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Fallen Heroes

“All gave some, some gave all.” September 11th, 2001. Most Americans can remember where they were that fateful morning that changed the political landscape of our nation. Sitting in kindergarten I had no idea why my teacher was sending us all home from school early. I got home to see my dad sitting in front of the television watching as news and updates flashed across the screen. As a retired lieutenant of the FDNY and NYPD officer, the acts of terror shook him along with citizens across the nation. Michael Lynch was among America’s 343 bravest firefighters who sacrificed their own lives for others. He has left a lasting impact on my life, without ever having the chance to meet him. Michael’s involvement in 9/11, his family’s effort in the relief search at Ground Zero and the memorial foundation created in his honor speak volumes to his character and the Lynch family’s desire to help others. They were determined to turn something good into this unspeakable tragedy and have assisted many students like myself in the process.

By September 2001, Michael had been a FDNY Firefighter for about eighteen months, permanently assigned to Ladder 32, Engine 62, in the Bronx, New York. On September 11th, Michael was on rotation with Engine 40, Ladder 35 on the Upper Westside of Manhattan learning how to combat high-rise fires, when the call came that a plane had struck the World Trade Center. Michael, along with fellow firefighters from the company, responded to the calls for help at the Twin Towers.

Twelve of thirteen firefighters from Engine 40/Ladder 35 were lost that day. Michael was last seen heading towards the entrance of the South Tower of the World Trade Center with other firefighters from Engine 40. In David Halberstam's novel *Firehouse*, he says, "There is a quick flash of videotape that shows Lieutenant John Ginley, Michael Lynch, Steve Mercado and Mike D'Auria as they descend into the lobby of Building 4 and head for the lobby of the south tower. Though no one is sure of the exact time it was shot, it obviously takes place well into the disaster with the air full of debris." The event captured by a news cameraman provided the family with information that later became valuable in the recovery process. Michael heroically answered the call that morning. Without a moment's hesitation, Michael and his engine company climbed aboard their engine and raced into the burning tower. Thousands lost their lives as the towers fell that morning. Unlike many of the victims that day, these brave firefighters ran in, while others ran out.

Service to others and putting others first came natural to Michael and the Lynch family. Michael came from a large family of ten and was very close with his siblings and parents. He was family oriented, caring deeply for his loved ones. Days after the attacks, Michael's father, Jack Lynch, turned his mourning into a mission to find Michael's remains and see them buried. Jack Lynch stated in an interview with the *Bronx Times* in 2011, "I received a pass from the Fire Department and joined the rescue and recovery effort and went to the site practically every day," "I was there till the last day, May 30." He was not only looking for his son, but anyone else's son, who might be recovered. After months of searching through the rubble, on the evening of March 21, 2002, on his way back from Ground Zero, Lynch received the

closure his family had been seeking. A few blocks from home after yet another day at Ground Zero, Lynch received a call that Michael's body had been recovered. The bittersweet relief they felt wouldn't end there. To ease the pain of their loss, the Lynch family decided to bring hope and joy to others.

This hope and joy came in the form of a foundation that the Lynch family established that gives scholarships in Michael's name. Numerous organizations were started after the 9/11 attacks, but the Michael Lynch Memorial Foundation is unique. Since its inception, it has expanded in scope and is almost completely organized and run by family members. The organization's website states, "Our mission is to provide grants (scholarships) to enable children of firefighters and other victims of the September 11 attacks and other fires and disasters to afford higher education." The Michael Lynch Memorial Scholarship Program is a charitable foundation established by the family and friends of Michael. In an article in the New York Times, Maureen Baker, Michael's sister, says, "The foundation gave out five \$20,000 scholarships in its first year, and last year gave out 11." As of 2015, the foundation is projected to hit \$4.75 million dollars raised in scholarship funds. On a more personal note, I was honored to be one of the scholarship recipients in 2014. Michael Lynch's Memorial Foundation has provided me with an incredible opportunity to pursue my education and intended career as a physical therapist. I intend to pay it forward one day providing hope and joy to my future patients. I'm eternally grateful for Michael's courage and bravery and the legacy his family has created in his honor.

Halberstam concluded his novel with, "September 11, of course, changed everything. My most lasting image of that morning will always be of the firefighters going into the Twin Towers just as everyone else was trying to leave them." This image depicts the selflessness and bravery of all emergency responders who gave everything for others. Michael Lynch's involvement in 9/11, his family's recovery efforts and the memorial foundation created in his name is merely one of many influential stories that came from September 11th.

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