

My friend. My brother. Denny Allen

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Some people have character, and others are a character.

My friend Denny Allen... he was both.

There are certain people in your life who are always in need of something – while others are always there when you need them.

My friend Dennis Allen was always there when you needed him.

Certain people work behind the scenes but manage to find their way into the spotlight. Others do great work on the scene but manage to stay in the shadows.

My friend Denny Allen has been on the scene more times in his lifetime than anyone else I know, but he never stood in the limelight. Instead he pushed others to the forefront to receive the recognition they deserved.

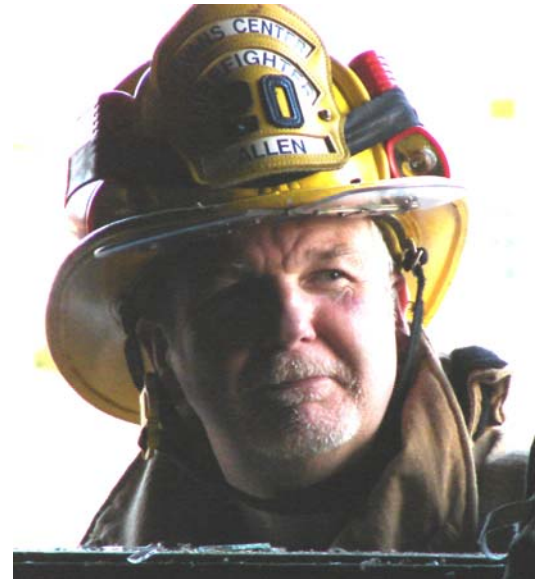
Let me tell you a little about my friend, my brother: Denny Allen.

To say Dennis had a certain way about him is being polite. Never one to boast, he was also never one to hide his feelings. A relatively quiet man, you never had to wonder where you stood with Denny Allen. Not the most tactful, not the most polished, just the most dedicated.

His strong, silent type was compensated for by his crass sense of humor and his signature smile.

It wasn't really a smile in the traditional sense of the word; in fact, most would call it a smirk. His lips stayed together while the corners of his mouth curled ever so slightly. His eyes squinted and his forehead scrunched. His head shook and his eyes welled up and he would start to cough if you got him laughing too hard. The end result was a contagious smile that you just couldn't help laughing at. We affectionately call it a "pie face."

His typical approach was to sit back, listen quietly and then, when you least expect it, he would drop a bomb that put everyone on the floor laughing. What you ended up with is a guy who was tough not to love.



Many people are consumers and some are contributors. Denny Allen was a contributor.

He was omnipresent at fires, rescues and first aid calls for 40 years in the Town of Evans community – responding to *every single emergency* he was physically available for. He even holds the fire department record for delivering the most babies in the field or in the back of an ambulance.

Dennis responded twice to Ground Zero following the attacks of September 11, 2001, providing EMS support to the first responders working the pile and covering calls for the FDNY while they tended to their lost brothers and each other.

But don't think for a second that his life was one-dimensional: devoted only to the fire service.

Dennis demonstrated the unique ability to effectively balance family, work, play and fire department activities. I envied him for that.

Three of the reasons he was so successful are his dedicated wife and best friend Marlene – and his sons Scott and Marcus. Both of them are Eagle Scouts just like their dad. With the addition of Scott's wife Lisa, and most recently his adorable granddaughter Avery, his life seemed complete.

Always putting his family first, Dennis instilled his core values of community service in each of them, involving them in everything he did and being involved in everything they participated in.

Despite that, some might argue that it's been nothing but "all about Dennis" in the six years since he learned he had this deadly lung disease — and in many ways it was. First with the diagnosis, the testing, the treatment, and the transplant; and for the past three and a half years – his re-birth, rehabilitation and recovery.

To many of us, it may have seemed that way. But to Dennis, it's always been about someone else: Marlene. Even when he wasn't at his best, when his health suffered and he was weak – he was a trooper and did the things she wanted to do, saw the things she wanted to see and traveled to the places she wanted to visit, even with his oxygen tank in tow.

If that's what Marlene wanted, then that's what Dennis wanted too. If that's where she wanted to go then he wanted to go with her, to be with her, to love her and to truly cherish her.

Their devotion to each other, their faith and their love story are a lesson and an inspiration for each and everyone of else to follow. I think that was one of their greatest gifts to us all.

Before, during and after the celebration benefit that all of you and so many others generously supported in this very same fire station on September 6, 2008 – Dennis often accused me of marketing him, of making him out to be better than he really was. I disagreed. His story gave me plenty of great material to work with.

Certainly, Dennis was by no means perfect and God knows he was no saint.

Dennis wasn't a great man. He was simply a good man who did great things by helping others. And in many ways, he represented the goodness in each of us. He was a simple guy, demonstrated by the simple goals he set while recovering from his transplant.

He wrote:

- ✓ "To be able to bring laundry up from the basement."
- ✓ "To make it up a flight of stairs the normal way – not on my butt."
- ✓ "To sleep with Marlene again in my own bed." – *I think the 'Don't ask. Don't tell' policy is appropriate for these last two!*
- ✓ And the most telling of his character: "To be able to help others. To pay it forward, big or small and many times over."

He even achieved one of his greatest post-transplant goals: to be cleared to drive the apparatus to fire and emergency calls once again – as he had done for 40 years.

In reality, I didn't make him out to be a better man than he really was. In the end, he made me a better man because I knew him, I learned from him and because I loved him.

I'm sure that many of you would agree that he had the same impact on you.

Last night, someone at the funeral home said they were sorry that I lost my buddy. I politely corrected them by saying that "I didn't lose my buddy, I know right where he is." And I will carry him there with me always.

I pray and hope that you will do the same.

Marlene, Scott and Marcus: Thank you for sharing Dennis with our fire department, our community and each of us.

Dennis lives on in our hearts, our minds and most importantly, in the next kind deed we do for someone else. We love you.