

We thank this anonymous firefighter for his service & vulnerability in sharing his story. Thank you!

I don't know many people that had their childhood dreams come true, but I am one of them.

When I was 4 years old, my dad came in from shoveling snow. He fell to the floor. I didn't know what to do but I remember him telling me to go to the neighbor's house so I did. Mrs. S ran to our house and found my dad on the floor. She called for the ambulance. I don't know how long it took, but in a matter of moments, there was police, fire, and ambulance at our house. The procession of vehicles was led by a plow, due to the amount of snow.

From that moment on, I wanted to be a fireman. It was so cool to see all those people in our house by making one phone call. Some of the firemen were guys that went to school with my sister, so we had a connection with the department. Every July 4th we would be at the curb as the fire equipment drove past. The chief always made it a point to call my name as he waved to me. I felt so special.

My dad's heart was not good. He could not do much with me like play ball because of his health. We fished a lot, but no football, baseball, basketball. I tried to be a good kid because of his health.

Fast forward 5 years and my mom got cancer. Now I wanted to be a good boy x2. I didn't sass back, did what I was told, etc. She beat the evil cancer.

I graduated high school at the age of 17 in June '73. I got a job in a local department store. Enlisted in the Navy and thought I was going to see the world. Low and behold my dad another heart attack. Being the only son at home, I took on the job of home maintenance and upkeep.

The Navy recruiter came to the house to pick me up. Being 17, I did not have to be held to the contract I signed. My mom told the guy why I had to stay home with them. He was not happy but understood.

2 months later I wake up to a thud. I run to the room next to my bedroom door. I yell out for my mom who is inside the bathroom. No answer. I push the door open, and the bathroom floor is swimming in blood. My dad dashes into the bathroom as I go to call the FD. I then run across the street to have a neighbor stay with my dad while I go to the hospital. My mom died. I began drinking THAT VERY NIGHT.

I pursued the fire dept job with earnest. I began testing for departments. In 1975 I was appointed as a paid-on call in my town. I loved it. The training, the structure, the fun!

My first working fire was in October of 1975. Halloween. 5 kids were killed. I shook it off and told myself to never think about that incident again. Impossible to do.
I drank more.

In 1978 got a job for the city Fire Department and became a paramedic. In the following years I had seen the good and bad of society. The things people would do to other people disgusted me. In the meantime, I am drinking more and more.

We had a few babies die, which I took ownership of and called them MY babies.

A woman and her 2 kids were visiting the kids grampa for Christmas. She showers, blow dries her hair and puts the blower on the edge of the tub. She draws a bath for the kids. After they are finished, the boy gets out of the tub, puts his hand on the blow dryer and gets electrocuted. He is killed outright and his sister had burns on her feet. We get there to find the BLS unit doing CPR on the boy right outside the elevator. As I am securing his airway, I am hearing the story of what happened. After I intubate the boy, I want to kill the mother for being so stupid.

There were many other kids that died for no reason. I kept stuffing the emotions and drowning them with liquor.

In 1985 we had a psych nurse come to our station and interviewed us 1 at a time. When it was my turn, I had no idea what she wanted from me. Until she told me to tell her 2 of the calls I remember like yesterday. I rattled off 4 of

them in one breath. Then she says something I did not think a paramedic could have. PTSD!

So of course, I shrug it off and continue doing what I do best. Drink.

Of course, we always had the kitchen table therapy, but none of us ever thought about PTSD.

3 years later I get promoted to Engineer. FINALLY got out of the paramedic program. By this time I am drinking like I was on a mission.

Drinking had taken over my life. Home life was in the toilet, my kids didn't want to be around me. Where drinking hadn't gotten in the way of work, soon work got in the way of drinking. Our work schedule was equivalent to working 10 days a month. The other 20 days were for drinking.

Then, in 1997 we had a fatal fire when the entire family of 5 were killed. They were completely cremated. I never saw raw bone laying in the rubble of a house. Oh, by the way, did I mention it was on HALLOWEEN. From that date on, I never worked another Halloween. I would take a vacation day or a trade, to not work that day.

My drinking was totally out of control. I end up in treatment in 1993. After treatment, I begin living life with a completely different outlook. Things are going well in every aspect of my (our) life.

In 2013 I wake up from a nightmare. Wondering to myself. "Where the hell did that come from"? From that night on, I had nightmares every night. I wake up, the bed is soaked from sweat. My heart is pounding. Now I am afraid to go to sleep because the dreams come every night. I would wake up from a dream. Go to the can. Then I am afraid to go to sleep because the nightmare picks up right where it left off. The chest tightness, the sweat, the fear of sleeping, the NEED for sleep. Every night.

One day I am in a panic going through the house. My wife asks me what is going on and I tell her I am looking for my pistol and I can't find it. I am in a panic looking for it. She convinces me that I need help and I agree to go to the hospital. I am evaluated and then placed in a huge fishbowl room. All glass. No walls, only glass. 2 very large guys are at the door just in case I have the notion of fleeing.

This guy Craig comes in and evaluates me again. He tells me there is a psychologist who specializes in PTSD. I was not allowed to leave until I made my first appt with him.

My first few appointments with Josh all I did was cry. I had so much pain from all the years of stuffing the "feelings" and drinking and drugging to forget. He told me that my PTSD began when I was 4 and my dad's first heart attack. Then my mom's death. I could not forget. I am still having these nightmares. Seeing Josh weekly. When I first started seeing him, I was going twice a week. All the while still having nightmares. I was put on an antidepressant. It made me more suicidal. By this time my son in law took my firearms and had them in his gun safe.

My depression was getting worse, and I end up in treatment again.

I have not had a drink in over 25 years and that depression was worse than anything I could imagine. I was put on a completely different regimen of meds and haven't felt this good since I don't remember.

I still see my psychologist, I take my meds and I share my experience whenever I am asked.