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WTC burn victim loses weeks-long struggle

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For 41 days, World Trade Center attack victim Jennieann Maffeo clung to life, refusing to surrender to the torturous burns that covered 90 percent of her body.

Her tenacity amazed doctors at New York's Cornell hospital who had feared she would not survive for more than 36 hours.

As the hours turned into days, and then weeks, her family's hopes grew that she would pull off a miraculous recovery.

But yesterday, those hopes turned to tears as the Maffeos were forced to deal with the news that their loved one had lost her valiant struggle.

"It's a horrible, horrible time," her sister Andrea Maffeo said yesterday as the family mourned at their Brooklyn home.

"She fought and fought for as long as she could. She was so strong. But now she's gone, and our hearts went with her."

Maffeo, 40, who worked at Wall Street brokerage firm UBS PaineWebber for five years as a senior associate, was waiting for a bus outside the World Trade Center when the first plane crashed into the north tower on Sept. 11.

She was doused with burning jet fuel and a colleague, Wai Chung, was killed.

A bystander, New Jersey architect Ronnie Clifford, saw Maffeo with her clothes burned to her skin and shielded her with his coat when the first tower collapsed.

Clifford's wife, who declined to be named, said yesterday the entire Clifford family, including relatives in Ireland, had been praying for Maffeo's recovery.

"The last time we saw her in the hospital she was doing so well," she said. "This is so upsetting."

UBS PaineWebber senior executive Joseph Grano told staff yesterday that their colleague's six-week battle had ended.

"She will be greatly missed," he said.

A Mass will be held at 9 a.m. Saturday at St. Mary's Catholic Church, 23rd Avenue and 85th Street in Brooklyn.

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