

Rick Schroeder

Getting another chance



Ricky Schroeder, 42, of Medford knows a thing or two about second chances. After a two-decade struggle with drug addiction, the Medford man found redemption in a job at Grayback Forestry Inc.

"Fighting wildfires was something he'd wanted to do for a long time," said Linda Parks, 60, Schroeder's mother, " but he didn't have his life straightened up."

Two years ago, inspired by his now-3½-year-old daughter, Ruby, Schroeder got help. Once stable, his mother said, he started looking for work that would take him into the woods. He heard about fighting wildfires -- and how much it paid. "He was sold on doing it," Parks said. "But he knew it was dangerous."

Last summer was Schroeder's first wildfire season. Parks said her son, who also has two teenage children, returned home in the fall, exhausted but exhilarated. "He said it was awesome but dangerous and scary," his mother recalls.

Parks said that she isn't surprised her son got out of the crash with the least severe injuries of anyone. "He finally got his second chance at life," she said. "And he didn't want to lose it."

Parks said her son told her he'd whispered one thing over and over again as he struggled to escape the broken, blazing helicopter.

"I'm not dying. I'm not dying. I'm not dying."

-- *Michelle Roberts*