

9

TEN YEARS ON

PART SIX THE PILOT'S WIFE

Mum, it is time to

start dating again

ANNIVERSARY SERIES

WHERE I WAS ON THAT DAY

Luc Longley

I was living in upstate New York and playing, getting ready to retire actually, with the NY Knicks when the planes hit the towers.

I was at the training facility in the gym lifting and initially thought the footage on the TV was a movie. As it dawned on me that it was real and happening, I remember not wanting to believe, followed by an overwhelming sense of dread and raw fear.

The gym was empty in 30 seconds. The roads were chaos as people scrambled to get to their families. It felt apocalyptic in those first few hours, even upstate. It was a catalyst for my family to move home to Perth.

We were headed back to WA as soon as we could load the kids into a friend's jet, fly to LA and jump on a Qantas flight home.



TOMORROW PART SEVEN
The children born on 9/11

FIREFIGHTER MADE IT OUT

Hero fought with guilt of surviving

As everyone fled the World Trade Center, firefighter Mike Kehoe was running up the stairs.

This photo, taken by an office worker on the 28th floor of the north tower, turned Kehoe into a hero.

But the fame bothered him because he survived when 343 other firefighters died and he turned around soon after the picture was taken.

"I saved one person and that was me," he said.

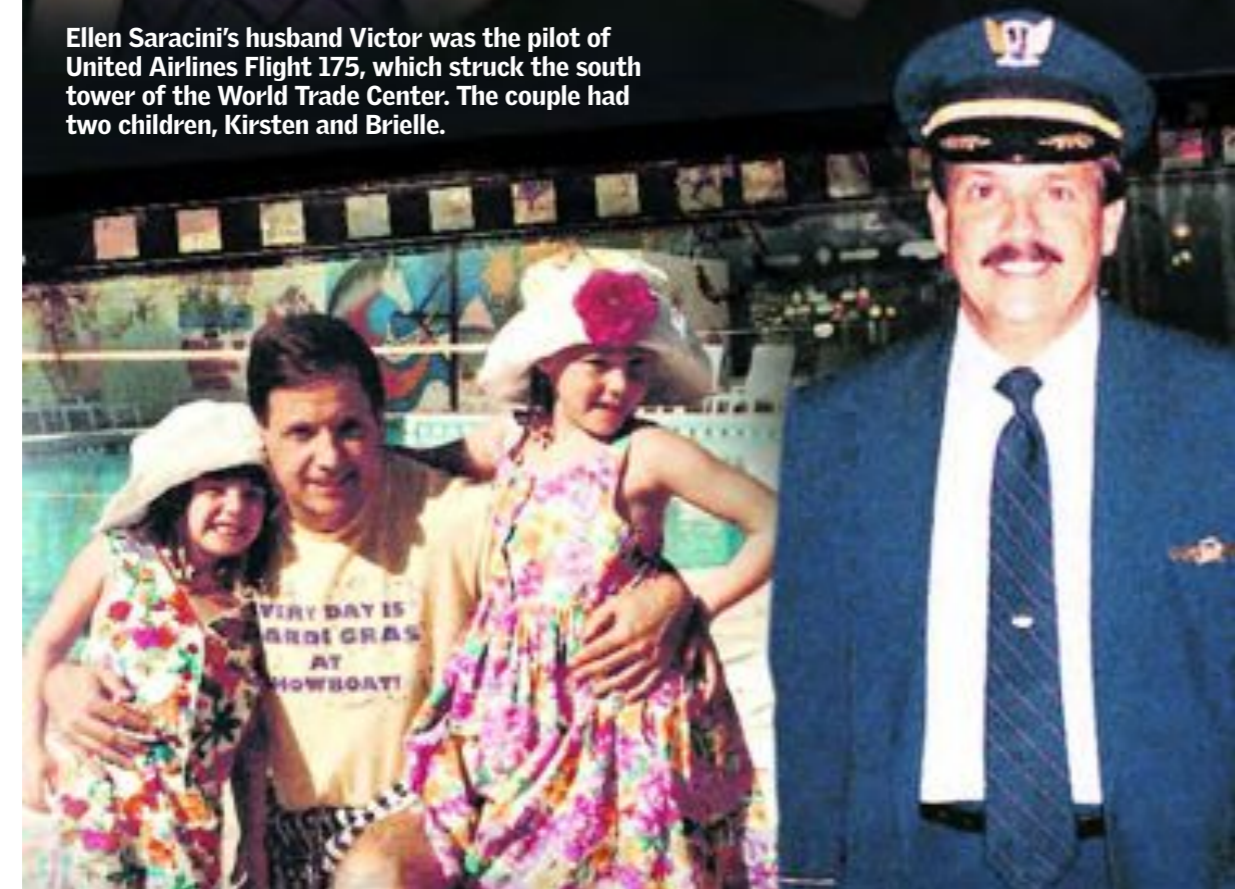
Today, Kehoe has dealt with the guilt.

He is still a proud firefighter — like his father and uncles before him — and lives in Staten Island with his wife and three young boys.

"It took a tragedy to show just what the police and firefighters do every day," Kehoe said.



Ellen Saracini's husband Victor was the pilot of United Airlines Flight 175, which struck the south tower of the World Trade Center. The couple had two children, Kirsten and Brielle.



Can you love two men in one lifetime? **Ellen Saracini** reflects on the day her husband died and her life since then. This is her emotional story in her own words

I remember the first time we met like it was yesterday. When we were introduced at a friend's apartment, Victor told me he'd finished five years as a lieutenant in the navy, where he had learnt to fly, and I recall thinking, "A handsome pilot."

We quickly fell in love and were together 21 years, married for 18, and have two beautiful girls. Victor had a great smile — it would light up a room. He was the best father but, tragically, Vic would never get to see our children grow up. He was captain of United Airlines Flight 175 that struck the south tower of the World Trade Center. It was the worst day of my life and a day that changed my family's lives for ever.

I was at my children's school that morning. Someone walked in and said, "A small aircraft has hit the World Trade Centre."

Of course, I was worried because my husband was a pilot. Then the next person came in and said, "It's American Airlines." Then I was really worried because we knew a pilot who flew for American. I prayed it wasn't him.

My sister was staying with us and when I got home we turned on the television. I couldn't believe what I was seeing: the twin towers were ablaze.

While I tried to make sense of what I was seeing, my sister went for a walk around the block to clear her head. But when she returned she told me, "I had a weird sensation, a feeling... It was something about Vic."

I had a weird sensation too. My first phone call was to Greg, a close friend and a United Airlines safety adviser. He told me he would find

out what was going on so I sat in the kitchen and tried not to watch the TV. Suddenly, the doorbell rang and I saw Greg standing there.

Then I saw the look on his face and I just knew.

I felt like my world had fallen apart but very quickly my house became the centre of all the action.

The FBI arrived and I had to dig out Vic's logbooks for them to read. I brought my fax machine downstairs and soon the police and FBI were using my front room as a command centre. I just stood in the middle of it all, quietly, not believing what was going on. Vic was still smiling out from dozens of photographs around the room.

Victor had this dry sense of humour and was a real practical joker. He would greet young children with glasses as thick as coke bottles, making them laugh and their parents would worry if they would ever reach their destination with this "blind as a bat" pilot!

Of course, our girls adored their father. I didn't know how I was going to tell them.

I knew I had to drive back to school to pick them up. As they jumped in the car I took a deep breath and said: "There's been an accident. Dad has been hurt." But they didn't understand. I had a lump in my throat. "When will we see him," asked Kirsten, my youngest. "I don't think we're going to see him again," I told them.

From that moment on I knew life was going to be hard. But when I look back I realised that somehow I was lucky. Unlike almost every other person who lost someone in 9/11, I knew straight away. And I knew we had to start grieving.

The FBI, pilots, the police and TV news crews were lined up outside and inside my house. The girls couldn't handle it and asked to go to school the next day.

When they got home they said that other kids were saying how their Daddy died. I brought them together and I told them, "You can believe all the terrible things they are saying or you can know that whatever happened to Daddy, that it was fast and God was with him the whole time." They smiled back at me through tears and it was then that I made a decision. I knew I had



Moving on: Ellen Saracini with fiancé Sal, a member of the same pilots' motorcycle team husband Victor belonged to. The pair met at an annual celebration to mark Victor's birthday.

to become an advocate for September 11 — I needed to create healing.

Nine people in our town lost someone, so we met every Thursday as a group. And I decided I would "complete" Vic's flight. "We are going to finish off the journey for Daddy," I told Brielle, my youngest. It wasn't about closure, I wanted the girls to understand it was terrorists who killed their Dad, not an aeroplane accident.

So the girls and I boarded at Boston and flew to LA. I joined the Airline Pilots' Security Alliance and I am happy to say I had my part in arming pilots. I also created The Garden of Reflection, a memorial in our town to remember the victims (www.9-11memorialgarden.org). There's a lot of meaning to it, yet it's very simple.

Vic is still ever present in the house. On the wall is my favourite photograph of him with the girls. His guitar is still in the room too. Sometimes, I hear Kirsten in the den playing Vic's guitar and it makes me stop in my tracks.

A while back I realised I had to start dating again. It's not been easy dating. I mean, imagine a guy asking what you do for a living and

you say, "I'm a full-time fundraiser for my dead husband."

Then one day the girls were sitting around the computer and they were asking me all kinds of questions. They were putting me on an online dating website! It was very funny. But Brielle turned to me and said: "Mum, it's time."

Every year, all the pilots throw a party on Vic's birthday and I go along. Two years ago Kirsten had just had her wisdom teeth out and I said to her, "I'm not going to go this year, I want to stay in and look after you." But Kirsten said, "You must go and I'm coming with you."

I didn't understand. The girls had never gone to these parties but Kirsten was literally dragging me out the door. When I arrived I realised it was all set up. "Meet my friend, Sal," said Greg.

I politely shook hands with Sal, who was handsome, and he smiled warmly. Greg introduced him as part of the pilots' motorcycle team.

We talked, and talked some more, and I remember I was so comfortable with Sal from the first moments we spent together. I said to Brielle, "I really like Sal, what do you think?" She laughed, "Yes!"

Kirsten had already left for college and Brielle was going in a matter of days. I knew they worried about leaving me alone — they thought I would be lonely. I met Sal on August 29, Vic's birthday. He's got four children, I've got two.

Victor always enjoyed motorcycles and he rode with the pilots all the time. I think he'd like the idea that I was with "one of them". Last November, Sal dropped to one knee and asked me to marry him. I was delighted to say yes!

Although there are no plans for a wedding just yet, when the time is right we'll marry. People say time heals, but it does not heal your heart. Time just gets you used to a new way of life.

This year, for the 10th anniversary, it will be different. This isn't the 11th, 12th, or 13th year — the anniversaries will never be as big again.

We'll have a big ceremony at the Garden of Reflection and I'll remember that terrible morning a decade ago. But I won't be alone because I'll be with Sal.

There was room in my life for a good man and I found him. We're beginning a new journey, together.



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