

Arizona firefighter Dustin DeFord, 24, had 'simple faith in Jesus'

Christian Petersen / Getty Images

By Laura J. Nelson

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A makeshift memorial and a sign reading "Heroes" is displayed outside of Station 7 in Prescott, Ariz., which housed the Granite Mountain Interagency Hotshot Crew.

Dustin DeFord grew up knowing God and fire. He was raised in a tiny town in southeastern Montana by a Baptist pastor who volunteered for the local fire department.

Surrounded by teenagers and toddlers, Dustin — the fifth of 10 children — was always loud and in motion, roughhousing with his seven brothers and sprinting during playtime. Residents of Ekalala, a town of fewer than 400 people, and friends from church helped raise the family.

“Even into his 20s, he was an innocent boy who never grew up,” his mother, Celeste DeFord, told The Times. Even in adulthood, she said, he retained a “pure view of the world.”

[WHO THEY WERE: Fallen Arizona firefighters](#)

DeFord was the life of the party, his mother said — not the bar type of party, she hastened to add, but good, clean fun: hunting, hiking, spending time with a very large family.

The numerous DeFords stayed in touch using a Facebook group called The DeFord Grapevine (description: “Who are these special people, and why are there so many of them?”). They shared recipes, birthdays and updates.

Dustin DeFord and his brothers had long dreamed of starting a family fire company, often tossing out ideas of how to fund it and who would do what. In time, the family’s eldest son joined the Marines. The next four became firefighters.

DeFord joined his father at the Carter County Fire Department when he turned 18. He left firefighting for three years to attend Cornerstone Bible Institute, an evangelical school in South Dakota, and serve a mission in Canada. When he returned home, he began searching for work on a hotshot crew.

“He loved the eliteness, the physical bars that were raised so high,” his mother said. “You had to achieve to be a part of those crews.”

Dustin DeFord moved to Arizona in January to join the Granite Mountain Interagency Hotshot Crew.

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To read this article in its entirety, go to: <http://www.latimes.com/news/nation/nationnow/la-na-nn-arizona-fire-dustin-deford-montana-jesus-20130702,0,7504929.story>