NYC 9/11 Public Portal Document

DAILY NEWS, SUNDAY, OCTOBER 21, 2001

Sad parade of farewells marches on across city

Families celebrate lives

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A fireman's widow and 10 children led hundreds of funeral-weary firefighters into a Manhattan church yesterday for a sad memorial Mass.

Ranks of blue-uniformed men, some from as far away as Texas, stood three deep outside St. Columba Church at 343 W. 25th St. as pipers skirled a mournful air for Firefighter Frank Palombo, 46, of Park Slope, Brooklyn, who died in the Sept. 11 attack on the World Trade Center.

Two American flags fluttered from the raised ladders of four fire trucks as Palombo's wife, Jean, led the mournful procession into the church, pushing her youngest child, Margaret Mary, in a stroller.

Margaret Mary will be a year old tomorrow.

The Palombos' nine other children — Anthony, 15; Frank Jr., 14; Joseph, 12; Maria, 11; Thomas, 9; John, 8; Patrick, 6; Daniel, 4, and [illegible], 2 — marched on either side of their mother, followed by more than 100 relatives and close friends, in addition to Palombo's brother firefighters.

The family sat in the front pews, and nearby were Mayor Giuliani and former Gov. Hugh Carey. The overflow crowd sat in an attached auditorium with a closed-circuit video feed of the service.

Among the mourners was Battalion Chief Stuart Grant of the Dallas Fire Department, who said Dallas offered to send support personnel and equipment shortly after the attack, but was told there was plenty of help closer by.

So the Dallas firefighters did what they could — they spearheaded a fund drive that has amassed $600,000 to date.

"We are like family," Grant said. "We are a brotherhood and feel close to our fellow firefighters here in New York."

At the beginning of the service, Jean Palombo said she chose scriptural readings from those she found marked in her husband's favorite Bible passages.

"I think what is most important for me to tell you today is that this liturgy is a celebration — a celebration of Frank's life, and a celebration of Frank's death, and a celebration of Frank's resurrection into eternal life," she said.

"That is what we celebrate today because your father got to taste eternal life here, and now he is living that eternal life. He is in heaven. Yes, we are sad, and I will cry, I know," she said, looking out at her children. "But we are happy for Daddy, right?"

Palombo's memorial service was one of four yesterday for victims of the Sept. 11 terrorist attack.

Making a career of caring

At Our Lady of the Blessed Sacrament Church in Bayside, Queens, an overflow crowd attended the rites for Michael Mullan, 34, of Ladder Co. 12, a 12-year veteran firefighter, an emergency-room nurse and a captain in the U.S. Army Reserve.

Mullan was one of five members of the ladder company killed in the attack.

Army Chaplain Peter Sousa told how Mullan and another [illegible] woman from 2 World Trade Center when they heard a radio "mayday" call. Leaving the civilian with the other man, Mullan ran to answer the distress call. The woman and the other firefighter escaped with their lives.

"In one way, Michael did have a choice," Sousa said. "He could have stayed safe. But in another way he didn't have a choice. Had he not gone to help, it would have gone against all he was. Michael had to do all he could when his neighbor's life was in danger."

Mullan's nursing instructor at Hunter College/Bellevue, Fran McGuinnes, recalled how Mullan would keep watch over her as she went to her car after their night-school class.

"That young man who watched me go home, today we take him on his final journey and we're going to see him home safely," she said.

A difficult day

At St. Ignatius Loyola Church on Park Ave. at 84th St., the Rev. Walter Modrys offered a memorial Mass for Firefighter Michael Carroll, 39, of Ladder 3, a 15-year Fire Department veteran.

"I've always been able to preach at a funeral with some composure," Modrys said to the hundreds of firefighters and family members gathered. "This is the first time I've presided at a memorial Mass for someone who gave his life to save others. I hope I can get through this."

He recalled watching firemen battle a blaze in an abandoned building in the neighborhood a few years ago.

"It was so dark, eerie and frightening," he said. "In the darkness, you could see the little rays of light from the flashlights. For you, it's routine, but all of us were amazed."

He said the entire city has finally begun to realize what firefighters do: "You go into darkness to bring out life."

Carroll's brother, retired Fire Capt. William Carroll, recalled the time Michael met his wife-to-be, Nancy.

"From the first day he laid eyes on Nancy, he adored her. For Mike, the sun rose and set on Nancy," he said, and "he had pure love for his kids, Brendan, 7, and Olivia, 4. If you ever wanted to see a little bit of heaven on earth, all you had to see was Mike with Brendan."

And he loved to play "little-[illegible]games" with Olivia, and cuddle her, he said.

Speaking for Mayor Giuliani, Deputy Mayor Tony Coles called Michael Carroll, "A true American patriot and a true American hero. ... He died as he lived — a hero whose first concern was the safety of his fellow human beings."

One of the guys

Earlier, at St. Fidelis Church in College Point, Queens, 150 mourners, mostly family members and friends, attended the service for Thomas Shubert, 43, first vice president of Cantor-Fitzgerald, one of 700 members of that firm to die at the World Trade Center.

Craig Garon, a neighbor and friend of five years in Eastchester, N.Y., recalled Shubert as "a bubbly guy, considerate and energetic, who always loved to be around the guys.

"Just being around Tommy was a blast," he said. "He was a Yankees and Giants fan. You couldn't talk bad about the Bombers or Big Blue — you'd never hear the end of it."

"Tommy's professional life was just as joyous as his personal life," said his cousin Richard Shubert. "He loved Cantor Fitzgerald.

"He worked his way up the ladder. He said, 'I clawed and clawed — I refused to take no for an answer until they finally opened the door to me, and when they did I kicked it down and hit a home run.' And that's what he did."

With Joyce Shelby and Warren Woodberry Jr.

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