How could I go on calls knowing they were all worried sick I would not come home?

While I did not resign, I did take a big step back, doing more social type things instead of fire/EMS, until I met my current husband. Yes, another firefighter/EMT. After sitting down and talking to the kids, I knew then that I would return to active service to serve by his side. I told myself that I went back because, should the worst happen a second time to our family, the best chance of a better outcome was for me to be there. In reality, it was because I missed it. July 2021 will make 38 years in the fire service.

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We asked Fire Hero Families what they are most looking forward to when COVID-related restrictions are lifted. Here are some of their answers:

Live music	Gathering in person with the NFFF survivor family	Just being able to go out and not be nervous	Camp bubble time!	Church	Vacation
	Handshakes, hugs for comfort, touch in general	Hugs! Lots of hugs!	Lunch and dinner out with friends		
	Seeing my children and grandchildren	Visiting my mom without worrying about getting her sick	Being able to travel and be with family and friends		