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TERRORIST ATTACKS

For Two 'Buddies,' the Ultimate Act of Friendship

By Kathryn Wellin
STAFF WRITER

For 31 years, Diane Urban and Dianne Gladstone were close friends as well as co-workers. For the past three years, they worked for New York State on the 86th floor of Tower Two. Last Tuesday, one of them tried to save the other.

Urban nearly escaped down a staircase, when she changed course to help her friend, who had injured her leg. Now both women are missing.

"I know my sister — she never could have lived with herself if she ran for those stairs," said Terry Corio of Manhasset. "It's like buddies in the war."

The story of how Diane Urban, 50, of Malverne tried to save Dianne Gladstone, 55, of Forest Hills was told to Corio and Gladstone's husband, Herbert, by co-workers of the missing women.

Shortly after the first tower was hit, Urban and Gladstone ran hand in hand, following colleagues to a concourse area on the 78th floor. There, hundreds of people waited for elevators to take them down to safety. Then the second plane crashed into their tower, unleashing a tidal wave of reverberations.

Gladstone was hurled away.

From the staircase, Urban spotted her friend. Her leg seemed broken.

"I'm going to help Dianne," Urban said to co-workers on the stairs. By the time she reached Gladstone, fireballs were spewing paralyzing smoke and heat. As they ran down the stairs, the co-workers saw Diane and Dianne huddling with two male colleagues — all of them shielding their faces with their hands.



Dianne Gladstone



Diane Urban

"I don't think they ever made it to the stairs," Corio said. "And then the building collapsed. They probably suffocated very quickly.

"I think Diane could have gotten out," Corio said. "She was quick on her feet. I guess she thought she had time enough to carry her friend out."

If the blast hadn't broken his wife's leg, she might have survived, said Gladstone's husband.

"She wasn't a typical 55-year-old woman," he said. "She could keep up with most people in aerobics class."

His wife loved the view from her 86th-floor office, he said. Both women worked for the state Department of Taxation & Finance. They were working in the same office in Queens three years ago when they accepted promotions that transferred them to the Twin Towers. Gladstone planned to retire in April after 37 years of service to the state.

Eight months ago, Urban moved to Malverne after a lifetime in Queens. The house was "like her toy," said Corio's husband, Ray. She spent her free time "dolling it up" and planned to retire there in five years.

"My sister just felt that she had picked the most wonderful place for herself," Terry Corio said. "She was looking forward to the holiday season, the tree lighting in Malverne."

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— Terry Corio of Manhasset

She added that her sister was proud to live in Steven McDonald's hometown, referring to the New York City police officer paralyzed by a gunshot 15 years ago who now makes public appearances espousing a message of forgiveness.

For many days, Herbert Gladstone, a crane operator, hoped for the best at ground zero as he watched fellow operators clear the rubble. By Sunday, he was "pretty well cried out."

"I cannot imagine that anybody is going to get out of there solid in a whole piece," he said.

Although the Corios initially harbored a "window of hope," they are "down to a peephole," Ray Corio said.

For Terry Corio, the co-workers' story is a gift, a "wonderful thing they can tell us," she said. "It gives me a picture."

It is a picture, Corio said, that proves the terrorists did not prevail.

"You can kill some of us, but you cannot conquer us. The goodness in people will go on."

A Man Who Was Proud to Work on the 91st Floor

By Victor Manuel Ramos
STAFF WRITER

When his employer started moving its offices to southern New Jersey, Frederick Kuo Jr. asked to keep his office on the 91st floor of Two World Trade Center.

Kuo, 53, of Great Neck, liked that the old offices were closer to his home. He liked that it had been his place of work for the same firm for many years, through company growth, name changes and the 1993 World Trade Center bombing.

Most of all, he liked the view.

Just five days before the attack, Kuo brought his wife, Teresita, to the office. He proudly took her to the window to show her the sparkling Hudson River, Ellis Island and the Statue of Liberty.

Kuo, a mechanical engineer, reluctantly had made an arrangement with his company, Washington Group International, to work out of his home instead of moving to Princeton. He wanted his wife to help him pick the bookcases and other furniture he would need for his home office.



Frederick Kuo worked on the 91st floor.

Before his move, though, he had some important work to complete. Kuo, who had a specialized knowledge of power plants, was scheduled to travel to Saudi Arabia on Sept. 8, but the electric-plant work he was to oversee was postponed.

Many factors, his wife said, seemed to have conspired to put him in his office when the hijacked planes crashed into the buildings.

After the first plane hit last Tuesday, Kuo urged everyone in the office to evacuate, but he stayed behind and called his wife. Kuo could get in only a few phrases before he realized the imminent danger.

"A plane just hit tower number one," Kuo told her. "I saw three people fall from the building. Number Two is OK." Then he stopped, for a moment. "Oh my God, something is happening here. Gotta go."

Teresita Kuo, a gynecologist who does medical reviews for Nassau County, could hear glass shattering in the background as the phone connection was lost.

Her husband, a highly devout man, chairman of the board of elders at the Community Church of Great Neck, and an avid tennis player is among the missing.

At the church, he played a role uniting different segments of the community, she said. He is "half Chinese, half Filipino, but all-American, because this was where he grew up," she added. His family lived in Flushing before moving to the Great Neck area, where he attended the public schools. He graduated from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology.

For their 30th wedding anniversary on Oct. 17, the Kuos had planned to continue a family tradition and vacation at the Thousand Islands of the St. Lawrence River in Ontario with their four children, Frederick James of North Andover, Mass.; Melissa of San Francisco and Michael and David of Great Neck.

Those plans are now on hold. "I have known him for 31½ years, and I consider myself the luckiest person with having such a man for my companion and my husband and father of my kids," Teresita Kuo said in a calm voice. "It's very strange, I am normally very emotional, I cry at movies, but for some reason I feel kind of peaceful. We all do."

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