

Good evening. My name is Nicki Parks and my father, N.P. “Nick” Parks III lost his life 45 years ago. I am honored to have been asked to speak to you all about my father.

First and foremost, I would like to thank all of you for coming here today. The dedication of the City of Durango and every one of you out there to keeping my father and Gale’s memories alive are why, 45 years later, we have again all gathered to remember that horribly fateful day.

I had yet to make my entrance into this world on August 24th, 1974. That wouldn’t happen for another 53 days. You must all know how thankful I am to have such a strong mother. At the tender age of 24, Loretta Parks faced and conquered tragedy to ensure that I would enter this world healthy and whole and be able to honor my father every day of my life. Has it been easy – not always, but she made sure that I knew my father and the sacrifice that he made so that others could go home safely that day.

I am thankful that my father’s profession carries such a “brotherhood” with it. No matter how many years pass, my father and Gale will never be forgotten. To all of the men and women who have followed in the invisible footsteps that they left – THANK YOU! I can’t say that word enough but let me say it again – THANK YOU!

I am thankful that early in my life, I was able to meet and befriend Jarod Emerson, Gale’s son who was born 3 months after me. We go years without seeing each other, but the bond between us will never be matched or broken.

I am thankful that I had the mental preparation of my own life’s events to help my daughter deal with the passing of her own father. The questions, the sadness, the anger.....I was able to channel back to my

youth and become my mother when she was talking to me about those same feelings that I was having (and still have to this day).

I am thankful for my family for sharing stories of my dad when I was little so I could get to know him. See, memories of my father are other people's memories and it took many years to have a true sense of who he was. So who was he? Nick Parks was the 4th child and 1st son born to Sylvia Louise and NP Parks II. He has 3 older sisters, Jeanne, Sherry and Jeri. He would also enjoy the company of two brothers, John and David, born after him. They grew up watching their dad, my grandfather, as a policeman who then transformed into the Fire Chief. My daddy aspired to be just like his dad – “Chief” as I remember him being called. He couldn't wait to graduate high school so he could become a fireman and ascend the ranks to fire chief – to become the next in line to carry on the family legacy. But then he was told he could not work for his father. So, as many young men did in those days, he became a reserve police officer and joined the Army Reserves. Grandpa took an early retirement and daddy jumped in with both feet and was an excellent fireman.

As he was only 24 years old when he passed, many of the stories that I have heard in my life reflect his orneriness. He had a mischievous smile – you could tell when he was up to something just by his smile. The other firemen used to tie him to the flag pole and turn the hose on at full pressure. Many a day's my mother would have to take him a dry uniform to the fire house. He bought his mother a snake for her birthday one year, he wrestled a bear downtown, he would tie fellow firefighters to the couch they were sleeping on upstairs in the fire house and then ring the alarm. That couch posed a large problem for those trying to slide down the pole to get to the truck. He was all boy and his actions showed it. When they were 24 years old, my mom and dad met and instantly fell in love. They married shortly after that. He

loved her with all of his heart and was ecstatic when he found out they were expecting. I was going to be a boy and my name was going to be NP Parks IV. There was no question in his mind about these “facts”. Shortly before he died, he changed his mind. I was going to be a girl. When my mom asked him why, he said he had never been very good at football so maybe he needed to try his hand at tennis. He also informed my mom that my middle name was to be Nicole. I am thankful that his nickname was Nick and not Chris.....as a girl Christopher Nicole might have been a little harder to explain than Nicki Nicole. And trust me when I tell you that I am asked often why I have two of the same names. I am proud of my name and the explanation that follows always brings a smile to the faces of those who ask.

I am thankful for the technology that we possess in today’s society. As I have said before, my memories are your memories and stories and pictures can now be shared with the click of a button. This also allows me to digitally store pieces of my father’s life so that I may keep the memories alive for my daughter, Jordyn. She also bears the middle name of Nicole to remind her always of “Papa Parks” and the life that he sacrificed trying to save others. I would give anything to share just one day with my father, but he wouldn’t have had it any other way. He was a fireman! It was his passion to save people. He died doing what he loved; a hero, – in the truest sense of the word and I am honored to call him daddy.

I want to thank all of the men who fought that fire with my dad that day, especially those that are here to help us celebrate. They are all bound by an unbreakable bond that none of us will ever know. Most of all – I want to thank Butch Gomez. I have never known a man in my life

who has exhibited more “honor” than Butch. He stood next to my father in his last moments – an act that would break the spirit of any accomplished human being. He loved (and still loves) his fellow firefighters with passion that most of us would be honored to experience. Thank you Butch for your dedication to the trade...and always to my daddy.

Thank you to Durango Fire and Rescue for keeping Nick Parks’ memory alive and thanks again to all of you for allowing me to share my story here today. I am truly THANKFUL!!