



The Journey

For Families of Fallen Firefighters

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We give those we love nicknames, because love requires a word that belongs to us alone. ~ Fredrik Backman

Taco. Cowboy. Sauce. Juju. Skillet. Tyke. Buzz. Skippy. The Doze. Pip. Dawg. Mook. Ace.

What do these have in common? They are all nicknames of firefighters honored at the National Memorial. Undoubtedly, there is a great story behind each one.

Nicknames are a way to enshrine some humorous story or to gently poke fun at a character trait or habit that stands out in a person. Although not everyone loves the nickname they are given, it's generally a sign of acceptance and respect within the group, an acknowledgment of a person's uniqueness.

The bios that families submit for firefighters honored at the National Memorial often include stories of how a nickname was earned. These stories tell us a little more about the person—their character and temperament and what stood out to those who loved them, served with them, and knew them best. In this issue, Fire Hero Families share the names their firefighters were “also known as” and the stories behind the nicknames.

Doug Sheehy

Father of Luke Sheehy (2013-CA), AKA “Pale Rider”

My firefighter's name was Luke Douglas Foster Sheehy. He was also known as Pale Rider. It's an amusing and interesting story of how he acquired that nickname.

In the wildland firefighting community, it is a proud tradition to have nicknames, as it is in the military or sports teams. Luke was working at the California Smokejumper Base in Redding, California, and there he dubbed himself “The Westwood Hammer.” Around the base he was also known as “The Show,” because of his commitment to physical training or PT. This was a daily practice of weightlifting, running, calisthenics, and much hiking while carrying a heavy load. He had a smoke jumper named Doug Powell who frequently partnered with him to do workouts. One day, after finishing in the weight room, Doug



Luke Sheehy

and Luke returned to the locker room. Another bro shouted, “Hey, Hammer, how was the workout?” Upon hearing this, Powell exclaimed, “This ain't The Westwood Hammer; this here is Pale Rider. I mean, look at him!”

I might describe Luke as a big, handsome, extremely fair-skinned young man. You know the type. A guaranteed sunburn after several minutes of sun exposure. All the bros then gathered closely around Luke. One smokejumper queried, “OK, Sheehy. What's it gonna

be, Westwood Hammer or Pale Rider?” Luke, filled with indignation, confidence, and pride, immediately responded, “I'm definitely The Hammer.” The chuckles began, and the bros, good naturedly, in unison chided, “That settles it. From now on, you're Pale Rider.”

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Doug Sheehy *continued from page 1*

Luke would embrace that new handle with much honor and great pride. After he was killed in action, the smokejumpers went on to make t-shirts, ball caps, and

bandanas marked with his nickname. And to this very day, the name is posted above his old locker there at the California Smokejumper Base.

Long Live Pale Rider.

Julia Edwards
Mother of Michael James Edwards (2018-WV), AKA "Fireman Ed"

My firefighter's name was Michael James Edwards, but he was also known as Fireman Ed. He joined the fire department at the age of sixteen as a junior firefighter. His mentor was Fire Chief Charlie Veazey, and Michael valued all that he taught him.

When he first joined, he would run up the back street to the station, getting there before most of those who had vehicles. Then he started riding his bicycle to the station, again being one of the first to get there. When he got a driver's license, he would put his red light on his vehicle and take off for the station, day or night. The neighbor who lived at the top of the hill from us said she had never seen someone move so fast.

Michael left and joined the Air National Guard, and on his return he was right back at it. Then he moved to North Carolina and eventually married. There was a fire station down the street from where he lived. He would stand on his



Michael James Edwards

steps and watch with a look of longing as the fire trucks left the station. We asked why he would never join, and he said it was not the same as being a part of the station where we lived.

Eventually he moved home and went right back to being a volunteer firefighter. At the station, he was given his nickname, because the other members said that when he walked into the station, he put on a different hat. He was serious about the safety of others. The younger firefighters looked

up to him, because they knew how seriously he took his role as assistant fire chief and their safety and training.

After Michael lost his life, one of the volunteer firefighters said he only wanted to complete his training because he wanted Michael to be proud of him. He absolutely loved being a volunteer firefighter and loved helping others. It made a difference in his life, and he chose to make a difference for others as well.

Pamela Reed
Wife of Brian Reed (2001-FL), AKA "Mr. Gadget" or "MacGyver"

My firefighter's name is Brian, but around the station he was known as Mr. Gadget or MacGyver, because they said he was the ultimate repairman. If he was called about a problem, no matter what it was or what time it was, instead of telling you how to fix it, he would stop what he was doing to come over and fix it himself. He



Brian Reed

wore this belt that they called his Batman belt. It had a phone, lots of keys, a pager, and a utility knife. You name it, it was on that belt. At night, you would know he was coming, because he clanked, buzzed, and even glowed.

Although it has been almost 24 years since we lost him, he is still dearly missed.



Introducing Joanne Rund, Director of Fire Hero Family Programs

Joanne Rund took over as the NFFF Director of Family Programs in the summer of 2024, after the retirement of Bev Donlon. For those who haven't had the pleasure of meeting Joanne, we'd like to take a minute to introduce her to you.

After working as a hair stylist, Joanne entered the fire service as a volunteer in Sykesville, Maryland, and spent most of her fire service career in Howard County, Maryland. She later served as the first female fire chief in Baltimore County, Maryland, before retiring earlier this year after more than 38 years in the fire service.

Since 2009, Joanne has been a strong advocate with the National Fallen Firefighters Foundation, holding roles such as Maryland state coordinator, Region III advocate coordinator, and executive secretary of the NFFF Board of Directors. She has a strong background in firefighter health and safety and has held fire service leadership positions at the state and national level.

Joanne holds a bachelor's degree in public safety administration, a Certificate in Public Safety Executive Leadership and graduated from the IAFC's Fire Service Executive Development Institute (FESDI). She lives in Carroll County, Maryland, with her husband, Michael. They have two wonderful children and ten beautiful grandchildren.



Joanne with the NFFF Family Programs team

From Joanne:

I feel deeply honored and blessed to have been chosen to serve as Family Programs Director. Working alongside such a compassionate, talented, and dedicated team is a privilege, and I am inspired by their commitment to supporting the families and meeting their needs. This role resonates with me, as my entire career has been dedicated to helping others and taking care of my people. It is a true honor to support

the families of fallen firefighters, and I look forward to connecting with each of you, learning about your firefighter, and helping to keep their memory alive.

I have a nickname story of my own from early in my career. When I had only been on the job for about six months, I was coming back from my random drug test and ran across a construction site over a hill. I saw sparks in the air flying and what I thought was a smoke plume. I called it in, and my officer and crew responded.

It turned out to be a dirt plume. My officer got out, walked over to me, and said, "You're not going to live this one down. They are going to call you 'Dusty' from now on. By the way, you are covered in dirt from head to toe. Go back in service, and we can talk once you have gotten cleaned up."

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Want to read more?

You can find issues of *The Journey* at www.firehero.org/news/newsletters going all the way back to 2003.

Support and Connection for Fire Hero Families

Join our private Facebook group for Fire Hero Families.

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


Find resources that support adults and children who are grieving.

<https://www.firehero.org/resources/family-resources>

Join one of our virtual support groups hosted via Zoom. These groups are provided for family members of firefighters honored or approved to be honored at the National Fallen Firefighters Memorial in Emmitsburg, Maryland.

Fire Hero Teens Support Group


open to children, stepchildren, and siblings of fallen firefighters, ages 13-17, facilitated by a psychologist who specializes in providing trauma-focused support

 **1st and 3rd Tuesday of the month, 7-8 PM (Eastern Time)**

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

Facilitated Support Group


open to adult Fire Hero Family members, for those who are struggling with grief or do not have a strong support system; facilitated by a psychologist who specializes in providing trauma-focused support

 **Weekly, Tuesday, 8-9 PM (Eastern Time)**

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

Fire Hero Family Peer Support Group


open to adult Fire Hero Family members; meet in small groups to share experiences, encouragement, and ideas; hosted by NFFF staff

 **Weekly, Wednesday, 8-9:15 PM (Eastern Time)**

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

Men Forging Ahead

open to adult men from the Fire Hero Family community; informal conversation and connection

 **Monthly, 4th Saturday, 3-4:30 PM (Eastern Time)**

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

Monthly Remembrance Group

open to adult Fire Hero Family members; during the anniversary month of your firefighter's death, join others who are also remembering their firefighters; facilitated by a behavioral health specialist

 **Monthly, 2nd Sunday, 3-4 PM (Eastern Time)**

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

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



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

Toll-free: 1-888-744-6513

Enacted in 1976, the Public Safety Officers' Benefits (PSOB) Programs are a unique partnership effort of the PSOB Office, Bureau of Justice Assistance (BJA), U.S. Department of Justice and local, state, and federal public safety agencies and national organizations, such as the National Fallen Firefighters Foundation, to provide death, disability, and education benefits to those eligible for the Programs.

Write About Your Journey



When we honor firefighters for their service, we honor the best part of them, the brave first responders who helped protect their communities and fellow citizens in their hour of greatest need. We call them heroes. We also recognize that each fire hero was a complex and flawed human being just like everyone else. Not every action they took was heroic, not every relationship was smooth, and not every memory is a good one. What are the complications of calling people heroes? How do you

balance the public image of your firefighter as a hero with the very real and human person you loved?

To share your story, please send it, along with a high-resolution photo, by January 15, 2025, to jwoodall@firehero.org.

If you don't use email, you can submit your written piece and a photo to:

National Fallen Firefighters Foundation
Attn: Jenny Woodall
P.O. Drawer 498
Emmitsburg, MD 21727

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