



Illinois Fire Fighter Peer Support

Firefighters Helping Each Other

Newsletter | January 2017

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WELCOME TO 2017!

A Letter from the Executive Director

By: Matt Olson, Executive Director



Dear Friends,

What a year 2016 was! I won't personally forget it! It reminded me why we work to spread our message. ILFFPS was blessed to receive over \$41,000 in donations in 2016!

The last three months, especially, have been productive for ILFFPS. We have received some peer requests, which are always good to see – not because people are in need – rather because people are in need, and they know that ILFFPS is here for them.

We continue to stand by our mission to **“make it safe”, in all fire departments, for people to come forward with their pain or trauma, talk to someone who can relate, and begin to heal.** Our hope is to take this mission to every state in America.

As we grow, ILFFPS remains as strong as ever! One of our most important and immediate peer support opportunities is still the Rosecrance Florian Program, which hosted a national symposium this fall (see page 2). We also have a fantastic group of core supporters that we are grateful for, and we continue to welcome new peer supporters in Illinois and in more than ten new states! And, we are planning 4 or 5 new Illinois trainings in 2017!

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Continued from Page 1: A Letter from the Executive Director

By: Matt Olson, Executive Director



Spreading "Make it Safe"

Recently, we brought an Illinois class to Chicago Ridge and welcomed a great group of peer supporters. I am always honored to be a part of these groups. Each time I share, I am reminded of how important "make it safe" is. It is always inspirational to hear from new groups of

firefighters.

Colleen Murphy, Mary Robbins, and I shared our spousal program with the Aroma Park, Illinois Fire department. Aroma Park also invited us to host a class for Illinois peer supporters in 2017. And, the opportunities continue to come!

Kentucky: In the past few months, we made a visit to Northern Kentucky and met with Kentucky Firefighter Peer Support. We brought our training and were welcomed by their core group and their EMS system, which has generously offered to seed their program to get it off the ground. Jada and I were there in December to officially begin their peer support program. Then, peer support will be in Kentucky and the greater Cincinnati region!

Connecticut: Dr. McKiness and I were able to travel to Connecticut and bring our program to them. It was truly an honor to be a part of this amazing effort. The genuine nature and generosity of the fire fighters we are blessed to meet is what keeps me going. They will essentially operate their program as part of a broader 501c3 and work like an Illinois MABAS unit.

Virginia: We have been invited to teach the same in Virginia. We will be making that visit and sharing the program in the summer of 2017.

California: The ILFFPS spousal program is sharing in Sacramento California this December as a part of a statewide symposium that brought many emotional wellness ideas to California.

Wisconsin: ILFFPS will be working with Jason Mims and the Milwaukee Fire Department to compare ideas and talk about best practices for delivery of service to our firefighters and theirs in early 2017.

The Rosecrance Symposium

Dan DeGryse of the Chicago Fire Department, ILFFPS and

Rosecrance created an amazing opportunity for us through the Rosecrance Florian Symposium. Almost 200 firefighters from 23 states and a few Canadian provinces attended and shared their stories and efforts. And, ILFFPS had great representation! Jada Hudson and I were there to represent ILFFPS. We met with Chief Bobby Halton Editor in Chief of *Fire Engineering*, Chief Pat Kenny of Western Springs Fire Department and ILFFPS, Ryan "Birdman" Parrot of the Navy Seals and Sons of the Flag, Lt. Drew Kane of FDNY, John Walters of FDNY and Sons of the Flag, Dr. Suzi Gulliver Ph.D., who works closely with the IAFF peer support initiative, Jason Mims of the Milwaukee Fire Department, Father Jim Swarthout of ILFFPS and Rosecrance, Jeremy Hurd of Palm Beach Florida Fire and Rescue, Chief Michael Allora of Clifton New Jersey Fire Department, Chief Derek Bergsten of Rockford Fire Department and ILFFPS, Sara Reichwald MS.Ed with Rosecrance, and Dr. Raymond Garcia with Rosecrance.

The Symposium provided an awesome opportunity to connect with many firefighters who were ambitious about learning what we can do for each other to "make it safe." ILFFPS is honored to have the opportunity to participate and extends a tremendous thank you to Rosecrance for selflessly sharing the vision of "make it safe" for firefighters.

Sharing "Make it Safe" with Illinois State Troopers

ILFFPS will soon be sharing with the Illinois State Troopers, who are in need of an initial peer support curriculum and an internal peer support structure for their 1,500 members. We are proud to be able to assist our brothers in sisters. Not really in blue - kind of an olive - I'd say. ;)

Suicide Prevention and Awareness: React4Ryan

With the recent passing of Lt. Ryan Elwood, we are reminded of the need to help firefighters know that there's always hope! So, we are working to amend the Illinois Fire Service curriculum to include emotional wellness and "make it safe" content.

We have begun partnering with React4Ryan, an new organization formed by Lt. Elwood's family to make sure that no firefighter feels lost and without hope. The Elwood family welcomed me to explore how we can collectively work towards preventing firefighter suicides by making sure that firefighters know that there are people who understand them. **Generously, React4Ryan has agreed to fund individuals who wish to attend peer support trainings, so that these trainings are FREE for firefighters!**

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Continued: A Letter from the Executive Director

Together, we can work to make sure that Lt. Elwood's legacy drives us to help firefighters find peace and safety. You are never alone. Please check out <http://www.react4ryan.com/> for more about React4Ryan. I can not express how grateful I am to them for allowing us the opportunity to be a part of their tremendous mission.

I also want to extend a sincere thank you to:

- JP Childers and Sammy Vega, ILFFPS peer supporters, for sharing ILFFPS with the academy classes in Champaign at Illinois Fire Service Institute
- Mike Fox for sharing ILFFPS through NIPSTA in Glenview, Illinois
- Kelli Krupa and Nick Gilbert for sharing ILFFPS at the Romeoville Fire Academy
- Junior Graham for sharing ILFFPS at the Rockford Fire Academy
- Kevin Kelly of Midlothian, Illinois for leading the Road to Help motorcycle rally. Kevin has raised close to \$20,000 in 2 years for ILFFPS!

CE Opportunities

CE opportunities are always available for ILFFPS peer supporters. Central and Southern Illinois, please reach out to our Lead Peer Coordinator Andy Perry. Northern Illinois Peer Supporters, please reach out to Mary Robbins. Everyone in our group is current through July 2018. There are countless ways to earn 10 hours by July 2018. Share our message, write an article, read an article from our website and share with Dr. McKiness, etc. God bless you all and thank you for being a part of this movement! It truly is my honor, **-Matt**

A Letter from the Clinical Director

By: Dr. Kristy McKiness



Dear Peers,
As we go through the busyness of this season, it is important to take moments to reflect on the growth and success of Illinois Firefighter Peer Support team. We have touched many lives; some of whom we do not even know we helped. The dedication, diligence, advocacy, and support of our members and by the communities we serve have been significant in furthering our mission and growth. As we all know, the holidays and the turn of the new year bring happiness as well as challenging times for many people. Therefore, keeping our mission visible for the fire service as well as ourselves will continue to foster positive impacts for peer support and personal wellness. I wish you all a happy new year, and thank you for all that you do.

Stay safe and be well, Kristy

A Letter from the Editor

Hello Everyone and Welcome to 2017!

My name is Jada Hudson, and I am the Clinical Consultant for ILFFPS. Being the ILFFPS Newsletter Editor has been a wonderful experience for me, as I have seen peer supporters from throughout Illinois come forward to share their stories and help their peers.



I am pleased to announce that emotional wellness is growing in its importance within the Illinois Fire Service Institute, and they have asked six ILFFPS members to join their new advisory committee as they put together their behavioral health curriculum! Our executive director Matt Olson, myself, Chief Dan DeGryse, Chief Pat Kenny, Chief Art Zern, and Retired Chief Paul Gardner will all participate. We are honored and excited to be a part of this advisory committee.

And, our cause of "make it safe" is reaching beyond the Illinois Fire Departments. Matt and I have recently had the honor of speaking to firefighters in Kentucky and Florida, and we are scheduled to present in Minnesota and Indiana in the upcoming months. I truly believe it is critical for firefighters throughout the country to have peers to whom they can turn when crisis arises.

In addition to presenting in other states, Matt and I had the honor of presenting to the Illinois State Troopers. We also presented at the Rosecrance Florian Symposium, where hundreds of firefighters gathered to learn about effective peer support and firefighter-related emotional wellness issues. Seeing firefighters become empowered to help their peers inspires me.

Chuck Wehrli has been working to grow our retiree program and recently conducted a survey (see page 11) to assess how we can help retired firefighters. I have also been at retiree meetings. Thank you to Jim Schrepfer, Director of the Illinois Association of Retired Firefighters for welcoming me. And, thank you to Bill Freiberg for inviting me to the Elgin Retired Firefighters meeting and Elgin Fire Museum (See pictures on page 13).

Thank you to Command Sergeant Major Sean Carney, Sergeant Talley, and Lieutenant Colonel Michael Legler of the National Guard for allowing me to observe your Urban Search and Rescue trainings. I was amazed by how skilled the ropes team was! (Pictures on page 26).

ILFFPS is truly a testament to the commitment of its leaders. Matt Olson volunteers his time tirelessly to continue to lead and grow this organization.

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Grandpa Needed Peer Support, but No One Knew it Then

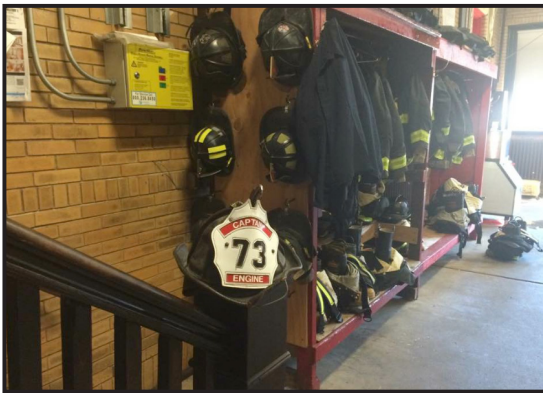
By: Matt Olson



During my 27 years as a firefighter, I have often thought about my grandpa, Bob Olson, and his influence on me. I saw how well he survived tragedies on the job and in his personal life. He had an incredible ability to be present in the lives of his family members, while clearly dealing with his own tough experiences.

Grandpa Bob Olson left me his old leather helmet. I kept it for a while, but now it's in its forever home with E-73, where Captain Casey and the rest of E-73 recently welcomed me and my sons as we presented the old helmet. It was inspirational.

E-73 has tremendous pride in those who came before and made E-73 into what it was and is today. A few years ago, I came across some of grandpa's log entries that he created



as Captain of 73. I traced his start at 73 to March 1, 1963. As I read, I saw a window into who he was as a fire officer. I had only known him as a gentle and caring grandfather. But seeing his handwriting and reading what he wrote was surreal.

One log entry stood out. I remember him talking about it – December 14, 1967. He was sent to a home on fire not far from the firehouse. There were three little kids in the house. He showed me his log entry from that night. Then, he turned the page and said, "Look here, back to work the next day".

"One log entry stood out. I remember him talking about it - December 14, 1967... Then, he turned the page and said, 'Look here, back to work the next day.'"



Grandpa, Bob Olson, with Engine 73

Here's what he had written...

"3:14 am

Co on still from citizen, called FAO for box, stretched 350' of 3" hose with 1 1/4" SOP and 350' of 2 1/2" hose with 100' of 1 1/2" hose and Elkhart nozzle, carried 2 children to sidewalk, gave same to citizen to bring to engine house. Worked 3" line in windows of bedroom, used 1 1/2" hose in rear door. Later attached 100' of 1 1/2" hose with 3/4" SOP on 3" line and worked stream in dining room. Ordered to quarters by 29th Batt. Chief. Chgo hydrant OK. H.P. 40# Engine pressure 170# and 110# Co. in service 4 men 0 miles"

When you stop and think about that, this was profound. No one ever taught my grandpa to understand or process what he saw and did that night. They just expected him to come back to work in a couple of days. How many people can carry 2 dead children to a sidewalk and hand them off to a stranger while their father watches and then go back to work like nothing happened? Firefighters do this. This is the job.

"When you stop and think about it, this was profound. No one ever taught my grandpa to understand or process what he saw and did that night. They just expected him to come back to work in a couple days."

In moments of seeing horrible things, what does a firefighter think of? When does he think of it? Grandpa logged who was his company.

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Continued: Grandpa Needed Peer Support, but No One Knew it Then

He logged the assignments that they completed. He logged engine pressures on each line. He logged hydrant pressures. His mind was on how much water was coming from the hydrant and how much pressure 73 was able to turn into at each nozzle for the firefighters fighting a fire. He was focused. But, somewhere in his mind were the faces of those two children he may have never met before. Somewhere in his mind were the faces of 5 of his own children.

What did he take home with him? What I saw each day was a smile and happy eyes, kindness and willingness to make sure that I had what I needed through some tough times. What he was is amazing to me. He showed limitless strength and patience.

But, Grandpa knew loss. He lost personally: 2 sons died before him. He lost professionally: this was just *one* day at work for my grandpa. He was and always will be to me, a hero. He loved life because he knew, all too well, what it was like to see life taken away.

A Safer Fire Service

I may have held onto his helmet and log entries, but I haven't held on to the approach men of his day took toward emotional wellness. Today we have a much better understanding of the emotional pressures of the job. We understand the emotional injuries we sustain while working, and we can look for ways to make it safe.

We have made such great strides to keep our bodies safe on this job, but not necessarily our emotions and our minds. We have the best gear, NFPA constantly reviews what we do. IDOL, OSHA, NIOSH – everyone studies our incidents and suggests improved ways to be safe.

My department has a policy on buckling up. Buckling up is safe; it makes sense. But, the seat belt isn't what saved my life in my career – a conversation with a counselor is. When I was facing my most difficult challenge as a firefighter and struggled more than I ever had before, it was a conversation that gave me hope, that showed me that it was ok to struggle. It is human.

What Peer Support is All About

Today we talk a lot about peer support. What we can do for each other is make it safe in the fire service. We can make it safe to struggle some. We can make it safe to not be ok today. Just because we may not be ok today, doesn't mean we stay that way. We take care of each other. We talk to each other. We listen to each other. We relate to the times in an-

other firefighters career that we can. We validate that the hard time they are going through makes sense. We acknowledge that they are where they are supposed to be, and we share the hope that we have because we also know that it can pass on by and we will soon be ok again.

“...the seatbelt isn't what saved my life in my career - a conversation with a counselor is. It was a conversation that gave me hope, that showed me that it was ok to struggle. It is human.”

For another firefighter to take the time to let one of us know that it is ok to struggle is powerful. If we do a better job of being there for each other and taking the cape off, putting down the emotional burdens that we carry, we can get through this job safely both physically and emotionally.

That to me is what peer support is about: it's about being able to look back at our old helmets and feel nostalgia without sorrow. It's about being able to be present with our families, care for their needs, and truly be ok because we've gotten to process the emotional scars from this job.

Thanks for your service, Grandpa, especially when you were hurting and didn't have a place to talk about it. I think you'd be proud of how we've made it safe for our firefighters now.

Continued: A Letter from the Editor

Andy Perry and Mary Robbins are committed to outreach and fielding peer support calls around the clock. Tom Howard continues to offer faith-based support to firefighters. Paul Gardner is amazing, as he oversees scheduling of peer support for Rosecrance. Our Clinical Director, Kristy McKiness has been busy launching a First Responder Chapter of the Illinois Counseling Association to train other counselors to work with first responders. She has also been working with Northern Illinois University's physical therapy program. Colleen Murphy just got back from California and has been traveling and working to help spouses understand and provide support to their first responders.

As we wrap up an amazing year, we are looking forward to seeing what 2017 will bring!

Be kind to yourself,

Jada B. Hudson, M.S., LCPC, CADC
Licensed Clinical Professional Counselor
Certified Alcohol and Drug Abuse Counselor
ILFFPS Clinical Consultant

Your Personal Wellness Plan

By: Dr. Kristy McKiness



Wellness. Health. Balance. Well-being. These terms are common in articles published during the end of the year for a variety

of reasons, but should also be visible throughout the year. Ask yourself how often you see articles such as “Top 10 Ways to Manage Holiday Stress.” Most likely, your response will be that you see similar publications on an annual basis. Have you ever wondered why these types of wellness articles continue to be published during the holiday season, but are not as common post-holiday?

The topics of wellness, health, balance, and well-being should be as visible throughout the year as they are during the year-end. Although the holidays can present unique stressors, there are always other times during life that have unique stressors and transition.

Implementing a regular wellness plan and being intentional about consistency with the plan for an overall healthy lifestyle is integral to health and happiness. “Health” and “happiness” are common terms used, but their meaning is different for each person as

“Implementing a regular wellness plan for an overall healthy lifestyle is integral to health and happiness.”

are the ways each person attains health and happiness.

For firefighters, the holidays may yield increased calls for alcohol related illness/injuries, suicides, car accidents, etc. Although having a strong wellness plan may help with managing emotions from potentially traumatic events (PTE’s) at the time they occur, regular wellness management can help to prevent compassion fatigue and burnout from these cumulative calls. The phrase “An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure” highlights this concept wonderfully.

Although we cannot predict how someone will specifically respond to a situation or an accumulation of several situations, research strongly supports that early intervention and preventative measures greatly assist with how people navigate and cope with difficult encounters. Whether one event or a number of events are negatively influencing a person’s wellness, there are several angles to implement wellness

in ways that support improvement of overall health.

The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) describes a wellness model, named **The Eight Dimensions of Wellness:**

1. **Emotional:** Coping effectively with life and creating satisfying relationships
2. **Financial:** Satisfaction with current and future financial situations
3. **Social:** Developing a sense of connection, belonging, and a well-developed support system
4. **Spiritual:** Expanding our sense of meaning and purpose in life
5. **Occupational:** Personal satisfaction and enrichment derived from work
6. **Physical:** Recognizing the need for physical activity, healthy diet, sleep, and nutrition
7. **Intellectual:** Recognizing creative abilities and finding ways to expand knowledge and skills
8. **Environmental:** Good health through occupying pleasant environments that support well-being

Although each wellness dimension is separate, they do influence one another. Therefore, by being proactive about several dimensions simultaneously, we can be cognizant of “not putting all of our eggs in one basket”.

(Continued on page 7)



(SAMHSA, 2016)

Continued: Your Personal Wellness Plan

"It is important to find consistent ways to nurture each dimension of wellness in your life, so that when particular dimensions are challenged, there are already factors in place to help you stay well as a person."

For example, if the emotional (divorce) and occupational (problems with a coworker) dimensions are being negatively impacted, focus on other

dimensions can support the areas being negatively impacted. It is important to find consistent ways to nurture each dimension of wellness in your life, so that when particular dimensions are

challenged, there are already factors in place to help you stay well as a person. Each person benefits differently from various self-care measures, so finding activities that best support your 8 wellness dimensions is important.

Writing Your Personal Wellness Plan

Challenge yourself to find activities that best help you maintain health and balance in each of these eight areas of your life. **Write them down.** Don't just focus on them as we start our new year, but work to become well in each of these areas throughout the year.

Consider how exercise, annual wellness exams, annual/ongoing mental health

check-ins with a therapist, chaplain/clergy support, formal/informal peer support, seeking new skills/duties at work, and extending outside of your comfort zone will help you find the best wellness plan for you. Your wellness plan will likely change and grow as your wellness needs change and grow. Therefore, continuing to explore new ways to nurture your 8 wellness dimensions is a dedicated, fun, and necessary way to be proactive about your health throughout the year.

On Transition to Solid Ground

By: Tim Grutzius



Often the small victories in life arise from the seeds of chaos. Last week, I was part of a crew that responded to a horrific accident on a section of a highway we

provide emergency services for. The patient was struck by another vehicle that was traveling at a rate of speed consist with the posted limit.

Upon arrival to the scene, our crew was handed a multi-systems trauma patient with CPR initiated by the State Police. We quickly packaged the patient and began accelerated transport to a trauma center as this was a load and go incident. All treatment was done en-route to no avail. The patient expired despite a combined valiant effort on the part of our department and the hospital ER staff.

Afterwards, I mentally noted this as

the worst trauma patient I had borne witness to in all my 22(+) years in the fire service. In past years, I gave away all my emotional energy to such a person's transitioning from this world- which in the end left me feeling drained (similar cumulative events were precursors to my PTSD). However, this time I realized something awe-inspiring about myself: I had transitioned to solid ground.

In that moment, I gently reflected on the lost life, held space for her, and wished safe passage into eternity. At the same time, I kept my life force energy intact which allowed me to remain in the present moment as a balanced soul.

I attribute my success to a group of healers, guides, and mentors (or however you may refer to them). The key to this major victory was the

fact that each one of these individuals held space for me without judgment. They also challenged me to seek ways of understanding my PTSD instead of just telling me "You have PTSD. . . This is what you should do about it." Instead, I was given "homework" that assisted me in

"In past years, I gave away all my emotional energy to such a person's transitioning from this world - which in the end left me feeling drained."

drawing my own conclusions on how to best manage the stressors in life that had once been my Achilles heel. At the end of the day, I righted my own ship with gentle nudging.

It was this active partnership that granted me the ability to take the high road in the face of adversity. This experience reminds me of the following Chinese proverb that is apropos to my continued healing journey:

Tell me, I'll forget.

Show me, and I may remember.

But involve me, and I'll understand.

In health and wellness,

Tim Grutzius

Providing Opportunities Out of Tears: React4Ryan

By: Jada Hudson, M.S., LCPC, CADC



In the fall of 2015, firefighter Lieutenant Ryan Elwood, took his life. But, out of his passing, seeds have been planted to provide hope, opportunity, and

futures for young firefighters.

I had the opportunity to meet Ryan's parents and aunts and hearing their experience with losing their son and nephew. Through their tears they told me about the wonderful person Ryan was. Ryan grew up as a smiling, funny, quick-witted kid. He was the youngest of three children, brother to Tommy and Meghan. He was tough. He played every sport possible and especially enjoyed basketball and volleyball. From a young age, Ryan loved helping people.

He was social and extroverted and never showed any signs of depression. His intuitive nature made him able to sense if someone was having a bad day. He cared about people and always looked for ways to help.

His friend's father even remarked on a time when twelve-year-old Ryan stood up for a homeless man. Ryan's peers made jokes about the homeless man for

asking for money, but Ryan stood up and said, "You don't know what he's going through. Stop teasing him." This act left an impression on Ryan's friend's father. What twelve-year-old has this kind of compassion and courage?

As Ryan grew up, he became more and more passionate about the idea of helping others, and he joined the fire service to be able to put his compas-

sion and courage into action for others. He loved acquiring more knowledge and training as he worked for both the Hometown and the North Palos Fire Departments. He tirelessly earned every certification possible, and in 2012 he became a Medal of Valor recipient. Ryan was one of the youngest firefighters to be in line for lieutenant and was made lieutenant posthumously in September right after he passed.

Ryan's family is tight-knit. His father was a member of the Board of Trade and his mother was a teacher and, later an administrator. They enjoyed many fun memories together. Ryan was extremely close to his grandfather who passed away in 2015. This loss hit him hard and Ryan grieved for him. Soon thereafter, Ryan lost a close friend in a car accident. Still reeling from these losses, Ryan continued to serve and care for others in his work in the fire service.

Two weeks before Ryan took his life, he went out on a call to help a man who had attempted suicide. The man had unsuccessfully tried to end his own

"Two weeks before Ryan took his life, he went out on a call to help a man who had attempted suicide."

life and Ryan was able to resuscitate him in the ambulance. But upon arriving at the hospital, the man didn't make it. Ryan was quite disturbed and affected by this incident, but his family believes

this incident had an even greater impact on him than anyone understood.

Ryan had trips planned and lots of plans for the future. He had healthy relationships, and aside from mourning the loss of his grandfather and friend in 2015, in addition to this traumatic call, Ryan seemed okay. Perhaps this decision to end his life was a somewhat quick decision. His family wonders.

As his loved ones reflected on what could have caused Ryan to take such drastic measures, they promised themselves never to be mad at the fire service. Ryan loved the fire service and they want his love to carry on.

To anyone who is struggling with traumatic memories or needs help, Ryan's family encourages you to seek help! Talk to a counselor or peer supporter. Take time off to process when things aren't right because the question is not, "Will it be you who needs help?" The question is, "When will it be you who needs help?"

Everyone struggles at some point in the fire service. Taking your life is not the

"The question is not 'Will you need help?' but 'When will you need help?' Everyone struggles at some point in the fire service."

answer. Ryan had so much ahead of him. What if he had been able to talk openly about his struggle and find healing? The world would be a better place now. There is so much hope when you realize you are not alone in your pain and experiences.

In honor of Ryan's memory, Ryan's family has launched an organization called RE;ACT (react4ryan.com), which provides awareness, counseling, and training for first responders. They also provide scholarships to send young firefighters to the IFSI training in Champaign, Illinois and other firefighter trainings. To make a donation or learn more, visit react4ryan.com.

Taking a Moment to Remember & Celebrate Ryan Elwood

In remembrance of every firefighter, who felt desperate and hopeless enough to take his/her own life this past year, we remember you. We see your pain. We are heartbroken that you got to a point where you felt that the only solution was to end your life. As we grieve, we also extend our care to those who contemplated suicide this past year. We are so glad you are still a part of this world, and we, as friends and peer supporters, are here for you whenever you need us. We believe there is always hope, so please reach out.

One of these firefighters impacted us personally. To the family and friends of Ryan Elwood, we offer our condolences and our most vigilant effort to help other firefighters, their families, and their communities never have to endure the pain and sorrow you have faced this past year.

Ryan Elwood 9/19/86 - 9/8/15



Why Peer Support is a Game-Changer for Firefighters

By: James Purrazzo



Its 2:00 in the afternoon, and a call has just been dispatched for a structure fire across town. The familiar voice of our dispatcher

breaks through the noise and laughter of the firehouse as all activity comes to a stop. The unspoken consensus in the air is that this is not going to be good, and if you've ever been on the job in a moment like this, you know exactly what I mean. You can feel your heart rate increase as you race to the rig and just go. The momentum of the moment carries you forward as instinct takes over amidst the sounds of sirens and the flurry of action. Your thoughts turn like a carousel in your mind.

It's difficult to put into words the cumulative spectrum of emotion one feels as he races toward an unknown and dangerous situation that may result in him not returning home that night. But, this is the stuff we train for. This is what we do.

A firefighter is often considered to be the closest thing to a real life superhero there is, and anyone who has ever put on the uniform knows the feeling of pride and honor it invokes.

I have had the privilege of being in the fire service for 5 years now, and in my relatively short time have been blessed

"We love the 'superhero' persona and believing that there is nothing we could ever see or do that would possibly break us."

to see and experience a lot of

things; and have lived to see another day. Unfortunately, there are many of our brothers and sisters out there that are struggling to do just that.

As firefighters, we love the "superhero" persona and believing that there is nothing we could ever see or do that would possibly break us. But the truth is, deep down we know this is nothing more than a form denial. A lie. The truth is, suicide has been the leading cause of death amongst firefighters for the last 3 years now, and it is not until just recently that the underlying causes are starting to surface as to why.

"For many years, it was believed that PTSD is a condition reserved only for the military."

However, it turns out that the stress and strain that comes with the responsibilities of our jobs as firefighters is just as devastating for us as it is for our soldiers at war.

I, myself, have suffered PTSD from the experiences I have had thus far and from the start of my education in EMS I was told stuff like, "We all go through this," or "You'll learn to live with it." The take away I hear is, essentially, "Suck it up kid; we all go through it."

This is where the danger lies! We are taught to think that somehow denying reality will help us reconcile the immense levels of stress and inner turmoil we face. Phrases like, "You'll

learn to live with it," promise that it will all just get better by itself. But, when confronted with the bleak reality that firefighter suicides are way too common, emotional wellness is no longer a topic to be brushed under the rug!

The definition of insanity is, "Doing the same thing over and over again, and expecting a different result." This is the current dichotomy we face in our line of work: coupling the "superhero" persona with the fact that we are so very human. That's why, though tragic, I am thankful that the suicide deaths in the fire service as of late have come with very personal and heart wrenching back stories. These stories have forced many of us to consider the way we handle emotional wellness in the fire service. They have come with the necessary evidence that shows us that our lack of communication or willingness to open up about our emotional wounds will only continue to be a silent killer for those we love, if we continue to do as we have always done.

For a community that traditionally

"Phrases like, 'You'll learn to live with it,' promise that it will all just get better by itself. But, when confronted with the bleak reality that firefighter suicides are way too common, emotional wellness is no longer a topic to be brushed under the rug!"

does a great job of cultivating a genuine family atmosphere and sense of brotherhood, it is tragic that we have done an even better job of allowing our brothers and sisters to feel like their only real problem is that they just don't "have what it takes" to make it in this line of work.

(Continued on page 11)

Continued: Why Peer Support is a Game-Changer for Firefighters

Instead of opening up the doors of communication about how we truly feel, we have, for too long, chosen to keep those doors shut. Ego has cost many good men their lives. And, I think we can agree that it is time for a change.

This is why ILFFPS means so much to me. We have an opportunity to alter the toxic, life-as-a-“superhero”-thinking and revolutionize our firehouses. After all, we spend a third of our lives in them! With IFFPS, we have an opportunity to provide our firehouses with a real sense of community and a safe space to process our stresses and anxieties properly, without having to suffer feelings of shame or inferiority. The program provides trained firefighter peer supporters, clinical consultants, group therapy, psychiatric services, and even substance abuse in-patient care for anyone looking to seek assistance in managing the pressures and strain this job can have on our mental health and home-lives. With faith based groups, spousal support programs, and retirement liaisons, IFFPS has something for everyone.

I have already seen the benefits of being able to process well the effects of the PTSD. I have been strengthened just by speaking and opening up to others who have been there, who understand, and who can help. We are firefighters. We are strong, and we put our lives on the line every day to face challenges and dangers that most people can never fully understand or wish upon anyone else.

A wise man once told me that “Every extraordinary thing that a fire fighter has done, was done by a human being.” The thing we often forget is that although what we do, at times, seem super human, at the end of the day, we are only human.

ILFFPS Directors, Coordinators, & Consultants

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Andy Perry

Significant Others/Family Coordinator
Colleen Murphy

Faith Program Coordinator
Tom Howard

Rosecrance Florian Program Coord.
Paul Gardner

Retiree Program Coordinator
Chuck Wehrli

Upcoming ILFFPS Events

Peer Support Training:
February 9th and 10th;
Carbondale, IL

ILFFPS Retirement Survey Results {2016}

{31 Surveys Returned}

Average years of service:
22-39

What have been their biggest challenges since retiring?

Staying healthy. Busy. Insurance issues. Staying connected to department.

What do they miss to most?

Almost all said, “the guys”.

What do they miss the least?

Political BS.

If they could’ve changed one thing, what would it have been?

Most said, “Nothing.” A few said, “More training.”

What would they tell the rookies now?

Pay attention to the old timers. Study hard. Stay in shape. Realize you have the best job ever. Don’t breathe smoke. Maintain the Brotherhood.

Have they had cancer or know a fellow firefighter who has?

28 said yes.

Have any firefighters they know committed suicide?

7 said yes.



Conducted By:
Chuck Wehrli

Cortisol can Complicate Fire Service Work

By: Dan DeGryse, BA, BS, CEAP, CADC, LAP/C



As firefighters, we go from 0 to 60 mph in a matter of seconds when we hear the bell ring at the fire station.

We race to gear up and to process the information about where we're headed. But, we don't prepare our bodies for that rush of adrenaline. Given the unexpected nature of the work, I'm not sure how we

would or could. It's not as easy as warming up or stretching before exercising.

Our bodies release adrenaline and cortisol when they're stressed. Cortisol is a stress hormone – actually, a steroid hormone. (I call it a hormone on steroids.) It's great to get you going, but is it healthy for our hearts to race 10 to 15 times a day? That's 30,000 instances of a racing heart just on the job alone if you do the math over a 30-year career.

"Our bodies release adrenaline and cortisol when they're stressed... It's great to get you going, but is it healthy for our hearts to race 10 to 15 times a day?"

I started researching cortisol – how it affects the immune system, the digestive tract, concentration, etc. – a few years ago after studying the suicide rate within the Chicago Fire Department. I looked at other main causes of death, and heart disease topped the list, as it does nationally. Diet, exercise, smoking and heredity are some of the main risk factors for heart disease, but excessive stress can contribute to those risks.

What if I get that injection of cortisol and my heart goes through the roof, but then I find out it's a false alarm? Now what? How do I get my heart rate back to normal, and where do the adrenaline and cortisol go? My understanding is they get absorbed back into the body, and that made me wonder if we truly know the effects of what happens when that occurs.

When I hear the firehouse bell go off, it's like a jolt. Even though it may not be for me, I can still feel my heart race a bit, and I have to sit there and breathe, relax and try to calm down. That's just an attempt to get my body back to its neutral state; that doesn't reduce the amount of adrenaline and cortisol that were just released in my body.

Former U.S. Fire Administrator Olin Green wrote in 1991 about the dangers of stress within the fire service. But,

after more than 25 years on the job, I hadn't heard anything about that until I started researching the topic. I never looked at stress as a possible hindrance until now. And, I don't want the next 25 years to pass without addressing it.

For many years, we've talked about improving personal protective equipment: bunker gear, helmets, self-contained breathing apparatuses, hoods, gloves, and boots. We've also found out that the heat buildup inside of our bodies and the skin exposure to carcinogens are as dangerous as us breathing in something toxic.

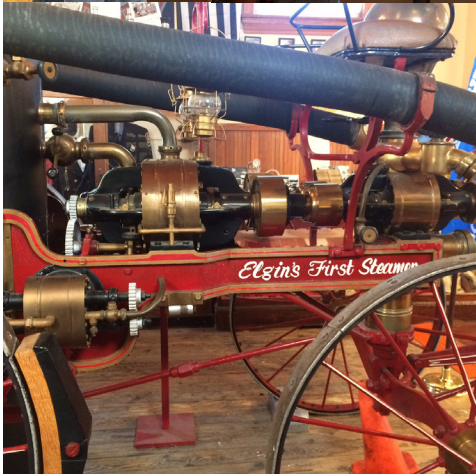
I'm finding out that adrenaline and cortisol, which are naturally occurring and necessary for us when in our fight-or-flight mode, are potentially hurting us from the inside out. The cortisol in our bodies is typically highest in the morning to help get us going. The level of cortisol lowers throughout the day in sync with our circadian rhythm. The level is lowest – half of the morning level – at night. But if we're constantly stressed by the firehouse alarms or during runs, what are the effects of the continually higher levels of cortisol on our minds and bodies? Although there is research available on this subject for military and police personnel, I haven't found any related to the fire service. My hope is that further research on the topic geared toward the fire service will help spread awareness about the physiological effects of stress we experience throughout our careers.

For example, when I look at my own physiological responses regarding this issue, I can tell you that when I come home after a long shift and being up most of the night, I feel like I'm shaking from the inside out. I try to meditate before I go to sleep so I don't have that feeling.

Another example of the physiological effects of cortisol: I spoke to a coworker who has 27 years on the job, and he told me he wakes up pretty much every night at 1 a.m. He wrestles around, gets up to walk around and then tries to go back to bed. He had a sleep study, and the technicians figured out that he typically doesn't have one minute of rapid eye movement (REM) sleep, which helps give us more energy during the day. Cortisol levels also fluctuate during sleep, according to the National Sleep Foundation.

(Continued on page 13)

Elgin Fire Museum



Continued: Cortisol Can Complicate Fire Service Work

Some people take medication to help them sleep, while others might have a drink before bed. Self-medication can quickly progress to addiction. We know that all too well.

That's part of the reason why I split my time between work as a battalion chief with the Chicago Fire Department and Rosecrance, a leading provider of addiction and mental health treatment services in Rockford, Illinois. In Fall 2014, I worked with Rosecrance to help launch the Florian Program, which is the first program in the country dedicated to treating fire service personnel with an eight-bed coed inpatient unit.

That program aims to help firefighters and paramedics with serious substance abuse and mental health issues such as post-traumatic stress disorder, anxiety, and depression. Knowing what we know now about cortisol's overall effects on our long-term well-being, we are incorporating its significance into our program. Florian clients will have their cortisol levels tested initially when they check in for treatment. Dr. Raymond Garcia, medical director at the Rosecrance Harrison Campus, where the Florian Program is located, will evaluate those tests to check for abnormalities and to see if there's a need to incorporate techniques for clients on how to de-stress. Clients whose cortisol levels have been identified as abnormal will be retested at the end of treatment to evaluate progress and treatment success.

We can educate them about stress and cortisol and give them tips on what to do when they return to their jobs, because they'll face the same triggers and traumas as they did before treatment.

Research has shown that low-intensity exercises, yoga, barre, meditation, breathing techniques and acupuncture can help reduce cortisol release in the body. Avoiding sugar and caffeine is best after a jolt of cortisol. Eat fruit high in vitamin C and food high in protein (eggs, lean meat), zinc (seafood) and magnesium (spinach), and avoid high-carbohydrate foods and sugary desserts.

"Research has shown that low-intensity exercises, yoga, barre, meditation, breathing techniques and acupuncture can help reduce cortisol release in the body."

And what if there's a way to change the tones in the firehouse? We don't have all the answers yet. Until we do, let's research and study the issue first.

Because doing nothing for the next 25 years is unacceptable.

A Mother's Perspective

By: Nanette Moore



After reading a recent story about a fire officer who committed suicide after years of emotional trauma, it caused me to reach out to Jada Hudson from Illinois Firefighter Peer Support to find a way to express my thoughts about firefighters and the trauma they suffer.

In the case of the fire officer who committed suicide after he posted about his pain of "27 years of deaths and babies dying in your hands is a memory that you will never get rid of." I cannot measure the pain this fire officer was suffering, but I can relate to the distress of losing a child, and this is where I write from.

I am a mother of four boys, two of whom are deceased, and two are here on earth and doing well. I am also the wife of a firefighter, who has not only experienced the loss of our children, but the challenges of the profession, including a call where a mother took the lives of her three young children.

As a mother, I was there when my two sons died (one in 1991 and another in 1995). My husband and I held them as they passed. They knew they were loved as they left this

world. We felt fortunate to be there, but not everyone is able to be there as a loved one passes. That is where our brave firefighters come in. As a mother, if I was not there when my child or loved one was passing to eternal life, I would want someone who had a caring human touch to be there. As a firefighter, you are doing a wonderful service. That is why people love firefighters because of their caring nature, compassionate ways, and thoughtful presence.

I know that each firefighter gets into the business to save lives, and when they don't it is emotionally draining. But, please know that each mother that could not be there when their loved one passed is greatly

appreciative that a caring and compassionate firefighter was with them in their place. They didn't die alone. I know this can be emotionally challenging, but it can be a source of great comfort to a parent. You cannot let the sadness of the incident take you down.

Having lost two children and having heard countless statements of wisdom, many of which can be harsh, I can only say that I am sure that God cries too when bad things happen.

"Each firefighter gets into the business to save lives, and when they don't, it's emotionally draining."

(Continued on page 15)

Curiosity

By: Father Jim Swarthout



Curious George turned 75 last month. It was in the fall of 1941 that the first Curious George book was published by H.A. (Hans) and

Margret Rey. Do you know Curious George or are you even curious to find out who he is?

I was introduced to him as a child, and now I enjoy sharing him with my six-month-old niece. I am enjoying seeing a third generation within my



own family enjoying the instant appeal of being curious. Young children, like George, cannot help but be curious. They are constantly exploring, questioning, wondering, and wanting to know why the sky is blue, and why tomatoes are red, and why leaves fall

off trees, and why water freezes in winter, and why birds can fly, and why, why, why.....

PBS KIDS has broadcast an animated television series based on the Curious George children's book series since 2006. PBS' interest, from the start, was not simply to entertain children, but to educate them about

the value of being curious and inquisitive. Curiosity is the natural first step of the desire to learn more and is a crucial factor in gaining a deeper understanding of how things work in the world and for exploring new ways of problem solving.

"Curiosity is the natural first step of the desire to learn more and is a crucial factor in gaining a deeper understanding of how things work in the world and for exploring new ways of problem solving."

(Continued on page 15)

Continued: A Mother's Perspective

We cannot control everything and you cannot save every patient. I know you can't snap your fingers and simply erase the intrusive images in your mind. I understand. There are snapshots in time that I will never forget.

"There are snapshots in time that I will never forget."

As the wife of a firefighter, I know that you typically don't show emotion with the "Brothers", so you need to find a productive outlet – one that allows you to be you and release stress and remove your burdens therapeutically one at a time. I am not naive enough to say that you can get rid of all your stress and burdens in one moment or day, but you must allow yourself time and space to let off the pressure in a productive way. Music, a good cry, and exercise helped my husband and I.

As a firefighter, you are always giving. Your biggest job may

"As a firefighter, you are always giving. Your biggest job may well be to learn how to receive."

well be to learn how to receive. Don't give up on your own life. Give yourself another day. Try something different. When you're feeling overwhelmed, take a risk on yourself. Talk to somebody – a neighbor, God, your uncle, a friend, your pet, or a dedicated caring professional like yourself – take that risk.

Help is available. All of us need to look out for one another too. If you notice a co-worker is in a dark spot in life, reach out a hand. We all need someone to lean on.

From a mother's perspective, suicide will not bring my sons back, nor will it bring any of your patients back. You still have your life to live. Please, take care of yourself for you, your loved ones, and the people you serve. Today is a new day.

(For me, music has been one of the most healing things. Personally, this song was very therapeutic at high volume. I will admit that I did break my car speakers listening to it, though.)

"Holy Mother" By: Eric Clapton

Holy mother, where are you?

Tonight I feel broken in two
I've seen the stars fall from the sky
Holy mother, can't keep from crying

Oh I need your help this time
Get me through this lonely night
Tell me please which way to turn
To find myself again

Continued: Curiosity

This makes curiosity as important an attribute for adults as it is for children. Somewhere along the line though, as we get older, adults lose the natural curiosity we had as children. When I work/minster with an individual, couple, or family who is "stuck" in some way, I almost always find that they have lost their ability to be curious about their life together.

"I find that I am almost always able to help them get 'unstuck' by simply being curious."

When this is the case, I find that I am almost always able to help them get "unstuck" by simply being curious. We wonder together why they are

stuck. We dig deep tougher and continue to wonder why. To gain a deeper understanding of what is going on we work together to ask "why?" and to explore new ways of solving a problem. That's right; we just follow the lead of Curious George and any young child by continuously asking why, and always exploring new ways of doing things.

It's worth noting here that word curious comes from the same root as the words cure and care. To be curious is to care enough to get to know others for who they really are, rather than simply assuming we already know who they are, or what they mean by a certain action or statement. Think for a moment how wonderfully caring it feels when others are curious

enough to take the time to really get to know you and who you really are. That simple curiosity on their part is a way of caring with compassion. And, in your relationships, when you become genuinely curious to understand them, it immediately shuts down the other person's defensiveness.

So the next time you are feeling stuck, try taking a step back and being curious about both how you got stuck and about new and creative ways you might try to get unstuck. In doing so you will be honoring Curious George's 75th anniversary while you are also reconnecting with the natural, child-like curiosity that lives within you and each and every one of us.



ILFFPS Mission Statement

To aid and serve fire service and emergency response members and their families by providing trained Peer Supporters, who can deliver confidential and supportive assistance whenever and wherever needed.

ILFFPS Vision Statement

Illinois Fire Fighter Peer Support seeks to contribute and provide ongoing emotional wellness resources that are readily needed in the fire service and emergency responders.

Value Statements

Illinois Fire Fighter Peer Support values the concepts of Making it Safe and Making it Matter. These values are upheld by an understanding that we have a calling to care for all firefighters and emergency responders equally, and that we are all deserving of genuine support by our peers in a time of need, no matter the need.

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www.ilffps.org

VISIT OUR FACEBOOK

<https://www.facebook.com/ILFFPS>

Firefighters and Stress: Just Breathe

By: Jada Hudson, M.S., LCPC, CADC



More than anyone, firefighters know that in an emergency situation, their natural reaction is “fight or flight”. If the danger is surmountable, we may choose to stand our ground and fight. If we can outrun or avoid the danger, we will flee. However, there is another response that can occur when a danger seems so overwhelmingly hopeless that there is no chance of survival. We may freeze, like the deer in the headlights.

Even firefighters can have this response in life-threatening situations, and it is not always healthy in the long run. A 1989 study by van der Kolk and van der Hart showed that dissociation or “freezing” in wake of an event is a precursor to Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), along with phobias, panic attacks, obsessive-compulsive behaviors and various anxieties that may be traced to a “freeze” state that never had the chance to “let go” or “thaw out”.

The purpose of “freezing” is to give us a chance to disassociate from the trauma we are experiencing. However, when are asked to “freeze” or mimic the freeze response when we are physiologically ready to flee or fight, we cannot benefit from dissociating from the event.

Instead, our body’s heart rate races, our muscles tense, etc. in preparation for the fight or flight. If we can’t do either, our levels of cortisol, the “stress hormone” that regulates our body for the response, builds up within us. Without a release, this cortisol can wreak havoc on our minds and bodies.

Firefighters, or anyone in life or death stressful situations, should remember that the freeze response is never your friend. Movement is good for us to release cortisol, and also to take action for our survival. In situations where movement is not possible, there is another suitable substitute to lower our cortisol levels and focus our action: intentional breathing.

From managing pain during childbirth to handling cases of shocking news, intentional breathing has been found to be soothing and effective in stressful situations. If you add light movement to the breathing, you have a formula for stress relief that has been proven effective, even in scientific experiments.

For example, a recent study of nurses from the University of New Mexico Hospital with positive PTSD symptoms were asked to participate in 16 sessions of 60-minute mind body intervention (MBX) sessions led by a trained instructor over a 8-week period. The program consisted of stretching, balancing and breathing with a focus on mindfulness.

“Our body’s heart rate races, our muscles tense, etc. in preparation for the fight or flight. If we can’t do either, our levels of cortisol, the ‘stress hormone’ that regulates our body for the response, builds up within us. Without a release, this cortisol can wreak havoc on our minds and bodies.”

(Continued on page 17)

Continued: Firefighters and Stress: Just Breathe



The group was asked to attend to their breathing, concentrating on inhalation, retention and exhalation. At the end of the program, the MBX group showed significant reduction in PTSD symptoms, serum cortisol and “improved sleep, stress resilience, energy levels, better emotional regulation under stress, and resumption of pleasurable activities that they had previously discontinued”.

On a call, firefighters aren’t able to lower their cortisol with yoga, but back at the station or in preparation for a call, performing mindful breathing can be surprisingly helpful as well as physically and mentally healthy for a firefighter. Back at the station, performing breathing and stretching exercises like those outlined below can help firefighters prepare mentally and physiologically for the next time our “fight or flight” response is activated, but we can’t fight or flee.

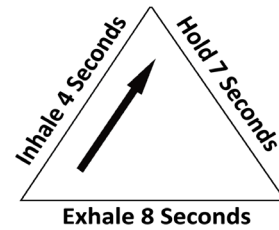
“...mindful breathing can be surprisingly helpful as well as physically and mentally healthy for a firefighter.”

Relieving Stress Through Physical Motion

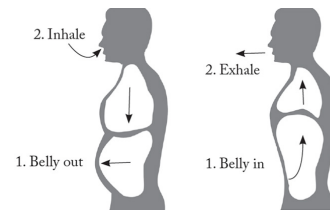
In an emergency situation, our bodies typically ramp up physically in preparation for the flight or fight response, dumping cortisol (the stress hormone) into our system. Our heart races, our muscles tense and energy surges through our body. If we are asked to sit still or “freeze” while we are in a stressed state, an unhealthy amount remains in our system, awaiting release so we can relax. How can we productively reduce our cortisol? Mindful deep breathing and simple stretches can do the trick. Here is a possible start:

Breathing

Try on the way to a call, when awaiting dispatch or any situation where you may feel anxious.



1. Close your mouth and inhale quietly through your nose to a mental count of four.
 2. Hold your breath for a count of seven.
 3. Exhale completely through your mouth to a count of eight.
- Repeat the cycle three more times for a total of four breaths.



Belly Breathing

1. Place your hand on your stomach.
2. Breathe in deeply, attempting to make your hand rise.
3. Hold for a count of seven and exhale, mindful of your hand falling with your exhalation.



Child's Pose

1. On your hands and knees, spread your knees wide apart while keeping your big toes touching.
2. Sit up straight and lengthen your spine up through the crown of your head.
3. On an exhalation, bow forward, draping your torso between your thighs while extending your arms in front of you, palms facing down.

Hold for a count of eight, then sit up and repeat.



Thread the Needle

1. On hands and knees, place your right arm underneath your left arm until your shoulder is resting on the ground. Hold for three breaths.
2. Come back to all fours and repeat, placing left arm underneath the right.

"Not Gone", A Poem

By: Mike Hoehn

Manchester Fire Rescue EMS,
Manchester Connecticut



A daughter,
a brother
A mother,
a father
Gone to others,
But not gone to me!

A call to the nurse's office,
A child is sick.
A patient so young,
so small
so innocent,
so sick.
Soft curly hair, smile is lost,
Soon gone to all,
except not gone to me!

A warm summer day,
out for a drive.
A crash out in front of me,
one will not survive!
As I approach,
her brother asks,
"Is he going to die?"
What can I say, I don't want to lie!
Oh, I wish it were me,
I would have survived.
Instead it was her.
Now gone to others.
but not gone to me!
Can someone please explain to me
why?

"Is daddy ok?" "Why can't he
breathe?"
With a whisper he says,
"Just let me be."
Tell them "I will miss them",
I just want to be free.
This is the way it was meant to be.
A man gone to others,
but not gone to me!

(Continued on page 19)

So This is 50

By: Tom Howard



So, this is 50. (Full disclosure: This is actually 51, but I needed time to settle into the whole "50" thing.) Over the past few years, my life has taken a few twists and turns, but in the end, I feel I have come out on top. (Another side note: Perhaps I shouldn't say, "In the end" since I am over 50 now, but you get the idea.) Having had a year to process has led me to a few realizations.

One of the biggest realizations I've had is that being in the fire service for more than 20 years has skewed my perception of "old." At 50-years-old, I get referred to as the "old guy" on occasion and all too often I hear someone say, "Hey, let the young guys get that."

I'm not sure when this shift happened, when I stopped being the "young" guy, but I do know in my mind, I still think I'm young and can still do everything I used to. That's generally true. I just regret it more the next day – and maybe even the day after that.

As I said though, I think the fire service has skewed my perception. Let's face it: At 50 in other fields, you are likely either beginning or into the prime of your career. Here, I am staring down the twilight of mine. And, while I could have followed the path to become a chief and extended my career, that was never my goal. I have always had a desire to be the best fireman I could be and ultimately, time will tell whether I was.

I recently had a conversation with someone outside the service that didn't get the idea of me being the old guy. He said there was no reason for me to even be thinking I wouldn't be doing this for years to come. I responded by simply suggesting he come down, load up with my gear and equipment and meet me on the eighth floor. Conversation over.

Mentally, being 50 has allowed me to admit to some of my aches and pains. It's only been in this last year that I have finally started to admit aloud when I'm tired after a busy night. I've even resorted to something I should have started years ago: taking naps.

So, what pushes me to still be the first guy grabbing equipment? Well, for starters, I still love what I do. I look forward to hearing the tones and knowing I'm going out on a run. That was always why I wanted this job. Simultaneously, I recognize my time here is almost up. Although there's truth in the expression, "Work smarter, not harder," I need to be honest with myself when I can no longer work this job at all.

"I recognize my time here is almost up. Although there's truth in the expression, 'Work smarter, not harder,' I need to be honest with myself when I can no longer work this job at all."

(Continued on page 19)

Continued: "Not Gone"

A mother is silent,
too many troubles to bear.
She goes to the attic to end her de-
spair.

Now her silence is crystal and all too
clear.

Gone are her troubles,
but she has left a piece with me!
Gone to others; but not gone to me!

Gone are the many.
Fore the many,
But not for me!

These images of others hold strong
with me!
I know these should just want to be
free.

They meant no harm to others or me.
They did not know it was their time to
go.

Without a goodbye.
Soft touch or a kiss.
They have no choice but to no longer
exist!
Gone to others, but not gone to me!

Together we go.
my ghosts and me.
in a dance.
a search.
to find peace;
just to be free!
Gone to some, but not gone to me!

I know not why this path was chosen
for me;
But given strength and courage,
I will not let it get the best of me!

For every stormy ocean,
there is a clam sea;
that is the place I want to be!
Not gone or forgotten,
I will let it be,
to do my best and help others like me!
Gone to others; but not gone to me!

Continued: So This is 50

On the upside, I'm not *that* old. I know that sounds like denial but outside of the fire service, 50 can be when many just get started. I don't plan on leaving tomorrow, but I do need to look ahead a few years and think about where I'll be.

When I look back at other firemen whose age caught up with them, I can see now that they were lost without this job. It was all they knew. Most of us have lived on a 3-day cycle (one on, two off) for most of our careers and the idea of a 40-hour workweek can be daunting to say the least. With that in mind, I have also witnessed many turn in their retirement paperwork, only to retract it a couple days later. It can no doubt be overwhelming to have to admit you're "too old" for your job at a fairly young age.

"Most of us have lived on a 3-day cycle (one on, two off) for most of our careers and the idea of a 40-hour workweek can be daunting to say the least."

So, what's next? Some seek to begin a second career, while others might work part-time or even volunteer. And I know a few guys who've hit the road and traveled as well. It's a personal decision, and one that needs to be made between you and your significant other.

I'd also add that planning is not something to put off. A second career might require taking a few classes — and if you're interested in traveling, it would be smart to start with a few short trips.

Sometimes when I get a little anxious, I go back to the book of Jeremiah. God's people were in exile, in a land not their own, feeling lost and uncertain. In this time, the Lord sent a prophet that told the people, "For I know the plans I have for you, plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future." Not long after that word, His people were restored. I believe this promise is there for each of us today.

The future can be scary, especially when it is filled with unknowns. Take time, prepare and dream a little. Remember: Just as in Jeremiah's time, if we remain faithful, God will provide.

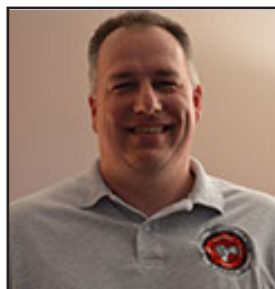
Read more from Tom Howard at <http://tomphoward.wordpress.com/>

"For I know the plans I have for you, plans to prosper you and not to harm you."
Jeremiah 29:11



Thankful for ILFFPS

By: Andy Perry



The day before Thanksgiving arrived seemingly earlier than ever this year, and the feelings of the holiday season dread were ushered in

alongside. I have felt this way for years, and someday hope that I'll enjoy them again. My to-do list was expanding, my phone was buzzing and beeping with incoming texts and emails, and a quick glance at the large calendar on my desk seemed to shout at me there was no slowing down anytime soon. I plopped down on my favorite spot on the couch and fired up my laptop.

Near the top of my emails was a peer request for the Illinois Firefighter Peer Support Team – a group that I have been involved with for two and a half years. For a little over a year now, I have shared the task of handling incoming requests through our website and toll free number. The firefighter mentality of helping

others kicked in inside of me, as I listened to the audio file left by a fellow firefighter reaching out for help. I could hear some hesitation in his voice, but I also detected some urgency. Apparently for him, the need for help outweighed the shame of making the call. And for that, I was thankful because I know so many people

go to their grave, often by their own hand, because of shame and guilt, and wrongful feelings of failure. I made a few notes and called his cell number

only to get his voicemail. I left a message, hoping he would call back.

On Thanksgiving morning, my alarm went off at 5:20. Time to go to work. That feeling of the holiday dread, coupled with the fact that I would spend the next twenty-four hours at the firehouse away from my family mixed together to create a muddled feeling. As I drove to work I wasn't sure if it was good or bad, so I decided on "meh." By 9:00am the housework was complete, the engine clean, and my engineer was whipping up a gut-buster breakfast. The smell pleasantly wafted into the office as I finalized the morning's paperwork.

The ringer on my cell phone startled me and I didn't recognize the number. Praying it wasn't the five hundredth attempt to get me to purchase an extended warranty on my car, I answered. On the other end of the line was the recognizable voice mixed with hesitation and urgency from the evening before. I was a few minutes late for

breakfast, but once again, I felt thankful. We had a good conversation; I gathered some information, and sent out a peer request to our two hundred peer supporters throughout Illinois. Because it was Thanksgiving morning, I didn't expect to hear back from anyone soon, so I delved into a delicious breakfast.

Two hours, a delicious meal, and an EMS call later, I noticed eleven responses to the peer request. Eleven! And on

"Two hours...and I noticed eleven responses to the peer request. Eleven! And on a holiday. The total reached sixteen by late in the afternoon..."

a holiday. The total reached sixteen by late in the afternoon and the hardest part of my job lay ahead – selecting the appropriate peer supporter by location, age, and best overall match. After over-thinking the process—like I do most things—I decided, but quickly realized that behind each of the sixteen doors was a prize. There were no duds, dead ends, or plastic eggs. Each was an absolute treasure – a completely unselfish gift to the fire service.

The process from this point will have played out by the time this is published, but I do not expect to have heard specific details. Our brother firefighter that called will have been given a safe place to vent. He received a non-judgmental ear to bend and perhaps a shoulder to lean on. He might have been given more phone numbers and/or resources. Likewise, we will never know to what lengths our colleague would have shouldered the unnecessary weight troubling him either, had he not made that courageous phone call. It might have subsided on its own in a few days or months. He might have carried the baggage the remainder of his career and become that grumpy miserable old SOB on the Department. He may even have been found swinging from a tree.

I know that as I write this, there are real struggles still out there going unchecked. The suicide rate for firefighters continues to outnumber line of duty deaths. **(Continued on page 21)**

Continued: Thankful for ILFFPS

But I know that the men and women on the Illinois Firefighter Peer Support Team are doing everything we can to curtail these sobering statistics. We have taken brave and uncharted steps in addressing issues that forever have been swept under the rug. In the unique seat that I have on this ride, I see firsthand the good that we do. I see a situation where sixteen people

“The suicide rate for firefighters continues to outnumber line of duty deaths. But I know that the men and women on the ILFFPS Team are doing everything we can to curtail these sobering statistics.”

step up and say, “I am able and willing to help,” when hours before, a firefighter thought nobody would understand. It is in giving that we receive and giving away what so freely has been given to us allows us to weather the storms.

Think back now to the day before Thanksgiving when I was dwelling a bit much in my own misery. That doesn’t make me a bad person, it just means that I’m human and I needn’t stay there too long. This journey aboard the peer support team has also reminded me that the good in people far outweighs the bad, and the outpouring of readily available help never ceases to amaze me. For this I am eternally thankful.

Andy Perry

Lead Coordinator
Illinois Firefighter Peer Support
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@andrewperry100 on Twitter

Wellness Recipe: Zucchini and Sweet Potato Frittata

(modified from *Paleoleap.com*)



8 eggs
2 Tbsp extra-virgin olive oil
1 large sweet potato, peeled and cubed
2 zucchini, sliced
1 red bell pepper, chopped
2 Tbsp fresh parsley
Salt and pepper to taste
Low-Fat Cheese (optional)

Heat an oven-safe pan over a medium-low heat. Add the oil and sweet potato slices and cook until soft, about 8 minutes. Add the zucchini and red bell pepper and cook for another 4 minutes. Meanwhile, whisk the eggs in a bowl, making sure to incorporate a lot of air in the mixture. Season the egg mixture with salt and pepper, and pour eggs over the cooking veggies. Cook on low heat until just set, about 10 minutes. Place the pan in the oven and broil until golden. Cut the finished frittata into wedges and serve with fresh parsley and optional cheese. (Makes 4 servings)

Wellness Recipe: Mexican Chicken Soup

(modified from *Nourishing Traditions* by Sally Fallon)

2 quarts chicken stock or bone broth
6 oz. tomato paste, preferably organic
4 cloves garlic, minced or mashed
2-4 Tbsp. fresh lemon or lime juice
1 Tbsp. extra-virgin olive oil
1 tsp. garlic salt
1 1-oz. packet taco seasoning (or make your own combination of cumin, paprika, cayenne, chili pepper, black pepper, garlic powder, and salt)
2 large chicken breasts, cooked and cubed
2 large zucchini, cubed
1/2 red bell pepper, chopped
1 medium sweet potato, cubed
Optional: avocado, whole wheat tortilla, cheese (to garnish)



In a large stock pot, combine chicken stock/broth, tomato paste, garlic, lemon/lime juice, olive oil, garlic salt, and taco seasoning. Bring to a boil. Add zucchini, red bell pepper, and sweet potato and let simmer until veggies become soft. Add chicken. Let simmer until all ingredients are soft. Serve in 1-cup portions and garnish with avocado, whole wheat tortilla, and/or low-fat cheese as desired. (Makes 6-8 servings)

Making Breakthroughs – In Fighting Fires and In Your Personal Life

By: Jada Hudson, M.S., LCPC, CADC



I recently had the opportunity to shadow Aurora Fire Department's Extrication Training, in which Private Stawikowski, Captain Garner, Private Koerbrel, and Lieutenant Glen Hasenheyer prepared and observed recruits as they tackled three staged obstacles with three specific tools. At the first station, recruits used an ax to cut through a roof. At the second station,

recruits used a 26-pound saw with various blades to cut through rebar. At the third station, recruits worked with a hammer and wedge to open a 1000-pound metal door. Each station required precise skill and tireless physical exertion.

First, I watched closely at the team working to saw through rebar. Captain Garner instructed them, "Don't bounce the saw. Hold it steady to the rebar. Keep your elbows in." The consistent, applied pressure with the right tool – a saw made for rebar, as opposed to one made for wood – would create a breakthrough and make an entry point for them to begin their rescue. Meanwhile, they had to be aware of smoke, so it did not choke up their saw.



Next, my eyes narrowed in on the group at the metal door. The two men working to open the door labored, for what seemed like forever, to get the door to budge only inches. Covered in sweat, with adrenaline and cortisol pulsing through their bodies, they counted together as one placed the wedge

between the door and the door frame and the other pounded it with his hammer. It took perfect timing and teamwork. They were told, "Do as little as you need to get the job done. Conserve your energy." Ultimately, the door budged, and they were able to enter. Completely exhausted, the recruits took a break. But, if this had been a real fire, this would only have been the beginning of their work. The real rescue work would require them to forget their exhaustion and move forward complete intensity of effort.

During these exercises, their primary goal was to protect one another. Their secondary goal was to locate and secure civilians. They multi-tasked, listening to commands from the chief, hearing their radios go off, looking for people, and putting out fires. Hasenheyer exhorted them to "Learn how to talk and work at the same time." Through the chaos, their attention and care for one another impressed me. Truly, this was the beginning of a brotherhood.

"When it comes to addiction, the rebar saw tactics apply perfectly: Hold steady."

Making Personal Breakthroughs Using Firefighting Tactics

As I watched these firefighters making breakthroughs while fighting fires, I could not help but notice that their tactics can be applied to breaking through personal struggles. For example, when it comes to addiction, the rebar saw tactics apply perfectly: Hold steady. Once you gain some momentum, don't let up. So often, people bounce in and out of addictions because they think their progress permits them to have a little bit of freedom. The alcoholic says, "I haven't had a beer in three weeks, so I can have this one right now." No! Holding the saw to the rebar and not bouncing it was the only way to cut through it. Even so, holding clean and not tinkering with the addictive substance is the only way

to become completely free and clean. Breakthrough.

"If you are not okay, you can't help your family. If you're exhausted or wrestling with a trauma, your first priority needs to be self-care."

The level of protection these firefighters paid toward one another has something to say to those struggling with exhaustion or difficult memories. It surprised me that the recruits' primary objective was to keep

their firefighters safe. But, this should be our approach when it comes to breaking through exhaustion or even a traumatic memory. If you are not okay, you can't help your family. If you're exhausted or wrestling with a trauma, your first priority needs to be self-care. Just as these recruits had to keep their personal team safe and strong, so you need to keep yourself strong by getting the rest and help you need first. Then, you'll be strong to help others. Breakthrough.

Third, all recruits were told to step back and do a personal 360. This applies to individuals working for breakthroughs in any area of life! If there is an obstacle you are struggling to overcome, look for another entry point. If you are struggling to at home, and communication seems to be strained, try a gentler approach.

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Continued: Making Breakthroughs - In Fighting Fires and In Your Personal Life

Maybe open up about your personal situation and stresses, and maybe thank your spouse for her support as you take on your challenging career. Maybe find something your spouse enjoys, and decide you like it, too. Bond over that! What are other ways you could approach a stuck situation? You may find you have a wooden door waiting, when you thought you had to cut through rebar. Breakthrough.

“What are some other ways you could approach a stuck situation? You may find you have a wooden door waiting, when you thought you had to cut through rebar.”

What the Recruits Walked Away With

In their debrief, Captain Garner exhorted recruits to “Use what information you know to make plans A, B, and C on the way to the call.” He also encouraged them to “Take a step back and do a personal 360 to assess the whole situation.”

Hasenheyer reminded them that, as they used the ax to penetrate a hole in the roof, their real-life goal was “Get a hole in the roof.” He challenged, “Learn from a book, and forget all that.” And, recruits were encouraged to “Do a cost versus benefit analysis.” What were the risks involved in each task and was the benefit worthwhile? For example, if it were a commercial fire, would it be worth risking your life to save an empty building?

In addition to keeping an eye on all potential options and hazards during the call, recruits discussed the need to prepare themselves before the call. Checking out supplies every day, knowing where each supply is, and knowing that each tool is working could save someone’s life. Also, knowing the strengths and limitations of each firefighter on the team increases communication. Older firefighters may experience physical aches, pains, or injuries and be more protective of their bodies. Meanwhile, younger firefighters thrive on the adrenaline of going on a call, and may have more eagerness to tackle physically exhausting jobs. Older firefighters have experience and wisdom from countless similar situations they have already faced. Younger firefighters may have new perspectives to bring to the group. Knowing each individual increases efficiency and communication.

“You’ll find you always feel most exhausted right before your barrier gives way.”

When it comes to breaking through roofs, walls, doors, or personal struggles, keep fighting, get a team, and take care of yourself. You’ll find you always feel most exhausted right before your barrier gives way.



The Importance of Resilience Training

By: Kirk Rangel, Sioux Falls



What can be done to reduce and prevent the problems of behavioral health in the fire service?

Changing the approach. Is the fire

service prepared to change the approach – and eventually the firefighter culture – regarding behavioral health, in order to help reduce and prevent the problems of PTSD, depression, and suicide? Albert Einstein said himself, “It’s insanity to continue to do the same thing over and over and expect different results.”

Until recent years, there has been a lack of research regarding the vulnerabilities and protective factors regarding firefighter’s behavioral health. However, particularly since the terror attacks of 9/11, the fire service has begun to recognize that there is a problem. Trauma is a fact of life and firefighters will experience trauma more than the general public, which puts firefighters at a higher risk for behavioral health problems. The psychological toll of emergency response gets

“Trauma is a fact of life and firefighters will experience trauma more than the general public, which puts firefighters at a higher risk of behavioral health problems.”

less attention than the physical toll, and its effects have not been as well documented. Most people are familiar with the term “mental health,” but professionals dealing with the psychological concerns affecting emergency responders refer to them as “behavioral health” issues. Behavioral health

addresses not only the mental and emotional aspects of wellness, but also substance use and other physical manifestations of mental and emotional states. (K. Deppa, Aug. 2015)

What can the fire service do differently to help prevent the problems of behavioral health?

The fire service should consider approaching the problem with the same philosophy of their mission statement. The mission of Sioux Falls Fire Rescue (SFFR) is to protect the citizens and visitors of Sioux Falls and their property from fires and other emergencies through education, prevention, and emergency management. Can the fire service improve its potential and performance as a whole by protecting its own through behavioral health education, prevention, and stress management?

Resilience Training is an alternative approach to the problems of behavioral health. What is Resilience Training and can it reduce PTSD and suicide in the fire service? Resilience Training is preventative and proactive providing individuals with skills needed to be more resilient in the face of high-stress situations, potentially traumatic events, and adversity. (R. Cornum, M. Matthews, M. Seligman, 2011) According to the author of *True Resilience*,

“Resilience Training is preventative and proactive providing individuals with skills needed to be more resilient in the face of high-stress situations, potentially traumatic events, and adversity.”

taught resilience for 25 years, “Resilience has been shown to reverse anxiety, depression, helplessness, and fear along with the physiological effects that are associated with those negative emotions.”

“Resilience has been shown to reverse anxiety, depression, helplessness, and fear along with the physiological effects that are associated with those negative emotions.”

In February, 2016, I interviewed Dr. Suzy Bird Gulliver, a licensed clinical psychologist and clinical researcher. Dr. Gulliver serves as Director and Chief of the Warriors Research Institute and as a Professor at the Texas A&M Health Science Center. She is the correspondence and contributor of the study:

“Social Support, Stress, and Suicidal Ideation in Professional Firefighters,” where she states: “Unfortunately, there is no specific data on the benefits of behavioral health for firefighters, or the benefits of a resilience program. However, I believe we can say with confidence that behavioral health programming including resilience training is decreasing the number of early retirements, decreasing the number of people who are likely to retire early due to a mental health problem, increasing job satisfaction, you can say those sorts of things with confidence.”

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Dr. Gail Wagnild who has studied and

Continued: The Importance of Resilience Training

The United States Armed Forces are also emphasizing a behavioral health program through Resilience Training. The Master Resilience Trainer (MRT) program is an element of the The Comprehensive Soldier Fitness and Family program (CSF2) that helps soldiers and their families overall well-being. The MRT program relies on the “train-the-trainer” model, which educates the company officers to teach the soldiers techniques to manage stress and maintain healthy relationships. The most recent evaluation of the program showed evidence that soldiers in units with MRT trainers reported greater increases in resilience and psychological health than soldiers who did not receive MRT’s in their units. (Harms, Peter D.; Herian, Mitchell, Mitchel; Krasikova, Dina V.; Vanhove, Adam J).

The MRT program has also been found to reduce behavioral problems

and symptoms of anxiety. The results showed a positive relationship between Resilience Training and a reduction in diagnoses for behavioral health problems. Second, the analyses provided evidence that resilience training reduces substance abuse diagnoses (drug and alcohol). The evaluation showed evidence that Resilience Training can provide soldiers with stress management skills in order to prevent behavioral health problems (Harms, Peter D.; Herian, Mitchell, Mitchel; Krasikova, Dina V.; Vanhove, Adam J.; and Lester). In addition, first responders are emphasizing resilience through a program developed in 2013 by the Department of Defense in Colorado, called “First Response Resiliency.” This is a two-day training that is an evidence-based program that improves and sustains first responder behavioral health (Jonathan Gunderson; Mike Grill, MS, NREMT-P; Philip Callahan, PhD & Michael Marks, PhD).

“The program’s goal was to apply resiliency practices that effectively manage stress and foster personal and professional development through intentionally practicing a resiliency skill set and establishing a social framework to foster resiliency. Specific focus was on research based resiliency methods, assessment, and the physical, psychological, and social systems of resiliency.” (Page 58, Responder Resiliency cited as Marks, 2013). The 25 participants had direct involvement with the shooting incident that occurred at a movie theater in Aurora, Colorado, on July 20, 2012. Fifteen of the participants had pre- and post-resilience evaluations as well as a six-week follow-up. Participants showed significant improvements in their resilience skills from pretest to their six-week

follow up.

What Resilience Training Can Offer

Resilience Training can offer the promise of prevention for stress-related mental illnesses. This includes helping people to recover from stress before stress turns into psychological disorders. Resilience training can be very inexpensive and effective, especially when weighed against the costs of waiting passively for serious psychological damage to occur. Implementing change in an organization is a challenge and takes time. Chehalis Washington Fire Chief Ken Cardinale explains how an organization should begin to implement change: “Your fire department has to be ‘all in’ or it will never work. The guys have to know that management cares about them and that they are willing to do what is necessary to help the individual mentally, just as much as physically.”

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“The ‘train-the-trainer’ model... educates company officers to teach the soldiers techniques to manage stress...”

“Resilience Training can offer the promise of prevention...This includes helping people to recover from stress before stress turns into psychological disorders.”

Check Yourself Before You Wreck Yourself

By: Tom Howard, Chaplain



There I was, driving home after a shift, when I realized I was feeling a little weird. It's hard to describe, but I've felt this way many times before, and if you've worked in the fire service or EMS, you probably have as well. I'll start with what stirred up these emotions.

A Superhuman Rush

During my shift, I'd been part of a crew that prevented a suicide. With everything moving so fast, in a blur of quick decisions and actions, I could feel the adrenaline rushing through me even after it was over. Although this ended positively, that is not always the case.

After a call this intense, I feel somewhat separated from "real" life — superhuman even. I'll look around, see people doing things and think, "If they only knew." As I was driving home the other day, I saw a man raking his leaves and contemplated how simple life must be for him, without knowing him at all — a common thought pattern that everything else is secondary compared to what I've endured.

Tragic loss can bring about similar feelings of detachment and, unfortunately, losses occur more often than happy endings. (While writing this, we had a young man commit suicide.) Loss never becomes normal, but it can produce the same sense of removal (especially from everyday life) as a successful call.

A couple hours after the attempted suicide, we were called to help a young woman stuck on her floor, during which time she became difficult and demanding. She instructed us to fill her diabetic cat's water bowl before leaving, while I was sure she'd be back home in the morning before I was. In moments like these, it takes everything I have not to lose my patience. "You have to be kidding me," I'll think. "Do you have any idea what just happened?"

Bringing Work Back Home

I'm sure you'll agree that this is also a feeling you can bring home. You walk in and your attitude is different, having experienced something most know nothing about.

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Cancer Support Group for First Responders

Waterford Place Cancer Resource Center has graciously invited first responders to gather for a First-Responder-Only Cancer Support Group!



Jada Hudson, our Clinical Consultant, will be facilitating the cancer support group. This group will provide police officers and firefighters friendship, support, and opportunities to talk openly about their unique battles with cancer.

Who: Groups are open to all first responders who are battling cancer or who have recently battled cancer. We are also forming groups of family members of first responder cancer patients.

When: Times and dates for groups will be based on demand. Contact Jada Hudson for more information (630) 815-3735.

Where: Groups will take place at Waterford Cancer Resource Center.

1310 Waterford Drive, Aurora, IL 60504, waterfordcrc.com

**Additional groups will be formed throughout the Chicago area based on demand.*

How much? It's free! Waterford Place Cancer Resource Center is where services and support, free of charge, are available to anyone impacted by a cancer diagnosis.

How do I sign up? For more information and to reserve your spot on the interest list, contact Jada Hudson, M.S., LCPC, CADC at (630) 815-3735.

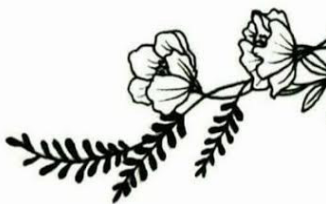
I Was Busy: a Poem

I lied and said I was busy.
I was busy;
but not in a way most people understand.

I was busy taking deeper breaths.
I was busy silencing irrational thoughts.
I was busy calming a racing heart.
I was busy telling myself I am okay.

Sometimes, this is my busy –
and I will not apologize for it.

b.oakman | Anxiety Doesn't Knock First



Kendall's Quote



You have to hurt, in
order to know, fall in
order to grow, lose in
order to gain. Because
most of life's lessons
are learned in pain.

Continued: Check Yourself Before You Wreck Yourself

There's a lot rolling around in your head, but especially after a traumatic call, you may not want to speak openly. I have also found over time that several of the most serious calls I've packed away will spill out into my thoughts as I try to process yet another event.

The idea that you can hold onto it all is a setup for failure. Remember, despite doing something amazing or being where you needed to be with the gifts God gave you, none of us are superhuman.

After these episodes, I tend to crave the rush. I have a strong desire to take out my bike and climb hills or dodge some trees.

Sometimes I'll even

drive aggressively on the way home, because like a drug, the surge of adrenaline leaves you wanting more. To remain grounded, take time and talk to someone. It could be your significant other or a good friend, but if it is someone outside the fire service, be aware of secondary trauma — caused when the very description affects the hearer. That said, when we don't take time to refocus and understand our emotions, it can lead to issues at home.

Among these is a lack of empathy, such as putting off fixing a broken toilet because — compared to a life or death call — it's "just a toilet." Remember, that toilet is important to your loved ones, and while it doesn't rise to the level of what you face on the job, you should acknowledge that you recognize their concerns. Another way this can play out is anger. Your family doesn't know what's in your head, and maybe you're not ready to share, but in that same broken toilet scenario, you don't want to raise the

tension even more with an overreaction.

Stay in Control

For me, avoiding these situations begins with reminding myself I'm only human. We encounter many crazy things as first responders, but we're merely players within the bigger picture. I'll repeat: We're players within the bigger picture — not the picture itself. And in terms of timing, which some might call luck or karma, I believe the circumstances I find myself in are part of God's design.

"Despite doing something amazing or being where you needed to be with the gifts God gave you, none of us are superhuman."

In the book of Romans, Paul instructs us not to think of ourselves more highly than we ought, but rather with sober judgment. This comes

just after he warns

against conforming to the patterns of the world, and calls for us to be transformed through the renewing of our minds. This renewal is critical for us to remember as we transition from the craziness of work to the normalcy of life.

I'm not suggesting walking away from your job, but we must choose what will determine our actions. I refuse to allow my job to control my life. Rather, through humility and God's abundant grace, I will look with sober judgment at the events of my life and follow Paul's next set of instructions: to live with love as an action.

Devotional: Romans 12:9–12

"Love must be sincere. Hate what is evil; cling to what is good. Be devoted to one another in love. Honor one another above yourselves. Never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervor, serving the Lord. Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer."

<http://tomphoward.wordpress.com/>

National Guard: Our Partners in Service

By: Jada Hudson



The Illinois National Guard's Ropes Team (CERFP Team) is highly trained and respected nationally. Their mission is to "leverage their defense capabilities to support civil authorities by providing a disciplined, trained, and equipped organization that supplements local, state, and federal efforts to conduct consequence management of the potentially catastrophic effects of a natural or man-made event and to provide special technical support to augment specific needs of the Incident Commander."

As with the fire service, the Illinois National Guard's CERFP is equipped to respond to disasters and trauma. Their specific focus is on supporting local authorities with fatality search and recovery from collapsed structures, including chemical decontamination. Their Search & Extrication (S&E) Element is set up to "conduct light search and rescue reconnaissance; high angle ropes and confined space rescue; patient packaging; breaching, breaking, lifting, and hauling; shoring and cribbing; and hazardous material operations during an event response."

This team recently performed an extrication training, and I had the privilege of observing. There are only 17 states with an Urban Search and Rescue Team and Illinois' is one of the best. This type of training prepares guardsmen for national disasters such as floods and large scale fires such as factory explosions. Because of the potentially traumatic work they do, we are pleased to be building a friendship with them! Here are some pictures of their recent Extrication Training:

