



## Staten Island Advance

### 9/11 hero's fatal sickness

49-year-old responder dies of esophageal cancer tied to the toxic dust

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**STATEN ISLAND ADVANCE**

The terrorist attacks of Sept. 11 may have claimed still another Staten Island victim.

Frederick J. Stuck III, 49, a retired deputy sheriff and a first responder on Sept. 11, died yesterday at his Port Richmond home. His wife, Lou Ann, said the cause was esophageal cancer, which she believes resulted from exposure to the toxic dust clouds that have made thousands of New Yorkers sick.

When asked yesterday about her husband's experiences on Sept. 11, Mrs. Stuck's voice became strained. "I can't talk about this," she said. "This was the cause of the whole thing."

The couple's son, Frederick IV, said his father had responded immediately following the attacks and was part of a search for survivors at the former World Trade Center PATH station. For at least six weeks, he worked long hours in the rubble. He returned only briefly to Port Richmond during that time, coming home covered in the dust that smothered Lower Manhattan -- only to sleep and shower and return to Ground Zero.

"He was proud to be a part of the rescue," Mrs. Stuck said. "He was a very proud American. He wanted to be there to help everybody."

Stuck developed asthma shortly after Sept. 11, his wife said, and had to use an inhaler. He developed an ache in his chest, then swallowing became difficult. When he was diagnosed with fourth-stage cancer in April, there was little that could be done.

A report issued this September by Mount Sinai Medical Center found that nearly 70 percent of Ground Zero workers suffered lung problems as a result of their exposure to toxins in the dust-cloud. Manhattan trial lawyers David Worby and Paul Napoli have filed about 8,000 lawsuits claiming the city failed to protect workers from these dangers.

But the city has maintained it is nearly impossible to determine a causal link between the recovery work at Ground Zero and illnesses that arise on an individual basis, and Stuck is a case in point. Whether his selfless acts were fatal has not been medically determined; his doctors pointed to his smoking as a young man (a habit he kicked almost 20 years ago) as a potential cause, Mrs. Stuck said.

What his family knows for sure is that Stuck was, until recently, relatively healthy. The Army veteran and retired deputy sheriff, an outdoorsman who idolized John Wayne, had been, according to his wife, exceptionally "youthful."

#### **HIS BIRTHDAY**

Today would have been his 50th birthday.

The native of Garfield, N.J., moved to Port Richmond in 1991, following his marriage to the former Lou Ann Ferone in 1988.

He moved to the Island to work for the New York City Sheriff's Office, which he did for 19 years, in all five boroughs. Stuck, who liked to share stories about his job, was injured while making an arrest in 2003. He retired last year.

"There are many Fred Stuck stories," a co-worker said yesterday. "Those of us who had the opportunity to

work side by side with Fred knew that they could not ask for a better partner to depend on in any situation."

The Vietnam War-era veteran who served in the U.S. Army from 1974 to 1977 was a member of the Cichon Post, American Legion, in Port Richmond. He enjoyed hunting and fishing in the Catskills -- a passion he shared with his children and many friends. Stuck would pull out his guitar at barbecues and family gatherings and sing Irish and folk songs. He had a large collection of tools and was known in the neighborhood for his handiness, as well as his small talk and his smile, family said. He also collected John Wayne movies, action figures and memorabilia.

### **HIS KEEPSAKES**

Stuck also maintained a solemn collection he kept private -- an album of photographs and keepsakes from the recovery effort. He had swapped badges with fellow officers from around the country, with whom he had forged a bond, and he kept these, along with the American flag bandanna he wore every day at the site.

"He was a true officer and a gentleman, a proud and devoted American," Mrs. Stuck said. She also described her husband, a parishioner of St. Roch's R.C. Church, Port Richmond, as a faithful man who prayed daily, and a devoted father of four.

Friends had encouraged the Stuck family to look into benefits available to ailing recovery workers, but Stuck had said he was receiving health care and just wanted to focus on getting better. He never pursued litigation, though he did alert his co-workers, encouraging them to seek medical tests in hopes they might detect Sept. 11-related health problems early.

"He apologized to me for being sick," Mrs. Stuck said. "He said he was going to fight this. He said, 'Don't worry, I'm not going anywhere.' ... But first you pray to God to keep him, then you pray to God to take him. He was suffering."

### **HIS SPIRIT**

But the young widow also said she had been inspired by her husband, who remained positive throughout his illness.

"I know he's in heaven now, that he's looking down on me and he'll give me the strength to get through this," she said.

According to Advance records, Stuck is the second Staten Islander to die from an illness potentially tied to the recovery effort.

"It's going to continue to be a problem," said Dennis McKeon, executive director of the Bloomfield-based Where-To-Turn, a non-profit group that advocates for families who suffered after Sept. 11.

The American Red Cross operates a Sept. 11 Recovery Program with services for those experiencing health problems. Those seeking information may call 212-812-4348.

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