

Some Like it Hot: Tales from the Firehouse
Interview with Janet DeArk

SUMMARY KEYWORDS

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Jen Weidner 00:01 Today is November 27, 2023. I'm Jen Weidner with the Jeffersonville Township Public Library conducting interviews for Some Like It Hot: Tales from the Firehouse. I'm here today with Janet DeArk. Now she's not a firefighter or retired firefighter. She was married to Bruce DeArk he is the only in line of duty death that the Jeffersonville Fire department has ever had. When I started doing these interviews, I kept telling myself I have to interview Bruce's wife. We're finally able to get together and talk about Bruce's time with the Jeffersonville Fire Department and yeah, we probably will cry and that's okay because oral histories are, what they are. And we want to record the truth. And yes, so thank you so much for being here today.

Janet DeArk 00:43 You're welcome.

Jen Weidner 00:43 I appreciate you taking your time to come talk about your husband. So it's been almost two years since Bruce died is that right?

Janet DeArk 00:51 Two years in February. Yes.

Jen Weidner 00:53 So how are you and his daughter's doing?

Janet DeArk 00:56 I'll tell you, I'm not as good as you think you would be. It's starting already (crying)

Jen Weidner 01:05 It's okay. It's okay. We've all we've all everybody listening to this I'm sure has lost somebody and we understand.

Janet DeArk 01:12 I say that myself and the girls.

Jen Weidner 01:16 Because people think that it gets easier. It doesn't you just learn to cope better.

Janet DeArk 01:21 No, no, I'm not sure I learned. But we learned at the end of year one year two was worse. And that is that was definitely the case.

Jen Weidner 01:33 So how long were you all married?

Janet DeArk 01:35 Um, I say cancer plus four months because he was diagnosed four months after we were married. So four years.

Jen Weidner 01:43 Oh my gosh, that almost makes it even worse.

Janet DeArk 01:46 Yes. Yes.

Jen Weidner 01:49 How long was Bruce a firefighter?

Janet DeArk 01:51 20 years. Yes, yes

Jen Weidner 01:52 That's a long time. How long had he been offline in the office?

Janet DeArk 02:01 10 years.

Jen Weidner 02:01 Okay. Yeah, 10 years on and then 10 years in the office? I'm not sure which is harder.

Janet DeArk 02:07 Yeah, I'm not sure how you would. There were many days during administration that he would say, I'm ready to go back online.

Jen Weidner 02:18 What was his job and administration?

Janet DeArk 02:20 He was the deputy chief.

Jen Weidner 02:21 Okay.

Janet DeArk 02:22 Eric Hedrick at the time who since retired and then Bruce, and I'm not sure it was Shawn Grant eventually. I can't remember who he started out in administration with which is sad but yeah.

Jen Weidner 02:40 Seems like that changes a lot.

Janet DeArk 02:42 It does, for different reasons. Some of them valid, some of them not.

Jen Weidner 02:48 You just roll with it.

Janet DeArk 02:50 And I do have to say we were very thankful he was in administration when he was diagnosed with cancer, because there were points that there's no way he could have put on gear and responded the way the online firefighters have to respond. Day in and day out hour and hour out. There was no time that Bruce wasn't working when he had cancer. The last day he walked into the firehouse was December 30 of 2021. And he died in February. February 6. Yeah. Last day he walked out and I found out after the fact that he was not sharing the extent of his diagnosis with those that he worked with. And I understand that it was an escape for him as was my work.

Jen Weidner 03:49 Absolutely. You can get away for eight hours and yes, kind of be your normal self whatever normal is.

Janet DeArk 03:56 Right? And if, you know by the time he was diagnosed with cancer like they weren't I'm not gonna say he they don't work hard, but versus day one of being an administration versus year six. So if Bruce had chemo and he wasn't feeling well, we lived very close. So he could come home, take two hours rest. Go back, you know there's that flexibility with being in administration. But still would you know, if there was a structure fire, he would jump in the truck and go even if he wasn't going to

Jen Weidner 04:42 Of course,

Janet DeArk 04:42 Put the gear on

Jen Weidner 04:43 It's in your blood to go and just see and make sure everything is ok.

Janet DeArk 04:47 Still wanted to be there. Because that's, you know, the more it's all dangerous, but there are things that can happen and structure fires don't happen every day. So being on scene and making sure he's guys and girls I say guys

Jen Weidner 05:04 What yeah, we know there's the two females have retired. Yeah, No, no, there's not, which is sad. Yes. So I met Bruce a couple times at the fire department headquarters. I had no clue he was sick. I had no clue.

Janet DeArk 05:08 Yes. I don't think there's any females. OH, I believe it

Jen Weidner 05:23 I mean, it was just like this bald guy sit back at his office telling jokes cracking us up.

Janet DeArk 05:30 Yeah, yeah

Jen Weidner 05:32 Yeah. Because so many of them are bald. So like I wouldn't think anything about it.

Janet DeArk 05:36 He didn't even like to lose eyebrows. Or you know, the skullit grew it out. But yeah, for some reason, you know,

Jen Weidner 05:47 And chemo affects everybody in a different way. Yeah.

Janet DeArk 05:49 Yeah, It sure does.

Jen Weidner 05:51 What do you think firefighting meant to him?

Janet DeArk 05:56 It meant the world. I mean, it as I'm sure many have told you. We just talked about this the other day with his brother to how his father instilled in them. That saying where you do what you love, you never work a day in your life. And I had never heard that story about Bruce's dad that he had talked to his children about that and, and like that, and that's exactly what it was. I mean, he spent 10 years trying to get on the fire department. When he got on the fire department there wasn't the merit board like there is now which kind of makes things less political. So for 10 years, he went in. I was told they had to go in once a month and update

their application. So for 10 years, Bruce trucked into City Hall, which I believe at the time, Sissy Ellis was the HR director, so he and Sissy he had a relationship before he even came on the fire department. She ended up as you may know, the executive assistant at the fire department, but she is who saw him every month for that time, updating his application.

Jen Weidner 07:25 I'm not sure that I could do that to be that diligent to be like,

Janet DeArk 07:29 I don't know.

Jen Weidner 07:30 But either you want me or you don't I'm not going to keep I guess if it's something that you know you're meant to do. How old was he when he finally got on?

Janet DeArk 07:38 Um, let me think it's gonna see 53 when he died, so 33-32 33.

Jen Weidner 07:48 He just kept on I mean, that's

Janet DeArk 07:51 Yes. David. His cousin was on fire department and his uncle CD was on fire department. And then his dad was part of the Utica department.

Jen Weidner 08:06 The volunteer.

Janet DeArk 08:08 I don't know do they call it Utica Township?

Jen Weidner 08:10 Yes. I don't know.

Janet DeArk 08:13 But I believe he was like one of the his dad was one of the founding members.

Jen Weidner 08:18 So kind of in the family.

Janet DeArk 08:20 Right, yes. And he had a very good job. He worked to I forget what it is now what Apollo Idemitsu out in Port. (Port of Jeffersonville)

Jen Weidner 08:32 Oh, yeah.

Janet DeArk 08:33 Had a very good job there. I think he was approaching the time where they took employees over to Japan for two weeks. And he was approaching the time that that would have been his term. When he got offered a job as a Jeffersonville firefighter.

Jen Weidner 08:54 Japan or firefighter. He made the right decision.

Janet DeArk 08:57 I know he very much enjoyed working there as well, and we're learning about everything the Japanese.

Jen Weidner 09:01 I could just see that he would fit in everywhere and just had a big personality. But

Janet DeArk 09:07 But yeah, firefighting. It was there were days it felt like a job but not like you and I have

Jen Weidner 09:14 Yeah, we feel every day we gotta work.

Janet DeArk 09:16 Or days, feeling like you're going to a job. Loved the people you worked with. Of course, there's ones you know, just

Jen Weidner 09:26 Like anywhere, there's people you're going to love, people you're going to be like, and whatever take it or leave it.

Janet DeArk 09:31 You know,

Jen Weidner 09:32 Everybody that I've interviewed, they just say it's just like a big family. Yeah, like you're gonna have some squabbling, but at the end of the day, you know, they literally got your back,

Janet DeArk 09:40 Right. Yeah, right.

Jen Weidner 09:42 Do you recall him talking about the best parts of his job?

Janet DeArk 09:48 Helping the younger ones. It was very rewarding. I know, you said you talked to Luke Coward. And just hearing him talk about somebody coming on day one. And just going through orientation and getting the hang of things and the different shifts and stuff and and then just working side by side training. I mean, he just enjoyed that so much.

Jen Weidner 10:16 So rewarding to see these younger guys and girls just

Janet DeArk 10:21 Yeah, especially the ones like Luke, and I know. I mean, Jeffrey was one of them. To Rex Caldwell. I mean, I don't know the half of it, I'm sure. But I know how close you know like Marty Stengal liked go on golf trips every year and

Jen Weidner 10:43 They become your family and you're working these 24 hour shifts with the people and they're seeing you on your best days. Your worst days you are going out and you're making

Janet DeArk 10:54 You're making meals together. You're

Jen Weidner 10:56 You're going to the grocery together.

Janet DeArk 10:58 And your families are coming in to see you so you see each other's kids.

Jen Weidner 11:03 You watch kids grow up and yeah, so it's which

Janet DeArk 11:08 I knew of Josh Kempf. I didn't realize how close they were until, I didn't pick the pallbearers. I had I don't even I know Eric Hedrick was involved because Eric Hedrick was living in our home the last four days of Bruce's life and I was like, You guys pick the pallbearers, you know who he was close to.

Jen Weidner 11:33 Do you remember who all they were?

Janet DeArk 11:36 Um, Jeffrey Lovan, Josh Kempf, Marcus Ren, David DeArk his cousin. Oh, gosh, it's gonna be bad. I can't remember. John Obermeyer, of course. I'm sure Eric was one of them. Am I forgetting I think Doug Sneed was this Captain way back when. That six?

Jen Weidner 12:12 I think

Janet DeArk 12:14 So I'm, I'm trying to picture it as they walked by. Yeah, but you know, that's I just said you all pick.

Jen Weidner 12:23 And I did listen to the funeral. I was hiking because I knew I couldn't sit. I had to be up by myself to listen to it. Yeah, bawled my eyes out on that hike. Yeah. And then seeing the pictures from when I was like, okay, oh, yes. Okay. Yeah. And I keep our newspaper files here at the library. And we do have a file dedicated to the Jeffersonville Fire Department. Everything about Bruce is in that file, if you or the girls ever need or want to see it.

Janet DeArk 12:50 That's good to know. Yep. Yeah.

Jen Weidner 12:54 Did you ever talk about any like the worst parts of the job?

Janet DeArk 12:58 Um, I mean, the, the political stuff is always difficult, but there were a couple of runs. I know that stuck with him. That I would say, you know, we're the worst parts of the job, but really the worst part other than the worst runs was just the politics. Yeah, I know. I can't say that too loudly, although Bruce isn't her anymore. So. And, you know,

Jen Weidner 13:40 I've gone through a merit board so it makes it less political. Right?

Janet DeArk 13:45 Right. It's just if you're, if you're in the administration, you've been appointed by the mayor. And Bruce was very good at I guess. I don't want to say playing but

Jen Weidner 14:08 Being diplomatic.

Janet DeArk 14:10 Yes. Yes. But not he did not go beyond that in crossing the line. He did what he had to do. And if you're gonna ask him to do anything that was remotely questionable. Didn't happen.

Jen Weidner 14:33 Because he had integrity he understood that

Janet DeArk 14:34 It did not happen.

Jen Weidner 14:35 Because once you lose your integrity, yeah, it's not worth it. It's not worth it. Did he have any funny or interesting stories about when he was online or when he was in admin because I know these guys jokesters?

Janet DeArk 14:57 Oh absolutely yeah, I'm trying to think. I'll have to think.

Jen Weidner 15:02 I mean, I've had someone tell me that

Janet DeArk 15:06 There's probably some that

Jen Weidner 15:07 They were having a snowball fight in the department or in the firehouse and they had like six inches of snow on the floor.

Janet DeArk 15:15 Oh, really? Yeah.

Jen Weidner 15:17 Someone told me about they taped the sink sprayer open. So when you turned on water They were just just gotta get used to the pranks.

Janet DeArk 15:27 This and this is a fairly common one, I think at fire departments but there's something called the I think it's called the K saw, K, the letter K saw that they use you know, to cut things open and whatever. Well, as newbies come on, this is like a kind of a general firefighter joke. They tell them that the K saw is like a pull start. And it's not. So they sit there

Jen Weidner 16:05 So all youo future firefighters listening. Yes. Don't be fooled by K saw.

Janet DeArk 16:09 I can tell you an extremely inappropriate one. From a golf trip. But I don't know if I should.

Jen Weidner 16:14 We can talk about that after the recording.

Janet DeArk 16:18 Yeah somebody shared it with me on Thanksgiving Day because they knew it was a hard day.

Jen Weidner 16:22 Yes, we all

Janet DeArk 16:23 Wanted to make us laugh.

Jen Weidner 16:25 We all need those little but yeah, reminders of the funny

Janet DeArk 16:28 There are thousands of stories of jokes that we're played. I'll tell you what, Eric Hendricks one of the I'll say the worst.

Jen Weidner 16:37 You always got that one guy that like

Janet DeArk 16:39 Best but worst right he will have you in stitches and person and we're very close. And yeah. They'll have you in stitches.

Jen Weidner 16:53 So when did he get the cancer diagnosis?

Janet DeArk 16:57 March 19 of 2018.

Jen Weidner 17:01 And what type of cancer did he have?

Janet DeArk 17:03 Colon cancer. Stage four colon cancer. Yep.

Jen Weidner 17:07 And it was caused by the job right?

Janet DeArk 17:12 Yes.

Jen Weidner 17:13 I don't know if people realize or understand newer building materials when they burn they are caustic.

Janet DeArk 17:20 Yes.

Jen Weidner 17:21 You don't want to be breathing that stuff you don't want to be near that stuff.

Janet DeArk 17:24 No.

Jen Weidner 17:26 I just don't think people understand. Everything that goes into your house is carcinogenic in some way or another.

Janet DeArk 17:32 We live in a very toxic world. I was at my parents this weekend for Thanksgiving, and my mom had a Glade Plugin. I mean, we just talked about hair products. I mean,

Jen Weidner 17:48 The most innocuous things do you don't think about until you have someone who's dealt with cancer.

Janet DeArk 17:55 What are you breathing in?

Jen Weidner 17:56 Yeah and then these firefighters are going into these buildings.

Janet DeArk 18:00 Yeah.

Jen Weidner 18:00 Whether it's your house. Anything, a big building that you know, manufactures whatever. I mean, there's and

Janet DeArk 18:11 I think firefighters I don't even think all of them are because there's you know, we're fortunate to be a paid career fire department here in Jeffersonville. And, you know, if you look at the majority of our nation, I don't know what we do with that our volunteers and I don't know that they get the training that they get the education etc. It's not always like a dumpster fire can be more toxic than, you know, a warehouse fire. I remember being at a Purdue football game one time tailgating and as happens, people get intoxicated. There was

somebody that set a boombox on fire. And that plastic burning was I mean taken everybody around us like down and it was like after Bruce's diagnosis, this hit home more but we'd go on camping trips with the family. And at the end of a meal, people would throw their paper plates, Styrofoam, you know, bowl plastic in the fire in you know, you're like

Jen Weidner 19:32 Now you're breathing all that

Janet DeArk 19:33 Now you are breathing all that and I know you think it's only one paper plate. It's only one Styrofoam bowl, and it's only my fork, my plastic fork. But

Jen Weidner 19:43 Now multiply that by whatever and then this is what these firefighters are going into.

Janet DeArk 19:47 Yes. Yes.

Jen Weidner 19:49 What was his reaction to the diagnosis?

Janet DeArk 19:52 Oh, just blown away. Just absolutely shocked.

Jen Weidner 20:00 Did he have I mean, had he had problems leading up to any symptoms or was it just kind of it was

Janet DeArk 20:07 I'll tell you. So he was diagnosed March 19. In hindsight, you know, beginning of a new year, trying to eat better trying to lose some weight. He was losing weight faster than he should have been. It was easier than it should have been. And I remember him even rubbing it into, like Eric Hedrick jokingly before the diagnosis, obviously, but the way it was coming off too quickly. In hindsight. He was sleeping a lot more. Resting a lot more. But again, beginning of a year, dark

Jen Weidner 20:57 You're trying something new.

Janet DeArk 20:59 Yeah, you know cold, you know, just didn't really click until in hindsight, and then leading up to the diagnosis. He felt kind of nauseous but the flu was going around.

Jen Weidner 21:2 It's winter time. literally

Janet DeArk 21:22 Literally as his wife, I did not know he was even feeling bad until like Sunday night. And he was like, I'm gonna go in and see Nicole tomorrow and I'm just like, okay, and then he tells me the symptoms on like, sounds like gallbladder you know, my mom had her gallbladder out she felt nauseous threw up appendicitis maybe

Jen Weidner 21:49 Never think cancer.

Janet DeArk 21:50 No. No, when he being new, like I had left the city of Jeffersonville employment to go to the Clark County Health Department to do what I had done previously up north. So when he was gonna go to the doctor, it was like, you know, you're you're new. So he didn't want me to miss work and he didn't really push it. Like at all so he went to see Nicole who

we both you know, she's a friend. And then he's like she sent me to get a CT scan. You want me to go with you? I can you know, I can leave. No, it's fine. It's fine. And then when we got back to Nicole's, and she said, You need to go directly to the ER and he called me that was like, Yeah, that was crazy

Jen Weidner 22:43 Because she knew, right?

Janet DeArk 22:45 She knew we didn't know like, obviously the severity of it. But we did very soon after that. And just to have somebody, you know, tell you that you have tumors in your abdomen and colon and it was it was insane.

Jen Weidner 23:04 What stage was at when he was diagnosed?

Janet DeArk 23:07 It was four, yeah.

Jen Weidner 23:09 Oh my gosh, yeah. What was your initial reaction, when you found out ?

Janet DeArk 23:17 Shock just absolute. I mean, I remember exactly where I was when he called me I remember exactly, it was standing in front of me exactly what I was doing. I mean, once and then like, once anybody found out they just, I mean, he was so loved. I mean, they just flooded. The frickin emergency room. But having to tell like his daughters, and his family is

Jen Weidner 23:47 How old were his daughters at the time?

Janet DeArk 23:49 Oh, gosh, Kayla, she's 25 Now she was 23. So like, 14 and 19.

Jen Weidner 24:00 Oh my gosh!

Janet DeArk 24:01 Yeah, Yeah,

Jen Weidner 24:03 It's hard at any however, whatever age but to be a super young adult.

Janet DeArk 24:08 I mean, he was he's not just a dad. He was like, Mr. Mom, I mean, he was Mr. Mom literally took those girls everywhere to school, bust them out of school. You know, Dad, will you sign me out? Yeah. Oh, okay. Yeah, just yeah, he was the best dad he was the best husband. But yeah, that was but once like once it sunk in, and you have like there's the unknown and just getting the diagnosis and that time between then and when you have like, an ounce of a plan of how we're going to attack this. And once you feel like you have a plan of attack. Then you feel like you have a little bit of control back. And there wasn't ever, ever, ever a time when he wasn't fighting it. That he wasn't going to fight it. Until his dying breath. He was still I mean, he guys would come literally to the house to say goodbye to him and he'd be like, Well, I'm just kind of hoping you know, I get enough strength up you know, wheelchair so I can get out and about you know, because I told him weeks to month so if he had months he was gonna get in a wheelchair so that he could get out and about.

Jen Weidner 25:43 And I remember hearing that when he was dying that he there was always a firefighter therewith him. Is that true?

Janet DeArk 25:51 After he passed or

Jen Weidner 25:52 As he Yeah,

Janet DeArk 25:53 Well, he came home like we finally had a doctor. Tell him God love her. She is a frickin saint. Like we were in the hospital for 26 days. Initially, we went in because he lost the ability to use his left leg. And he's like, what's going on? What's going on? I don't know why. Maybe? I don't know. I have more medical background. I really don't. I kind of knew what that meant. But he wanted to know why he lost.

Jen Weidner 26:32 Yeah.

Janet DeArk 26:33 So we ended up spending 26 days in the hospital and finally a doctor wasn't even his doctor. Came in and told him this is it. You know, like you want to go to Frazier rehab for the next four to six weeks. And that's what he wanted to do in his mind and that's kind of what they talked to him about to regain strength so you can get in a wheelchair so you get out and about and she's like, Hey, that's not the best place for you. You don't have that much time. Yeah, thank God she was actually

Jen Weidner 27:15 (crying) Finally somebody told him the truth.

Janet DeArk 27:17 And the only reason she did is because she treated my sister-in-law for breast cancer. So she knew our family and she knew his story in you she just came up into the room and literally was like, took his hand, looked him in the eye and said, Hey, that's not the best use of your time. You don't have that much time left. So once we knew that he wanted to come home, and so he literally like was making his own EMS arrangement with Matt Owen.

Jen Weidner 28:02 Of course he was

Janet DeArk 28:04 He did to get to the hospital. He did to get to the hospital

Jen Weidner 28:09 Even in the end he was like, No, let me go ahead . That's funny.

Janet DeArk 28:14 He's calling New Chapel, Matt Owen

Jen Weidner 28:17 You gotta laugh about something. Just crazy. Just their personality. That's what they're gonna do. Yeah. So

Janet DeArk 28:23 Yeah so I it was, let me think Thursday, Friday, Saturday, Sunday. I can't remember if it was a Wednesday or Thursday when he came home. It drives me nuts but I didn't think he was gonna make it through the night because his he was in multi system organ failure, which I didn't I learned a lot about the body that I really didn't care to learn. But apparently your liver function is what keeps your blood clotting. I mean, there's something with your liver that

makes your blood able to stay in your body and he so he was literally bleeding out. I didn't think he was gonna make it through the first night that he was home. But before we left the hospital, they gave him as many transfusions as they possibly could. They gave him vitamin K. everything they possibly could they gave him to give him as much time as possible. So the moment we got home literally a living wake occurred. Yeah That is amazing. It's crazy. It was and we had an ice storm coming.

Jen Weidner 29:54 You're gonna go, you're gonna go all out.

Janet DeArk 29:57 Let me tell you hospice failed us moment one. Moment one. I walked in the door after 26 days in the hospital. And they wanted me to sign a bunch of forms. They wanted to tell me what medications they had ready for him. When to give them blablabla and I'm just like Joe Hurt is a firefighter and he's an RN.

Jen Weidner 30:23 I know that name. My nephew's wife knows him. Yes.

Janet DeArk 30:28 Josh Thompson, former paramedic. Those two moved in with us. Eric Hedrick moved in with us. (crying) Yeah, it was crazy. Those three Eric was like our gatekeeper. He managed the entire house. He managed who would come in who would go when we'd had enough when we didn't, he'd made sure there was food abound drink abound. Eric so he managed like the household. The comings and goings of people and Joe along with Bruce's daughter who was in nursing school and her fiance's sister who was in nursing school. And Josh made sure Bruce was in no pain whatsoever. 24/7 I have no idea what we wouldn't have done without Joe Hurt. No idea. No idea. I don't know how other people do it that don't have a nurse in the family. But yeah, we had streams. Our front door didn't close, streams of people. I didn't even you know, I was just like, you know,

Jen Weidner 31:47 So you are you took off work during this time. Yeah. Are you doing the best you could? Well, you

Janet DeArk 31:52 Well you know what? So June, at the end of June 2021. I was just like, over COVID like burnout literally between COVID and cancer. I was literally ready to jump off the bridge. No joke. Like, we can

Jen Weidner 32:13 Like we can only take so much.

Janet DeArk 32:15 Yeah. It gets. I was like, and at that time. I knew the statistics of Bruce's disease, but he wasn't like, going downhill necessarily. But I was like, if we can do this, let's do it. And I just quit. I quit my job. And I was like, I don't know how much time we have left. I don't know how the some of the bills are gonna get paid. I didn't care.

Jen Weidner 32:46 You got plenty of firefighters that we're gonna take care of you. Yeah,

Janet DeArk 32:48 Yeah, I didn't care. So I was not working at the time. No. But yeah, I am forever, and I know. They loved Bruce as much as I loved Bruce. And, you know, he will I always say he wasn't mine alone. He was this town's. He was at fire departments and anybody that wanted to come in my home. You come in. You talk to him. You say your goodbyes, and there's nothing better than a living wake.

Jen Weidner 33:23 And there was a firefighter with him from the time he died right until...

Janet DeArk 33:26 Yes after he passed. They Scott (the funeral home) took him to the funeral home flanked by every apparatus in town. And yes, they did. I think it was half hour shifts. I think that it was 10 days.

Jen Weidner 33:48 Like that's what really got me is when I heard that his body was not left alone. (crying) That there was firefighter there with him

Janet DeArk 33:53 I couldn't, I would have been there. And we had to go to Scott,

Jen Weidner 34:01 (sobbing) What other job would do that for you? What other co-workers

Janet DeArk 34:07 We didn't even ask like and they didn't even have to like there wasn't a shift that wasn't. I mean,

Jen Weidner 34:15 I mean like, who else is co workers might do that? Yeah, well go to the funeral home and stand. I don't want to say guard but stand in memoriam of their co-worker.

Janet DeArk 34:27 I mean 1am, 2am, 3,4 am

Jen Weidner 34:28 These guys are used to being up at all hours anyways,

Janet DeArk 34:30 It was 10 days before his funeral though, just because of how things fell. And I would have been at the funeral home back there, because that leaving him alone was something, no, Yeah. And there were we had to go to Scott a couple times, obviously to do some planning. And each time I would be like, oh, I need to go back there and think who's ever there.

Jen Weidner 34:55 Yeah.

Janet DeArk 34:55 You know, it was Donny Johnson who's very good friend Paul Finch. I mean those are just you know, a couple that were there when we happen to be there, but 24/7

Jen Weidner 35:10 I mean, that just shows you how amazing he was. How loved he was.

Janet DeArk 35:14 Yeah, it was crazy. It was like the most beautiful horrible thing.

Jen Weidner 35:24 Absolutely.

Janet DeArk 35:24 It couldn't have been more beautiful. It couldn't have played out.

Jen Weidner 35:28 So my next question was, was the fire department supportive of him? Obviously, above and beyond. They didn't, they didn't have to do that but...

Janet DeArk 35:37 No and we've had four memorials this year. And I mean, we just had one in Colorado Springs, Colorado, and they made sure you know we got there. They made sure we had housing. Oh, they were there themselves. I mean Brandon Hove, who's the president of the Union currently. Like he's got six kids. He flew out the morning and flew home right after

Jen Weidner 36:07 Was Colorado special, was Colorado special to you all?

Janet DeArk 36:12 That International. So there was a memorial in May, the National Fallen Firefighters has, has their memorial in May in Emmitsburg, Maryland. And that we were told is more for the family. Which John Obermeyer and Josh Thompson both traveled out there. Absolutely incredible. Can't even, can't even put words to it. And then Supporting Heros has their they call it a gala where they honor those who have died the past year so 2022s are honored and 2023 that was in July. That was in Owensboro, Kentucky. And then the state of Indiana has like it was like a Thursday evening in September in Indianapolis. And then the one in Colorado Springs is the International Association of Firefighters. So they have their own memorial as well. That was US and Canada in September, so that and that we were explained is more not just not for the family but more for the brothers. So you would see a good contingency from those who are being honored Fire Department stuff for that one in particular. So yeah, we had all those memorials. I don't even know what the question was. But yes, the fire department, you know, not just from the date of diagnosis, through his passing through the funeral. I mean, it's just been ongoing.

Jen Weidner 37:58 And they are still there for you.

Janet DeArk 37:59 Yes. Yes.

Jen Weidner 38:02 So he made it his mission to make sure firefighters get screened for cancer?

Janet DeArk 38:06 Correct

Jen Weidner 38:07 I remember seeing him on the news.

Janet DeArk 38:08 Yes and that was even before his diagnosis as deputy chief was something he was working on as far as you know, he knew that firefighters were more likely to get cancer you knew the statistics and was working on protocols within the fire department as far as deconing after fires and making sure that the exhaust on the vehicles is exiting they have this special hoses. They put over the exhaust so that the exhaust is going outside not throughout the firehouse and so he was working on that stuff already but once he was diagnosed with cancer, colon in particular Yeah,

Jen Weidner 38:52 Cuz I know I've seen now where they scrub each other off. Yes, turnout gear before they go back to the firehouse.

Janet DeArk 39:00 Yeah. Used to be like your helmet being really really dirty and having suet on it was like a badge of honor. And now we know

Jen Weidner 39:09 That's a no, no

Janet DeArk 39:10 Yeah. To the point where even like, if you're in administration, driving an SUV with your gear in the back versus driving like a pickup truck, where you can put your gear outside of the cab that you're in. I mean, even that far like your gear should not even be within the vehicle that you're driving. Yeah. So we at the he was diagnosed March 19. And the fire department put together a fundraiser because we didn't know where we were going for treatment. And MD Anderson was always talked about. Just so happens we found out because Kentucky is so prevalent with colon cancer that there were a ton of colon cancer doctors right here in this area. So they put together a fundraiser knowing that we would be traveling which we did end up going to MD Anderson, we did end up at Sara Cannon in Nashville, Tennessee. But at that fundraiser, we were introduced to the Colon Cancer Prevention Project, which Joe Hurt once again, knew a gastroenterologist who started the Colon Cancer Prevention Project Dr. Whitney Jones. And then the executive director of the Colon Cancer Prevention project is Amanda Smart whose brother Josh Smart is on the Jeffersonville Fire Department her dad was a preacher here in town. She grew up here. So we were introduced to them at that fundraiser and then from then on, we I eventually became part of the board of directors and then Bruce worked on the firefighter education. And they ended up naming that educational program after him. So and there was a point in time where the American Cancer Society in Indiana got Bruce's name and he went up to the statehouse to give testimony to lowering the age from 50 to 45. So he did that as well, which they lowered it in Indiana and then very soon after that, they lowered it nationwide, which was very, very good move. I think it still needs to be lower. But again, toxic world. Toxins going in our bodies.

Jen Weidner 39:33 Oh, wow. What do you want people to know about Bruce?

Janet DeArk 42:00 He would want us to continue spreading the message of early detection of colon cancer. So that is our mission. To continue his legacy. To that end. What I want people to know about Bruce, and what those closest to him know is that he was a phenomenal husband like have been married before. He was my home, we talked about anxiety. He was my drug. Like he just took it away. Like I would get anxiety just mean I hate to say this, but I would get anxiety going home for holidays with my family. And I didn't with him. He just took it away.

Jen Weidner 43:04 He was your person.

Janet DeArk 43:05 Yeah. He was hilarious. Goofy

Jen Weidner 43:10 Always positive.

Janet DeArk 43:11 Yes.

Jen Weidner 43:12 Oh, laughing like I said when I met him I had no idea he was sick. He was in his office just laughing and cutting up and no clue. He was so sick.

Janet DeArk 43:22 Yeah. And yeah. I think I was the only one that knew what he went through. Because he suffered. Now, I'm not saying he didn't have had good days because we had good days and we had continued having adventures camping or traveling or whatever. But he was just out of this world dad from moment one. Remember I'm talking about Kayla. She apparently was pretty colicky the first year life and I think he held her the first year of her life. Oh, it's kind of funny. And I'd say this to her too, but she's like a bottle fed kitten. (laughing) And I worked at an animal rescue but I mean, they were he was Mr. Mom. And it was his choice. And if he'd had a spouse that didn't allow him to do those things. Yeah. But he was

Jen Weidner 44:40 How has your life changed since his passing?

Janet DeArk 44:43 I lost my future. Literally. It's just way too quiet. Way too boring. But I mean, you lose your future. I mean, we've just gotten started. You know, I moved down here in 2015 after dating, you know, a year and a half just because at some point you need to

Jen Weidner 45:13 Be closer

Janet DeArk 45:14 Yeah, decide is this gonna work or is this not so we were just we're just getting started but I'm thankful because we did get. We did a lot. In the eight years we had. We did a lot and I have all of those memories and pictures and it's not the same. It's not remotely the same as having him here physically, but I lost my future because he was my future. And the things we wanted to do we weren't you know, like I said we made a lot of memories. We did a ton had a lot of adventures. We had a lot more to do. And even just day to day life.

Jen Weidner 45:56 Just the normal.

Janet DeArk 45:59 Just doing nothing. I mean, yeah, so I'm still trying to figure it out. But just it's never gonna be the same as he's one of a kind.

Jen Weidner 46:10 No matter how much time passes it is never gonna be the same. Yeah. What do you think he would tell someone that wanted to be a firefighter

Janet DeArk 46:22 He would tell him it's best job in the world. I mean, he has. He had me the trend (trying to get people on the fire department) . I mean, I remember the Clark County Health Department there's a couple of guys and they're still there. I'd be like, hey Zak. Think about you know being a firefighter, or like Drew who was my eventually my boss after Laura Lindley passed away and my boss became the administrator then Drew was my boss and like, Drew you sure, especially during COVID, like, you know, who isn't thinking of a different career, but it's like this best job in the world. And then you can have I mean, it does. You do miss things, and I can't even begin to know what that's like for those guys. I also feel like a door is opened to things that you wouldn't be able to do. Like, you know, Bruce, Tori's best friend is Olivia Jones and Karen Jones would take Olivia and Tory to school every morning and Bruce would pick them up every night for years like when when Bruce passed, Olivia lost. She has a dad. But Bruce was her dad too

Jen Weidner 47:47 Because he was here every day after Yeah,

Janet DeArk 47:50 Yeah. But yeah, best job in the world. And all I can say is my son-in-law is also a firefighter in Fairdale, Kentucky. Being a Jeffersonville firefighter. I mean, we've been through it. And as far as when you get sick the benefits, I mean, I can't imagine how some people get through cancer or or any chronic illness without the benefits that we've had. And we've just, we've been taken care of with health insurance with you know, how the state of Indiana manages their firefighters pension and benefits.

Jen Weidner 48:41 I know that a Deputy Chief Jason Sharpe took a lot of time to gathering all the information about Bruce's illness because he had shared with me like how emotional it was how hard it was for him to do that.

Janet DeArk 48:55 He and I both but yeah,

Jen Weidner 48:56 He knew he wasn't gonna let this go. Yeah, he knew we had to get it certified as in line of duty death.

Janet DeArk 49:04 1000 pieces of paper!

Jen Weidner 49:08 And he hand delivered it to the state. Yeah, I mean, like once again, who else is employer would do that for them?

Janet DeArk 49:15 Yeah. Yeah,

Jen Weidner 49:17 Who else is a co-worker who would take that time that energy that emotion?

Janet DeArk 49:20 Yeah.

Jen Weidner 49:21 To do that.

Janet DeArk 49:24 Yeah. We did it together. Yeah. Yeah, I mean, I got a letter from Dr. Yazel. Letter from Dr. James Crips, who is with Colon Cancer Prevention Project. I don't know how many hospitals in how many states I went to to get all these medical records. He printed them all off. I mean, it was it was crazy. Yeah,

Jen Weidner 49:51 I mean, you just

Janet DeArk 49:52 And that's the thing like, if his death does one thing in elevating, you know, the the knowledge of the risk of cancer in the fire service when we were at the memorial in Indianapolis. Joel Thacker who's the executive director of the Indiana Department, Homeland Security, who I mean I didn't know Bruce knew him. Like we both worked on this project under Governor Daniels with Homeland Security. So we've been around Homeland Security. Joe Thacker wasn't the executive director at the time. So Joel Thacker's up there, addressing everyone who's had a firefighter in the state of Indiana pass. There were 12 of us. He's standing at the podium staring at me and I said he was staring literally into my soul talking about Bruce and how he had ran into Bruce outside the state house one day just walking. They were just

passing. I assume Bruce was there testifying. And so Bruce told his story to Joel and Joel went to the doctor because, because of Bruce because of Bruce's story, and he had cancerous polyps in his colon, and he stood up there and said, I would not be alive today if it were not for Bruce. And just like in passing Bruce has shared his story with this man, which he's done. I mean,

Jen Weidner 51:34 We never know what stories we tell are going to change somebody's life. Yeah. Are going to make somebody be like, oh, yeah, actually I should get tested.

Janet DeArk 51:43 And we'd be on vacation. I mean, I remember in Florida. Two hours, he went inside, he's like, I'm gonna go to this firehouse and he didn't know anybody there. Didn't know a soul and I laugh because we're on vacation. We'd rented a convertible. He left me in the parking lot with a convertible down in the hot Florida sun to go talk to these firefighters about and I wasn't a bit mad

Jen Weidner 52:12 No, no

Janet DeArk 52:13 He was in there for two hours talking to complete strangers about colon cancer and his story. And he I mean, we drove down to Key West and we stopped at , at least two firehouses one in Key West and one on the way out there. Same thing he's just going into a random firehouse, talking to complete strangers about his story because he is determined to spread the message.

Jen Weidner 52:36 And I say this all the time. Everybody has a story to tell. We all have something that can help somebody whether we think it's Oh, nobody cares about this or about that. But right there. I didn't know these people. And then what if he saved one person's life or made them think, yeah, we should start this program in our fire department. Yeah.

Janet DeArk 52:58 Yeah, And there are several Jeff firefighters who have come to me and told me about and there's the fire chief in Henryville Mark Furnish. I want to smack him because he told me after Bruce's funeral, it hit him that he had not had his colonoscopy yet and he was at least 60 And they found cancerous polyps and he had to have he didn't go into detail but he had to go through not chemo but some kind of treatment.

Jen Weidner 53:36 Yeah.

Janet DeArk 53:37 And he's like because of Bruce. I went to the doctor at 60 but still, he still wasn't going to go then. And you know he, yeah, I mean, we both knew him. Well, I would call him a friend. And just to hear those stories, and then you know, like, he shows up the next year at the Colon Cancer Prevention Project 5k Hey, we're here wanting to walk in Bruce's honor and I'm like, well, your survivor to get over there and get your picture taken. You know, like it's, it's crazy.

Jen Weidner 54:19 We just don't know. I mean, how much time we have left. And we can sit around and complain and get caught up and things which I have so much this year, but sitting

here talking to you. It's yeah, it's I know what I need to do and what to thank Bruce, for us to be able to talk and for me to realize like, life is short.

Janet DeArk 54:22 We don't It is!

Jen Weidner 54:42 You gotta have, you gotta have fun. My mom had breast cancer. I've had so many family members, you know, my aunt died of pancreatic cancer. And you can sit around and you can be mad you can be upset you can hate whatever about your life but in the end just go out there and live it

Janet DeArk 55:01 Yeah

Jen Weidner 55:02 Be like Bruce you have to be like anybody be like Bruce I mean. You see all these celebrities Oh would have been no. Be like somebody that truly loved their life, their career, their family.

Janet DeArk 55:14 And wanted, he always said I want to live to be 100 And I'm always like I'm not sure I'm gonna be he, but he he wanted to live to be 100 and he was not joking and he wanted to be a grandfather and he literally loved life. Love life and I've never been the person and he wasn't either. To You know, you see people that are just saving for retirement saving for retirement. We never were thankful and that's why we had the wonderful eight years

Jen Weidner 55:44 years. That's why, why I'm broke because I'm trying to enjoy life now.

Janet DeArk 55:47 Yeah, I mean, that's okay. Yeah. Because you're whether you're 20, 25, 45 or 75 you may not be here tomorrow.

Jen Weidner 55:56 You got one life to live. Right?

Janet DeArk 55:59 Yeah

Jen Weidner 56:01 I thank you so much for being here. Like I've been wanting to do this interview for so long, but I wasn't sure I was ever going to be emotionally ready.

Janet DeArk 56:08 Right

Jen Weidner 56:08 But here we are. Yeah, we cry. It's okay. Cuz this is just how much Bruce is meant to you to our community. Was there any seats in that church at his funeral

Janet DeArk 56:11 Yeah There was which was surprising but honestly, that is kind of he was loved no matter.

Jen Weidner 56:32 Yep. Absolutely. And yeah, we're definitely a better city because of him. You have anything else you want to tell us? I'm just

Janet DeArk 56:42 I'm just thankful that you're doing this and that's a lot talking to 12 firefighters.

Jen Weidner 56:47 Now I think I want, need to talk to Joe Hurt evidently, too.

Janet DeArk 56:55 Joe Hurt I mean, you got a lot of good ones there. If you have to make a selection.

Jen Weidner 57:00 Thank you so much for being here.

Janet DeArk 57:02 Thank you. It was nice to meet you for one