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# Children who lost parents in 9/11 attacks share how their love — and grief — live on

By [Susan Edelman](#) and [Mary Kay Linge](#)  
September 11, 2021 9:00am Updated



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*A year after 9/11, a group of Long Island schoolkids whose mom or dad died in the World Trade Center gathered to tell The Post their stories. They reunited on the 3rd, 5th and 10th anniversaries. Now, 20 years after the terror attacks, we catch up with some of these parents, homeowners and professionals who continue to grapple with their loss and to honor their parents' legacies.*

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Jennifer Herold, Andrew Erker, Lauren Erker, Jackie Hobbs all lost their fathers in the terror attacks on Sept. 11, 2001.

Tamara Beckwith

Unanticipated glimpses of the 9/11 Memorial Plaza from a conference room or a colleague's office have sometimes left her reeling.

"It's like — oh! I wasn't expecting that," she said. "I've needed to take a step back, take a breath."

But over time, the plaza became a place of solace.

"On days when I'm really stressed, that's where I walk," she explained. "It reminds me that life is precious. It puts everything into perspective."

The three Hobbs siblings all live in Long Island and remain close. Steven, now 30, is an attorney; David, 28, recently founded a business-services firm. Jackie and her husband Anthony bought a home of their own last year in Bellmore, a few miles from her mother's house.

"My mom's been seeing someone for years," she said — a man who stepped up to fill a crucial role at Jackie's November 2019 wedding reception.

"He danced with me at my wedding," she recalled. "It was nice. But not the same."

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This 2002 photo shows children who lost their parents on Sept. 11, 2001: (Back row) Chris Wieman, 13, Jennifer Herold, 17, Tommy Gies, 19, Bobby Gies 15, Ronnie Gies, 17. (Second from back row) Lyndsay Herold, 10, Ashley Herold, 13, Lauren Erker, 13. (Center row) Steven Hobbs, 11, Jacqueline Hobbs, 13, Drew Erker, 10. (Front) David Hobbs, 9.

New York Post

Jennifer and Ashley Herold

“Pop-Pop was a hero. He helped people get out of the tower when bad men crashed the planes.”

That’s how Jennifer Herold explains 9/11 and their grandfather’s death to her three young children. Gary Herold, 44, a risk management supervisor at Aon Corp., worked on the 98th floor of the South Tower.





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Jennifer Herold tells her children Lucas, 6, Ashlyn, 5, and Declan, 3 about their grandfather Gary's heroics on Sept. 11, 2001.

Tamara Beckwith

Soon after the attacks, a co-worker called the family. "She said my dad walked her to the stairwell, gave her a hug and said, 'I'm going to go back and make sure everyone else is out.'"

Jennifer, now 36, has overcome her anger that dad didn't escape when he could.

"In the beginning, it made me very mad. But as the years went on, I realized he wouldn't have it any other way. He wouldn't run away. He would have tried to save someone."

Her father never met his grandkids — Lucas, 6, Ashlyn, 5, and Declan, 3. They lovingly hug his gravestone on visits to St. Charles Cemetery in Farmingdale, L.I., where Herold raised Jennifer, Ashley and Lyndsey — ages 16, 13 and 9 on 9/11. "When it came to us kids, he was so funny and had such a big heart," Ashley said.

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still struggles with grief.

But the sisters keep their dad's legacy alive. Five years ago, they launched the Gary Herold Memorial Scholarship in Spring Hill, Fla., raising funds to give out \$1,000 and \$500 to teens who write the best essays on "why it is important to never forget 9/11."

"Students also have to demonstrate selflessness and generosity, the characteristics my father embodied," Jennifer said.



This photo taken in 2011 shows children who lost their parents on Sept. 11, 2001: (Back row) Chris Wieman, Jennifer Herold, Tommy Gies, Bobby Gies, Ronnie Gies. (Second from back) Lyndsey Herold, Ashley Herold, Lauren Erker. (Center row) Steven Hobbs, Jacqueline Hobbs, Drew Erker. (Front row) David Hobbs.

Tamara Beckwith

## Chris Wieman

"They tell me I can take the day off," Chris Wieman said of the anniversary of the terror attack that killed his mother, Mary Lenz Wieman, 43, a marketing executive at Aon Corp.

"But it's just better if I work," the 32-year-old said. "It's better to keep my mind going."

Chris has formed a "tight family" of colleagues at Greek Xpress, a Long Island-based restaurant chain. He spends six days a week at its Great Neck store, where he takes great pride in his work and doesn't have to retell his family's 9/11 experience.

"The owner knows my story," he said. "The people here know my story. Everyone's there for each other."

The sudden loss of his mother at age 12 haunts him. "It just never leaves you," Chris said. "You still remember where you were, what period in school you were in ... you remember that moment, and the day after, as if it was yesterday."

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Lauren Erker

August is the cruelest month for Lauren Erker.

"His birthday is Aug. 7, so I remember that every year," she said, speaking of her father Erwin Erker, 41, a vice president at Marsh & McLennan.

"And then everything about 9/11 starts," she said. "You turn on the TV, it's there. You turn on social media, it's there.

"You don't want people to forget," she said. "But for everybody that was directly affected by it, we're reliving it over and over, every year."

After attending college in Rhode Island, Lauren settled in the Ocean State. She works in marketing for a major mortgage lender – a handy connection when it came time to buy a home of her own.

"I still don't understand mortgages, but the marketing side of it I got down," she joked.

Her cherished townhouse adjoins a 130-acre nature preserve, perfect for the athletic, outdoorsy 32-year-old. Her brother Andrew, 29, a supervisor at a large sporting-goods store, recently got a place of his own in Long Island.

Lauren, who was 12 when her father died, clings to memories of traveling with him on his meticulously planned family vacations. "My dad was all about us," she said, tearing up.

"My mom's my rock, and I had a lot of amazing men in my life — uncles and family friends who stepped up," she said. "But nothing replaces Dad."

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