

ORANGE PEEL

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THE IDEA

The Idea is that we are supposed to die for each other. The Idea is that we are supposed to live to see each other. The Idea is that we are a family driven to the same goal. The Idea is that we protect each other so that, together, we can protect them. What happen to that Idea?

I was not raised into the profession. I had no legacy to follow. But as a child I was always drawn to the sirens. I would stand by and watch them go by and wonder whose life they were going to save. Those firefighters always seemed so together. By together I don't mean individually but as a group. They were bonded by the job at hand. Nothing was going to deter them from their lifesaving mission. Little did I know then that many of those missions were less than life saving but nonetheless they seemed to be committed to the task at hand. That was one of the things that drew me to the fire service, being part of a team.

As I grew, I leaned in other directions but always within eyesight of what was to be my final destination. It was only after I had finished college that I had realized that what I had just spent the last nine years preparing for was not what I wanted to do for the rest of my life. I wanted to be a *firefighter*. They say that all boys want to be firefighters. And then they grow up. Well, I grew up and then wanted to be a firefighter.

When I first became a firefighter it was all about learning the job. I had many teachers and many lessons. My first critical lesson learned was that you never let go of the halyard and place your hand on the inside of the ladder, when raising a ground ladder. The result can be that the fly section comes down and wedges your pinky finger between it and the bed section. (I will never be able to straighten out that finger again.) The lessons were there for the taking. I learned everything I could about ladders, nozzles, hose, knots, and EMS.

Anyone who has been a firefighter knows that that is the easy stuff. Learning the job was one thing but loving the job was something totally different. Loving the job meant that you cared about knowing your part and your partner's part. Loving your job meant that you cared about your partner.

The Idea is that everyone goes home. The Idea is that we put our differences aside for twenty-four hours. The Idea is that individually we may be good firefighters but together we are a great team of firefighters. The Idea is that our differences make us a more well-rounded unit. This unit can in turn be proud of the job that it does. Other units can be proud of the job they do. These proud units form a proud battalion. These proud battalions form a proud department.

But pride is spelled with five letters. It is not a four-letter word. To say “My company is the best in the city” should not be looked at with disdain. The reply should be “I am sorry but *my* company is the best in the city.” Striving to be the best should not be confused with saying you are the best. Having company pride should not be a scarlet letter hidden from public view. Company pride should be worn on all of our chests as a symbol that we are doing what we were meant to do, what we are happy to do, what we are honored to do. Remember, you *get* to go to work as a firefighter. It is not something you *have* to do.

The Idea was that pride in the fire service was born out of pride in serving your country. That most of our department’s leaders served their country and brought that pride to the fire service. The Idea was that when you are proud of something you inherently make more of an effort to succeed at it. The more you succeed the harder you try, and so on and so on. What happens to those leaders? What has turned them against what they once cherished so much? Why is company pride under attack? Those of us who declare our pride do not do so at the expense of our departments. I could not be proud of my company without being proud of my department as well. Rather company pride is merely a means of separating ourselves from other proud companies. This does not destroy the department, as some would believe, but makes it stronger. We all inherently want to do a good job. We also don’t want to look bad because someone else does their job better than us. Sometimes all the motivation we need is to see a neighboring company train. As companies train to better themselves the confidence level of those companies rises and in turn the department level rises. Everything gets better when we train together.

I believe I understand what The Idea is. The Idea is that we will do what comes natural to us. The Idea is that love of our job encompasses love for our brothers and sisters. The Idea is that not everybody feels the same and with that comes tolerance. The Idea is that as long as we believe what we are doing is just then we are doing the right thing. We only have ourselves to rely on in the heat of the battle. The Idea is that we will be there for ourselves.