

February 13, 2015

To the Connecticut Legislators:

My husband, David Maynard, was a Willimantic City Firefighter for over 29 years. He was an athlete, played college football, and exercised and worked out regularly. He was the guy that the other Fireman depended on to do the job that required strength and determination. He battled raging infernos; rescued people trapped in burning structures and responded to fires where no one knew what chemicals might be involved. He faced significant, and frequently unidentifiable hazards on the job.

David started out as a volunteer fireman when he was still in high school and then continued after college. In 1981 he was hired by Willimantic to become a professional fire fighter. I cannot remember when I had seen him so elated over a job. He couldn't wait to start being one of the chosen few. We were aware of the dangers and lived with them daily. I always believed that if he lost his life it would be in a fire, little did I know that the serious danger would be cancer. After being exposed to burning chemicals and other toxins all those years, cancer is what took his life.

Eight years ago sharp stomach pains sent David to the doctor. He then went for a colonoscopy. A biopsy revealed the bitter truth; he had colon cancer, one of the leading killers of men, and our whole world fell apart. He started chemotherapy right away so he had to use all his sick time for the treatments. Since I teach school it became a struggle, each day I would have to leave early to get him to his treatments. I also needed my job so we could have the extra insurance coverage and income. When I wanted to just spend time with him I had to leave and go to work. That year he had surgery in June to remove the cancer but complications set in and the recovery time was more than we anticipated. In September he started chemotherapy treatments again which were "supposed" to kill any cancer that was still in his body. The costs of the treatments were covered by insurance but the financial burden of David not working, traveling to treatments, bills stacking up; all were taking a toll on us. I still had to teach full time, find friends and relatives to take him to treatments when I could not take time off, and the stress of disease with the knowledge of what the outcome would be was devastating. After about a year and a half the doctors told him that he was in remission and he returned to the fire department. He was not the strong robust man that he had been. He had trouble keeping up physically with the job. Before the cancer he could go for days with no sleep and still have energy to work out and spend time with the family, but now he could hardly make it through a shift. Then the cancer returned and he had no choice but to retire from the fire department. With no sick time left and no disability he had no other choice. He then started more chemotherapy and this time it didn't work. He then agreed to go to Dana Farber in Boston to try an experimental drug treatment. After two months the results were the same. It wasn't working. Our last try was to drive to Philadelphia to the Cancer Treatment Center of America. I do have to say they were wonderful. But after traveling back and forth all summer of 2011 they also gave us the news that they could do nothing more for him. That fall I took a leave from school so I could be with him those last days. I lost my soul mate, the love of my life, on September 14, 2011.

Cancer is one of the most horrific ways to die. Here was a man that was 220 pound, in excellent physical shape that deteriorated to 140 pounds and could not even hold his 18 month old granddaughter. This disease not only put a financial burden on our family it also took a mental toll on all of us. He had so much to live for and he lost it all.

One thing I do want to say is the Willimantic Fire Department is a true brother hood. If not for the firefighters I don't know how I would have survived. Not only did they give monetary help to us they were there 24/7 to give support and encouragement. Even now I know they are just a phone call away if I need anything at all. I realize that nothing can bring David back but I hope that others will not have worry about finances. If the bill for workers compensation for firefighter's with cancer was passed it would help to take away the financial burden for the stricken firefighter, and his/her family could then concentrate only on the person battling cancer.

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