

## Story on NY City Fireman - Remembrance '911'

By Kerin Carlson

This is a story written by Kerin Carlson who lost her uncle, Kevin Bracken, in the 911 attack. Kevin Bracken, husband of Jennifer, and son of Retired U.S. Army Sergeant Major Hugh Bracken and his wife, Mary, lost his life as a New York City Fireman responding to the 'Towers'. Kevin was 37 years old. He was assigned to NYFD Company 40 - Ladder 35. Kevin was a graduate of Central Islip High School and a volunteer fireman for Central Islip Fire Department.

*I thought as I read this copy of Kerins' (my granddaughter) paper she wrote and the response from her professor about her paper.*

*Hughie*

*Subject: Paper I wrote about Kevin for journalism*

*Hey dad, my last assignment for my journalism class was to pick a song and say how the lyrics relate to me and my life...so I did mine on Kevin...i attached my paper, and here is what my teacher wrote back to me...show mom too...love Keri:)*

Kerin Carlson  
February 28, 2002  
Song Lyrics

On September 11, 2001 the people of the United States witnessed the most terrifying attacks ever seen on American soil. At 8:45 AM, the North Tower of the World Trade Center burst into flames when a hijacked plane crashed into the tower and exploded. My uncle, Kevin Bracken, had just arrived at his firehouse in the upper west side of Manhattan to start his workday. Although they were one of the farthest firehouses from the World Trade Center, the Westside Highway that runs straight down the west side of Manhattan, permitted them to be the first firefighters on the scene. As thousands of people ran down the stairs of Tower 1, Kevin and the other firefighters pushed their way up to try and save as many people as they could. Although his body was never found beneath the rubble, I believe that a spirit like his can never be destroyed. He lives on in each and every person that he has touched. "Stand Here With Me" by Creed captures everything that I have learned from Kevin, what happened to him, and how he is still with me in my heart today.

Although I like Creed, I would not call myself their number one fan. But luckily,

my roommate Brenda could. When Creed's latest album "Weathered" came out in November of 2001, Brenda had it practically before it was out on the shelves. After listening to the cd, she shared this song with me.

"Stand Here With Me"

You always reached out to me and helped me believe  
All those memories we share  
I will cherish every one of them  
The truth of it is there's a right way to live  
And you showed me  
So now you live on in the words of a song  
You're a melody

You stand here with me now

Just when fear blinded me you taught me to dream  
I'll give you everything I am and still fall short of  
What you've done for me  
In this life that I live  
I hope I can give love unselfishly  
I've learned the world is bigger than me  
You're my daily dose of reality

You stand here with me now

On and on we sing  
On and on we sing this song

'Cause you stand here with me

I didn't have to ask her why she had me listen to this song. After hearing the lyrics and the powerful music, I knew it was because of my uncle. Ever since that day, I have listened to this song when I am upset or sad. It reminds me that although Kevin is gone and is not coming back, he "stands here with me now" in my heart.

These four lines show what I remember about Kevin and what he taught me:

All those memories we share  
I will cherish every one of them  
The truth of it is there's a right way to live  
And you showed me

Kevin was the first person ever to ask me, if I had a glass that was filled with water halfway, would I say it was half full or half empty. This was before I had ever heard of this concept, so I said I didn't know. He told me that I always want

to have my glass half-full because it is better to look at the good side of things rather than the bad. He was the most optimistic person I have ever met and always lived his life with his glass half-full. I think that this is the "right way to live," and he is the closest person to me besides my parents, that ever honestly came right out and gave me a lesson about life that I will always remember. And the memories of him I will always cherish. They are all happy and funny memories that still make me laugh. Like how every single Christmas we would open at least one of each other's presents, because our names are the same except I have an R and he has V. And of course it would always be something girly like a nightgown or headband and he would have to put it on and wear it for the rest of Christmas morning. Or like the time when my brother and I were little and he tied a walkie-talkie to the Christmas tree and talked to us. We couldn't figure out how the Christmas tree could talk and how it knew our names and what we wanted for Christmas.

These next four lines describe how I live now, after Kevin has passed away.

In this life that I live  
I hope I can give love unselfishly  
I've learned the world is bigger than me  
You're my daily dose of reality

Since September 11, I, as many other Americans, have learned that I am vulnerable. With this knowledge, I am aware that my life can be taken from me at any moment. No one ever expected terrorist actions as large as the attacks on 9-11. But because of these attacks, "I've learned that the world is bigger than me." There is definitely not one day, possibly not one hour, that goes by when I do not think of my uncle. I find myself thinking about why he had to be the one working the 9 AM shift and why he had to be early for work that day. Why couldn't have he been the guy whose car broke down so he was late to work, or the guy whose ex-girlfriend called his office asking him to pick her up at the airport, or the guy who had another firefighter cover his shift so he could extend his vacation a little longer? Why did he have to be like the guy who happened to have a meeting on the 97th floor of the Tower 2, or like the guy who said he'd cover his buddy's shift, or the guy that happened to catch the early train and arrive for work at 8:30? I know that it will not help to ask myself these questions. I know that I cannot be "selfish" and have to be grateful for the thousands of people that did survive the attacks, and remember that Kevin was one of the people that helped them to get out alive. When I am having a bad day and feeling stressed out about school or work, Kevin is my "daily dose of reality." I remember that I am lucky to even be living. The miniscule troubles of life do not bother me so much anymore, and I try the best I can to live my life to the fullest, because that is what Kevin did. The chorus, "You stand here with me now" represents everything I have said so far about Kevin. Besides being in my thoughts and prayers, he is in my heart. I think he not only "stands here with me now," but he also stands with his wife, his three older sisters and older brother, his parents, nieces and nephews, and the

rest of his family. He stands with the other firefighters from Engine 40, Truck 35, his many friends, his two softball teams, hockey team, and golfing partners. He stands with the three doormen at his apartment that each claimed to me "Kevin liked me the best." He stands with every person that he has touched, and we each hold a piece of him in our hearts.

Kevin's optimism, wit, and charming smile "live on in on in the words of a song." Creed's amazing presence and sincerity in "Stand Here With Me" will forever be a reminder of my uncle. Since September 11, I am lucky to have a part of Kevin's spirit in me and in honor of him I will live my life to the fullest, with my cup always half-full.

### Professor's Comments:

*Kerin,*

*There's an expression you've probably heard: Still waters run deep. That came to mind as I started reading your story. Kerin, "the quiet one" in class, saved her best story for last. She could have "hated" terrorists for the first assignment. She could have chosen her Uncle Kevin for the character study. Instead she waited until she was almost out the door before telling her most important story. Thank you for trusting me with it. I think I now understand something I've seen behind your eyes. Not a sadness, exactly. But a depth of sorrow. The stillness of a full soul and a half empty heart.*

*I was just about your age -- I was 22 -- when my brother Doug was killed in a plane crash. We were a year and ten days apart, and I can imagine my younger brother and I being as amazed as you and your brother were by a talking Christmas tree with your uncle's voice. We slept together in the same room for 18 years and I actively hated him for so much of my life that I could barely believe it when I realized that I loved him. I even liked him. And then I missed him for the rest of my life. "All those memories we share. I will cherish every one of them."*

*On his 22nd birthday I wrote a piece that appeared in the Philadelphia Inquirer on Dec. 1, 1972. It began, "This is for you, Doug. On your birthday. For a brother who died too soon. For a friend I met too late." It ended, "Happy birthday, Doug. If we could do it over again, I'd let you have more french fries." In between was my brother's life, much as you shared your uncle's. And I can only imagine how many times you cried as you felt the words you were about to write.*

*It's a wonderful pain, writing is.*

*You wrote your pain well.*

**Clark DeLeon**

***P.S. Tell Kevin his paper got an A.***

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