



# The Forum

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July/August/September 2003

## September Marks Firefighter Remembrance

By Aaron Espy

For people like me, September is a bittersweet time of year. While kids reacquaint themselves with homework and football teams glare at each other across the gridiron, professional firefighters from around the North American continent gather in Colorado to honor fallen comrades.

We congregate in Colorado Springs, on a grass-carpeted oasis aptly named Memorial Park. There, beneath the shadow of the majestic Rocky Mountains, we pay tribute to our members who have paid the ultimate price while defending their communities.

At the center of the park stands the “wall of honor,” a Vietnam memorial-style black granite wall nearly 100 feet in length. Etched on these black stone slates are the names of every professional firefighter who has given his life in the line of duty since 1976. Between the wall and the Rocky Mountains stand two bronze sculptures. One is an 18-foot-tall image of a firefighter descending a ladder while cradling a baby in his arms. The other is a firefighter grieving over his lost comrade. Together they stand like sentinels, keeping watch over the stone-chiseled names while flags of the United States, Canada and Colorado dance proudly overhead on the front range breeze.

Every September we gather to remember fallen firefighters. We gather to support their families, to assure them they are not alone. We gather to remind ourselves that we are part of a larger family—a fire-fighting family. (You do not risk your life with others who share your dedication without developing that bond.) And finally, we gather to remind our communities and our country that protection of life and property, on occasion, exacts a terrible price. Once a year we cry, we laugh, we honor, we remember. And those of us who have survived another year’s worth of alarms pray our name will not be chiseled in the granite next year.

My first visit to the Colorado Springs memorial in 1995 inspired this poem. Now, when I return each year, memorial organizers ask me to recite it. Maybe because it is a prayer of hope every firefighter breathes as he runs his finger across those names etched in the smooth, black stone.

*. . . Just maybe, this will be the year we fly no flags half-mast.  
No shrouded badges, funeral prayers,  
Memorial flowers or streaming tears;*

*Just maybe once, since long before we ever started counting,  
no fireman would have to die,  
no gift of gallant sacrifice  
no empty boots, no empty chair—  
Just maybe, this will be the year  
when all our family makes it home,  
no casket draped, no bagpipe drone;  
Just maybe once we'll honor those  
we've lost in years gone by,  
but add no more names to the wall,  
for none have had to die . . .*

If you are ever in Colorado Springs, see Memorial Park. There's a small piece of every professional firefighter's heart there.

**About the Author**

*Aaron Espy is a firefighter/paramedic who writes from Port Orchard, WA.*

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