

From the Ashes Michael's Spirit Soars

The sun burns bright in the endless blue sky, and the sea born wind lightly caress my face as I painfully fix my gaze for the thousandth time at the Manhattan skyline, void of the Twin Towers that once stood there proudly. My family and I would often walk this road, the Indian Trail in Silver Beach, as the World Trade Center rose to its majestic heights in the 1970s. The World Trade Center was a crowning achievement for the city of New York – an icon of hope and a symbol of American ingenuity and industrial might. On September 11, and the long, sorrow-ridden months that followed, we would often look south to the empty skyline, the missing towers, the columns of smoke and the lights from “the pile” as the rescue and, later, the recovery efforts at Ground Zero continued relentlessly.

It is hard to believe it is 10 years since we last saw Michael, gripped his firm hands, hugged him closely, and felt our hearts lifted by his mischievous smile and dancing eyes. What a gift to the world and humanity he was. When you were with Michael, you felt good – about yourself, about life. He always had a joke, a gentle taunt, a laugh to brighten your darkest day. He was happy and hopeful, and optimistic about the future. He was filled with music and song.

As his parents, we were so proud that he had chosen to dedicate himself to the honorable profession of a New York City firefighter. Then, on that bright fall morning in September 2001, God asked Michael to summon all of his courage, faith, and his love of life and go to the horror of the 9/11 attacks and lay down his life. For us, the candle of life that burned so brightly in Michael was extinguished, but we also felt his spirit soar.

God gave us several gifts to help deal with the loss of Michael. We had the chance to see Michael enter # 4 World Trade Center on television and we still have the videotape of his last minutes on earth. He and his brethren from Engine 40 walked into that building with the full knowledge they would never walk out. You can see it in each of their eyes and sense them make peace with their Maker. The courage of their act takes your breath away. Our other sons and daughters watch and tearfully admire his bravery, openly questioning if they could do what he had done. The second gift was to discover his remains six months later and to be able to bury him in New York. For those of us who toiled every day on the pile for months on end, this was our single-minded goal – recover our son. God blessed us to bring Michael home.

People ask us how we are doing, what it feels like 10 years later, have we moved on or moved forward. The answer is simple – we have learned to live with and cope with the loss of Michael, but we can never forget or move on. His departure has left a tremendous void in our lives. He was part of us and is gone. We celebrate his bravery, his dedication, and his courage. We mourn his loss, what he would have been, and the impact he would have had on others. We miss him, plain and simple. He was a joy and God asked him to help him and he did.

Michael's brothers and sisters could not let his death be the end. His spirit soared and we all felt it. His life was relatively short, but his legacy had to live on. Together, we knew we had to do something good to help others and turn a horrible tragedy into something positive. In 2002, we established the Michael Lynch Memorial Foundation to provide college scholarships to children of victims of 9/11 and the children of active or deceased firefighters. It was conceived out of love. Love of Michael, love of life, love of

education and the knowledge that educating tomorrow's servant leaders was our best chance to overcome the ignorance that feeds terrorism.

The Foundation has been more successful and generous than we had ever dreamed. In a decade we have provided 96 scholarships totaling \$2.3 million dollars to the children of victims of 9/11 and active and deceased fireman. The Foundation is highly efficient and directs 98 cents of every dollar to actual scholarships. There are very minimal administrative costs because everything we do is based on volunteers dedicating their time and effort. It is what Michael would have wanted it to be.

It is a decade since Michael was called to die. Into a burning, crumbling building he walked surrounded by death and fear. The courage he displayed gives us the strength to carry on in his absence. We miss him dearly but we are comforted that from the Ashes of the South Tower Michael Lynch's Spirit Soars!

By Jack and Kathleen Lynch

Parents of Michael Francis Joseph Lynch (FDNY Badge # 2315)

September 8, 2011