

FROM HEROES TO ICONS



The Associated Press

Mike Heffernan, second from right at front, poses with fellow firefighters from Engine 13 and Ladder 22 at their firehouse in New York Thursday, Aug. 15, 2002. The firehouse lost nine firefighters in the World Trade Center attacks on Sept. 11.

# 'It's a big thing to shoulder'

After a year viewed as heroes, firefighters say they want to shed the mantle

NEW YORK (AP) — John Hemsley spent his vacation in Myrtle Beach, S.C., trying to hide. He dodged questions about what he did for a living and wore no paraphernalia associated with his work. "I spent my week trying to be incognito," he said.

Hemsley was tired of being a hero. As a New York Fire Department captain in an Upper East Side firehouse that lost nine men in the attacks, Hemsley was thrust into the strange limelight of the post-Sept. 11 world, in which ordinary men suddenly became icons.

He's done a high school graduation, a grammar school moving-up ceremony, multiple church groups and too many benefit dinners to count. He's signed autographs, posed for pictures and given hugs. He's polished and repolished his speech, thanking the public and praising the American spirit.

"I felt an obligation to do it," he said. "But it was still overwhelming."

By the time summer arrived, "I was barely limping across the finish line."

In the altered cultural landscape after Sept. 11, New York firefighters and, to a lesser extent, NYPD and Port Authority

police officers, have been elevated to almost mythic status. It is a mantle that some have relished, but most have worn uncomfortably.

In a profession that frowns on self-promotion, many have come to see the hero status as a burden, something they never asked for and feel they can't live up to. Others have even argued that it's dangerous.

"It's a big thing to have to shoulder," said firefighter Mike Heffernan, who lost his brother on Sept. 11. "Especially on top of the grieving you're still doing."

In the days immediately following Sept. 11, city firehouses became meccas of grief; firefighters, the objects of worship. Hundreds showed up with flowers, poems and gifts.

The flow has abated considerably, but some firehouses remain besieged.

In Lower Manhattan, when a fire company responds near ground zero, firefighters have to stop on the way back to sign autographs and work the crowd, said firefighter Tommy Narducci, a member of Engine 10.

"Anytime we're near the rig, forget it," he said. "It's photography central."

In the months that followed Sept. 11, as sales of firefighter action figures and anything

FDNY skyrocketed, the department was bombarded with requests for public appearances. Gruff men, used to going to the corner bar after work, became speechmakers and black-tie dinner regulars. They popped champagne backstage with singer Bono of U2 and threw out the first pitch at playoff games. FDNY members served as pageant judges, graduation speakers and parade marshals. Countless appearances have taken them from Simsboro, La., to Paris, France.

The demand on police officers has been less, but some have been similarly flooded with invitations. Port Authority police dog handler David Lim, who was pulled from the rubble but lost his canine partner, Sirius, has rung the opening bell at the New York Stock Exchange, traveled to Alaska to start the Iditarod dog sled race and presided over the Chinese New Year Parade in San Francisco. At a recent charity auction he attended in San Diego, someone bought one of Lim's Port Authority hats for \$650.

"After the anniversary," he hopes, "things will naturally calm down."

Hemsley, being a captain, shouldered much of the responsibility in his house, Engine 22,

Ladder 13. His willingness, albeit reluctant, took the pressure off others, like firefighter Peter Clinton, one of just three men from the house's Sept. 11 day shift who lived.

Clinton, who found himself in demand as a "survivor," declined everything. "Even though it seems like a good thing ... eating for free, drinking for free, good looking girls," he said. "For me, it's like a burden."

The attention only reminds the men of the trauma of the day, and takes away from time with their families when they need it most.

"The Waldorf is nice, but not when you haven't seen your family in three days," Heffernan said.

The hero worship has interrupted the normal grieving process for firefighters, said Malachy Corrigan, director of the fire department's counseling services. In the past, firehouses were sanctuaries, places for healing.

With constant attention, however, "that's almost in suspension," he said.

Only in the past month or two, after the site closed, have firefighters been able to find the space to begin to reflect. One reflection: The pedestal they've been put on is unrealistic.

"We're just regular guys," Heffernan said.

## HEROES IN DEATH

# Some attack victims became well-known

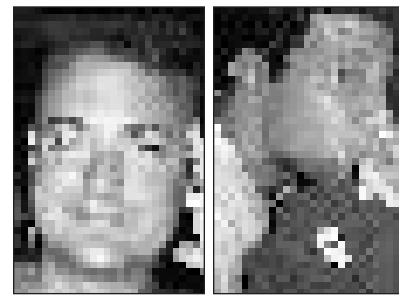
Some of the Sept. 11 victims many Americans felt they got to know after their deaths:

**TODD BEAMER:** The 32-year-old Oracle Corp. account manager from Cranbury, N.J., was believed to have helped lead a passenger attack on Flight 93 hijackers that prevented the jet from reaching its target, possibly the White House. Beamer spoke to a GTE operator on the plane's phone. His final words — "Are you guys ready? Let's roll!" — have become a rallying cry for the war against terrorism. Beamer and wife, Lisa, had two sons: David, now 4, and Drew, 2. His daughter, Morgan, was born in January. Beamer played baseball and basketball in college and loved coaching youth sports. President Bush, in an address to the nation last fall, praised Beamer as "an exceptional man." Today, the Todd M. Beamer Foundation aims to help kids deal with trauma and learn how to make choices.

**MARK BINGHAM:** A 6-foot-5 rugby player and public relations firm founder, Bingham called his mother from Flight 93 and said he and other passengers were planning to fight back. Bingham, 31, was gay, and has become a symbol of inspira-



Beamer Bingham



Burnett Glick

tion to the nation's gay community. The Mark Bingham Leadership Fund provides scholarships to students with interests in areas including rugby and the qualities of teamwork, leadership and heroism. Rugby teams in the San Francisco Bay area now vie for a cup named in Bingham's honor.

**THOMAS E. BURNETT JR.:** Burnett called his wife, Deena, to tell her about the Flight 93 hijacking and said he and other passengers were "going to do something about it." Burnett, 38, of San Ramon, Calif., was senior vice president and chief operating officer of Thoratec Corp., a medical research and development company. His wife and three daughters moved to Arkansas this year to be closer to her parents. The new Thomas Burnett Family Foundation plans to provide endowments

for children's bereavement camps and leadership scholarships at selected universities.

**JEREMY GLICK:** Glick called his wife, Lyz, after terrorists took over Flight 93. She patched the call to a 911 dispatcher, who told Glick about earlier attacks in New York. Glick told his wife some passengers had taken a vote, and "We're going to rush the hijackers." Glick, 31, of West Milford, N.J., had been a collegiate judo champion at the University of Rochester. His older sister, Jennifer, is president of the new Jeremy's Heroes foundation, which has supplied sneakers to kids in Chicago and paid for 20 children in Washington to attend a soccer camp. The idea is to build character through sports.

**THE REV. MYCHAL JUDGE:** Judge's death certificate listed

him as victim No. 00001 — the first official fatality of the World Trade Center attack. A stretch of West 31st Street has been renamed in the New York fire department chaplain's honor, and the Mychal Judge ferry runs around Manhattan and from New Jersey. A group of New York firefighters traveled to the Vatican to deliver Judge's helmet to Pope John Paul II. And former Fire Commissioner Thomas Von Essen's grandson, born three weeks after the attack, was named Mason Judge. Judge's poster-sized portrait still stands inside the front door of Engine Co. 1/Ladder Co. 24, his local firehouse. The Advocate, a national gay magazine, put him on its cover as one of "our heroes." Thousands filled the church for Judge's funeral.

**On the Net:**  
**The Legacy of Flight 93:** <http://www.flight93legacy.org/>  
**The Todd M. Beamer Foundation:** <http://www.beamerfoundation.org>  
**Jeremy's Heroes:** <http://www.jeremysheroes.com>  
**Mark Bingham site:** <http://www.markbingham.org/>  
**Thomas Burnett Family Foundation site, expected to be operational by Sept. 11:** <http://www.tomburnettfoundation.com>

# Survivor deals with his demons

**EDITOR'S NOTE** — Adam Mayblum was working for the May Davis Group investment firm on the 87th floor of the World Trade Center's north tower when the first plane hit. He escaped down a stairwell with a wet piece of his T-shirt tied around his face. The day after the attacks, he thought it would help to put thoughts into words and let loved ones know he was safe, so he wrote an e-mail to friends and family. Soon the message was being forwarded around the world. Here, Mayblum, 36, of New Rochelle, N.Y., shares his thoughts a year after the attacks.

By ADAM MAYBLUM  
For The Associated Press

Perhaps the soldiers in the barracks in Lebanon or the heroes of the Normandy landings know what "it" is like. But, then again, they were professionals. They knew that they were in harm's way 24/7. We were professionals of a different sort. Lawyers. Bankers. Brokers. Traders. Waiters.

I was having my daily iced coffee. Light with skim and two Equals. Then "it" arrived. Hell on Earth. It was an hour-and-a-half climb down 87 crowded, hot, and smoky flights. It was fires and sparks and doors that wouldn't open. It was stepping over twisted steel and God knows what else. It was losing dear friends.

I look back at the attack as a whole event unto itself. Not the thousands of little occurrences along the way. The attack and its consequences are of such a magnitude that I still cannot fully absorb it. I think I am better off that way.

I do, however, have some demons to deal with. There are those two events that won't go away. I remember seeing my friend Harry Ramos helping people out of one stairwell while I was helping them into another. What would I have done if I knew then that it was the last time I would see him? Would he have done it anyway if he knew he wasn't going to make it home that night? Did he know that he was crossing that fine line between bravery and death? Did he even think about it? I doubt it. None of us did. But in hindsight, I get to ask these questions and he doesn't.

And then there was the third floor. Almost out. Almost home. I can almost smell the fresh air. And then there was that rumbling. That low vibration I could feel in my bones followed by this inconceivable shaking. Then the lights went out. Pitch black except for some glow-in-the-dark paint and a flashlight.

It was, in reality, 2 WTC collapsing. However, in my world, at that very moment, I was sure it was my stairwell collapsing down upon me under the weight of thousands of people. I was going to die. All I could do was shrug my shoulders, look up at the stairs above, and wait for the pain. Then it passed. A miracle, I thought. It turns out that my miracle was also the death of over a thousand people. Almost a year later, I cannot hear (feel) a train roll by without a flashback to that moment.

I have been told that sometimes a person learns things that cannot be unlearned. I have learned that I am not safe anywhere or at any time. After all, who would have thought that the opening salvo in a war would be a 737 slamming into their office during breakfast?

This knowledge has changed me forever. I don't step out into traffic any more. I drive slower. More cautious. I guess this will fade with time, as most things seem to. On the other hand, I am more focused and driven than ever. I even learned to ski.

I just started working at a new firm. I am now the managing director of The Private Equities Group of Joseph Stevens and Co. It's downtown. Just a few blocks from ground zero. I am not afraid to be there. I will not be chased from there. It is my statement to the terrorists. I work in The Financial Capital of The World. You have not destroyed us.

Life goes on. My wife and I are expecting another child in late October. Why? Because now we live a little more for today than tomorrow. Because we can't let the bad guys win. Because we love each other. Because people we knew can't. Because when I hold my son, Ethan, nothing else matters and I want more of that feeling in my life.



Adam Mayblum

Christie Coombs

# A day that wiped out love, innocence

**EDITOR'S NOTE** — Jeffrey W. Coombs died on American Airlines Flight 11 when it crashed into the World Trade Center. Coombs, 42, was a security analyst for Compaq Computer Corp. He lived in Abington, Mass., with his wife, Christie, and their children — Matthew, who was 13 when his father died, Meaghan, 11, and Julia, 7. Coombs was a coach in Abington's youth soccer league. After he died, some league officials wanted to postpone games out of respect. But Christie Coombs insisted the games go on. Here, she shares some thoughts of her husband and their life together.

By CHRISTIE COOMBS  
For The Associated Press

Often times when I lie awake late at night, I think about life before Sept. 11 when "normal" was easy to explain, when laughter and fun were common and guilt-free, and when loneliness was a feeling from the past. Life since then has taken on a different tone, altering the way we live, the way we love, the things we think about, and how we plan our future. What remains consistent in our house since that horrible day is the love we have for Jeffrey and now the incredible void that has been forced upon our young family.

Twenty-three years ago Jeffrey and I met as college students in Arizona. Although there were many differences between us, we found common ground in our love for each other, commitment to family, an understanding of the give-and-take, and our desire to spend our lives together.

He became a loving and devoted husband and father to our three children, Matthew, Meaghan and Julia. He parented with a sense of humor and a real grasp of the enormous responsibility he had undertaken. He was very much a big kid when it came to interacting with his family. He was truly in his element when he was wrestling with the kids, rollerblading with them in the neighborhood, hiking Blue Hills, playing hoops in the driveway, or boating and tubing on the Cape.

One question often asked of us is, "How has life changed in the last year?" Quite simply, everything has changed. There is far less laughter in the house, because he was not only the funny one, but he provided the entertainment. Although he disciplined when necessary, he was the one to invent the fun. The ever-popular game "push Daddy off the couch" is now but a fond yet painful memory for children too young to be thrust into the core of a national tragedy.

His silly laugh seems to linger in the halls of our home, enabling us to remember the happier times when sadness and the feeling of loss attempt to overcome our family. His smile has been imprinted on our brains, helping to guide us through each day where the reminders of the horrific mass murder are ever-present in the daily newspapers, TV news, magazines, bumper stickers, T-shirts, and billboards. Everywhere we turn, Sept. 11 and visions of the burning building come alive.

Sept. 11 took away my children's security; their ability to trust when we as adults tell them we're going to be there for them; their innocent outlook on life. It gave them one less person to express the pride in their accomplishments that only a parent can feel.

From me it took away my lifelong companion, the love of my life, my soulmate. It has caused me to dread the future, rather than anticipate it. It has put an indescribable level of loneliness into every moment of my life. Now I end each day with a letter to my husband in my journal rather than with a meaningful one-on-one conversation with the man I've loved for more than half my life.

And that day has caused me to wonder on a daily basis whether the last moments of my husband's life were calm or filled with fear and despair. It has left me wondering if we'll ever find the element of peace that some say comes with recovery of his remains. It has put me in the midst of a never-ending struggle between the need to move forward and the intense longing to go back. It has left us with a hole in our hearts so significant that it will never heal.