



Patrick & James Dowdell
Anniversary Digital Learning Experience
Transcript

PATRICK DOWDELL: That was the last radio transmission:

JAMES DOWDELL: "Ladder 3, we're on 35. We're heading up."

PATRICK: "We're heading up."

JAMES: It was pretty crazy, man.

PATRICK: It's a good, good last transmission.

PATRICK: I'm the son of FDNY Lieutenant Kevin Dowdell, who was killed in the World Trade Center on September 11, 2001.

JAMES: He was one of the 343 firemen killed on September 11.

PATRICK: My dad was, you know, we were very close growing up.

JAMES: A great father and a great fireman.

PATRICK: We used to spend a lot of time going surfing, spending time at the ocean.

JAMES: Used to take my brother and I to the firehouse. Kind of spend time with him there and, you know, hanging out with my father while also watching him, you know, go to fires and be around the guys. The firehouse was just, it was great.

PATRICK: He started his career in Brooklyn at Engine 290, was eventually brought into Squad 1 when that was formed, and then ended up in Rescue Company 2 in Brooklyn for about nine years before he was promoted to lieutenant.

JAMES: Everything about the fire department was what my father loved. The camaraderie, the life of service, the excitement, just showing up for people on their worst day was something that really excited him and made him happy. He was living his dream. He had, you know, he had a great relationship with my mother. You know, he had his two sons.

PATRICK: He used to say, "respect gets respect." He was big on helping our neighbors. You see someone carrying their groceries, you go carry it for them. Those were, you know, lessons that I-- I'm glad that I got to experience and learn over those 18 years, because they've carried me into my adult life.

JAMES: He loved the city. He loved the village and walking around Manhattan. We used to do that a lot.

PATRICK: Get coffee or something like that and walk around and oftentimes go to go to dinner.

JAMES: We'd sit down at one of his favorite restaurants, and he would just sit there and look at us and just say,

PATRICK: "This is what I work all week for."

PATRICK: On 9/11, I was a freshman in college and had just gotten to-- to college. I was at Iona and was in my dorm room. We woke up and just like any other day.

JAMES: It started out like any other day. I was just looking forward to all the-- all the things that seniors in high school looked forward to. Getting a driver's license. Proms. I was sitting first period. All of a sudden the world changed. They made an announcement over the loudspeaker, "We're in lockdown. Lock your windows, the doors. Just stay put."

PATRICK: You know, just a lot of kind of concern, a lot of nervousness in the air. So I called home and asked my mom, "Have you heard from dad? Is he working?" She said, "Yes, he's working. We haven't heard anything yet."

JAMES: I remember just trying to call my mother saying, you know, I need someone to come sign me out.

PATRICK: I called the firehouse. No one was there. We don't really know what's happening.

JAMES: I remember getting a hold of my mom and her saying, "Listen, I'll try to get a hold of dad. We'll figure it out. Just sit tight." He always found time to call. He always checked in. "Hey. It's me. If you see this on the news, I'm good."

PATRICK: It turns out that the next day, we still haven't heard. We never really had the - you know, the aha moment that he was gone, it really happened gradually over time. And I was at my mom's house, and we still hadn't heard anything, which was really unlike him.

JAMES: You know, we didn't have that. That definitely raised a flag.

PATRICK: We started to assume the worst,

JAMES: But by no means did that mean we were giving up hope. The hardest part of the process was not knowing.

PATRICK: But every time the door opened, we would all look to see if it was him walking in. So a couple days had gone by and and we kind of then were able to reconcile the fact that he wasn't coming home. My mom, being very strong, kept us together.

JAMES: She sat us both down real early and just said, "We don't know the outcome of this. Whatever it is, you're still held to the same standards."

PATRICK: You got to take care of your responsibilities.

JAMES: I remember talking to Pat and he said, you know, I want to start-- I want to go down to the Trade Center and start digging.

PATRICK: I wanted to be down there. I ended up being fortunate enough to go work with the guys from Rescue 4, who were there at the site every day, trying to find the guys that we lost.

JAMES: They kind of welcomed us in, and you know, we were down here with them kind of going through things. They still had to work. They still-- they were digging. They were going to funerals for their friends. They had their own families, like, and then they were also making us a huge priority in their lives.

PATRICK: The balance of school, family, you know, going to the site whenever possible, and then funerals pretty much every weekend became the routine.

JAMES: We tried to just emulate my father, which was to show up and help people and try to, kind of, contribute in any way we could.

PATRICK: And it became what we would do week over week, month after month, you know, that entire next year. So there was sometimes, you know, multiple, multiple funerals on a Saturday and Sunday. So we ended up kind of joining in to try to help and playing with the band.

JAMES: At the end of the day, we never recovered my father. We-- we held his funeral in April of '02. Listening to Patrick play Amazing Grace outside the funeral while I was holding my mother's arm, I just remember the-- It was a-- it was a tough time, but, you know, very, very proud, I guess, of the way we got to send him off.

When we lost him, it just reinforced the fact that this is what I wanted to do, which was to follow in his footsteps.

PATRICK: My dad was really, you know, proud of the fact that I wanted to try to go to West Point. It kind of reaffirmed that I wanted to see it through. It became a way for me to honor him.

JAMES: I think it was March of '02, I took the test to become a fireman. When I turned 21, I got on-- on the job a couple, a couple of months later.

PATRICK: Kind of full circle moment for the both of us to be, you know, taking on that next chapter of our lives. At the same time, we were taking on something a bit bigger than ourselves in terms of just, you know, service. So I went to Iraq for a year-long deployment before we got deployed to Afghanistan.

JAMES: I'm definitely very proud to be a member of the FDNY and to follow in his footsteps. I'm a lieutenant, which is the same rank my father was when he was killed. I have three kids. I have two boys and a daughter at home. I'm trying to emulate what, you know, the way he raised us, which is, you know, by being there, by-- by kind of making, making every minute that you're home present. **PATRICK:** We have kids of our own. They know who Grandpa Kevin is, and they know what he did, and they know that he was a hero. And they get to grow up, you know, knowing that, which gives me a lot of comfort.

JAMES: You know, as we move forward, I think it's-- it's important to, to keep to keep an eye, you know, on the past and to tell those stories and to kind of bring my father to life.

PATRICK: How do we keep that memory alive, and how do we live out the phrase 'never forget' that's mentioned a lot when you speak of 9/11, but what does it really mean? So to us it means paying it forward, and it means living a life worthy of their sacrifice.

JAMES: Acts of service like he used to do all the time, helping people like try to live a life that that my father lived.

PATRICK: I feel like he did that throughout his life. He overcame a lot of hardship. He went through a lot of difficult times himself, and what he focused on was the positive of having his family, and being there for his family, and being there for his neighbors, and being there for the community that he served. So if you can take that mentality and live your life, you know, in service of others, it becomes very rewarding. And I think that's the best way to honor their life and their legacy and their sacrifice is by-- by living your life, you know, in service of others and with others in mind.

JAMES: I think he'd be happy.

PATRICK: I think so.

I think he'd be really proud of how things worked out.

JAMES: 100%.

PATRICK: You might never be rich, but you're going to love going to work every day.

JAMES: Yeah, he was right about that.