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By Capt. Bob Casale, Nbfd

I stand before you today to speak of a man I knew so well. So why is this hard for me? Why can't I just get up here and talk about all the memories we all shared with Jimmy D? Why can't I just get up here and talk about what an honorable man he was? Why can't I just put into words how he was my best friend, my brother, and my hero? The truth is – I don't know why I can't do that. Maybe it is because I want to approach speaking about Jimmy D a little different today – after all, it has been one year.

People say it gets a little easier after the first year a person passed away. You go through each holiday without the person. You've made it through all the birthdays and various other occasions without them. Though they were not the same – we all made it. Well, I have realized whoever said it is a little easier after the first year is wrong. That is correct, they are wrong. The truth is, Jimmy being gone forever will never get easier. It will never be less painful. It will never make sense to me or anyone else. The idea of Jimmy being gone is only a little more inconceivable after one year. Have no fear my friends – there are some things I have realized after one year.

When someone you love passes away it is always the ones who love them the most who are the saddest. Why is this fair? I mean, I could go into a store in the next town over and most likely none of them would be sad about Jimmy the way we are today. But, would I want to be any of these people? No way! These people, though, they are not sad like all of us have been since September 3, 2004 – never got to know Jimmy. They never got to see him walk into a room or hear his voice like we did. They never got to share even a minute of their life with him. I feel bad for them, not us. We got to know him. We got to see him in his prime. And if we could do it all over we would just want to make more memories with him and spend more time with him. Even if it means being more sad than we already are.

There is something else I have realized. We all need to be more of a “Jimmy-ist”. That was not a word until today so allow me to explain. You see, an optimist is someone who looks at the world more favorably. They look at the world through rose tinted spectacles. The glass is half full, not half empty. They always look for the good in people, and never dwell on the bad. So to be a “Jimmy-ist” we need to look for the Jimmy D in people. Whether it be the way they smile, the way they laugh, the way they climb on a fire engine, or the way they love to surf. Whatever it may be, if you can find a little Jimmy in someone – suddenly that person doesn't seem quite as bad. If every person were half Jimmy D, like a glass being half full this world would be a hell of a place to live in.

Jimmy has unfortunately taken on the title, like so many before him, and so many will after him of a “fallen firefighter”. Fallen means dropped, it means degraded. These words do not describe Jimmy. He is standing so tall there is not a word for it. He is standing up, shoulders broad with that look on his face we all know so well. He is standing, watching over, and guiding each and every one of us. And with some of the guys that stand before me today, he definitely has his work cut out for him. He could

never do it if he was not standing up, the proud man that he was and still is. He left this world doing his job, his passion for helping others. And that is exactly what he is still doing. I know we can all feel him around us everyday. Though he will be referred to as fallen firefighter forever, we all really know he did not fall and he never will

The last thing I have realized after one year is that I know Jimmy is in heaven. Truthfully, I have known this since day one for a million reasons. But the main reason recently came to me. If Jimmy ever went to hell, he would put their fire out so fast and probably save some people on his way out. Hell is clearly not equipped for a man like Jimmy D – he would be hell's worst nightmare. But sweet heaven was made for men like Jimmy D.

