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Firefighting can be very dangerous, as we all know. We answer the call without hesitation, and safely do whatever it takes to make problems go away in an all-risk environment. Our schedule and lifestyle also have hidden risks that the fire services, along with the medical and research communities... are beginning to uncover. Job related illness is becoming one of the most talked about and researched topics at the firehouse.

As a kid, I knew I wanted to be a firefighter, just like a lot of kids growing up. But for me, the passion for adventure, service, and community never grew tired. From age seven to eighteen, scouting was a natural expression of this passion. High school came, and I was able to join Long Beach Search and Rescue, a Boy Scout Explorer Post that provided fire and police support services to the City of Long Beach. Being an Eagle Scout, I knew how the explorers worked and the many "real life" things they do. I wanted to become a firefighter so badly. After graduation, I immediately started Fire Science courses and got my first "real job" as a volunteer firefighter at La Habra Heights Fire. The "Heights" sponsored me through the Basic Fire Academy, and thus, I began my quest for a professional fire department position. During my time with Long Beach Search and Rescue, I became very proficient in Urban Search and Rescue and started teaching right out of the basic academy which gave me a specialty that sent me all over the world and the USA. Garden Grove Fire gave me the blessing of hiring me at age twenty-four. During my 30 year career, I have been fortunate enough to pursue my passion of firefighting and teach Urban Search and Rescue. With Garden Grove Fire, I have had a hand in the Office of Emergency Services Fire/Rescue Fire Engine that goes on wildland fires throughout the State.

During this last summer of 2016, I had the opportunity to respond to the California wildfires up and down the state on our OES Engine. During the month long deployment, sleep was a luxury and the environment was far from ideal. As a Fire Apparatus Engineer, I drove the whole time I was deployed - over three thousand logged miles. After completing my fourth deployment of the summer, I returned home. My wife immediately noticed a "change" in my sleeping patterns and activity. As all firefighters do, I shrugged it off to the deployment and expected to get back to normal soon.



After returning home, duty still calls at the firehouse the next shift. At the firehouse, you never know when the bells will go off, and your heart races to help someone in need. For me, the bells went off soon. The first bell was a second alarm fire, followed by a third alarm the following shift. That day, it was 105 degrees outside. My engine company was first in. As Engineer, I got my own water supply...as I've done for 15 years. This required pulling 300 feet of 3 inch hose to the fire hydrant in full turnouts, maneuvering through parked cars...all before the engine ran out of the 500 gallons the Captain and Firefighters were fighting the fire with.

During the two hour firefight, my company was requested to go to rehabilitation and rest. Fresh crews continued the fight. As part of the rehab rest, medical screening began...rehydration and a vital sign check. My blood pressure was fine, but my pulse was irregular. The heart monitor went on with a three lead and showed many irregular beats. A twelve lead showed a possible acute myocardial infarction. My life changed with the reading of that monitor strip. I found myself in the hands of our own paramedics...going code three to the hospital.

My Cardiologist's diagnosis - acute heart failure. My ventricle was only pumping at about 20% when normal ejection fraction is 50-70%. That very likely showed itself in my lifestyle "change" at home. So far, the best medical explanation is that my heart was exposed to "something" that overwhelmed it. Since then, my family & I have been on a long, uncertain road of medical appointments, medications and adjustments that accompany the recovery process. My time being off has been taxing on the family and finances.

I've worked with Mr. Gannon Eckhardt in the same department for many years. He witnessed my ordeal from day one and approached me. I knew his brother had passed from cancer, and that Lionhardt.org had been formed. Mr. Eckhardt helped me get through a difficult recovery time, and Lionhardt generously awarded me and my family a donation that helped us financially. After five months of rest and therapy, there has been improvement. I have an optimistic outlook for recovery. And, I am very thankful to Lionhardt for their gracious donation.

I have always wanted to be a firefighter... to make a difference in this life. I have had a very blessed career spanning almost three decades with awards and accolades. I know I have more work on this planet. I am blessed to continue living and experiencing the joy of watching my precious nine-year-old son grow up. Please take care of yourselves and rest when you can. Life is precious, and we all can make a difference in this world.

Yours,

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