

Sifting through SORROW

Only 174 bodies were found intact at Ground Zero, giving special meaning to the thousands of artifacts scattered among the debris

By SUSAN EDELMAN and GREGORY MILLER

His FDNY helmet signified 'the ultimate SACRIFICE'

Retired firefighter Lee Ielpi arrived 90 minutes after the South Tower fell to dig through the smoky pile in search of his son, Jonathan, 29, of Squad 288 in Queens. Three months later, he found Jonathan in a staircase in the South Tower. Two weeks later, recovery workers found his helmet and turnout coat. "It's ripped right down the back, ripped right off him," says his father. Jonathan Ielpi, a married father of two young sons, "loved the job, loved helping people," says Lee.

His ring was 'something he wore all the time — a PIECE OF HIM'

Mitchel Wallace, 34, ran to the World Trade Center when the first plane hit, despite a friend's warning to flee. "I have to help," he said. The court officer, also a trained EMT, knew he'd be needed. His family recovered parts of his uniform, but not a trace of his body. Five years later, his ring was found. Today his mom, Rita Wallace, displays it in a living-room cabinet with photos of Mitchel, who was single, and her grandkids. "I cannot tell you how much it means to us to have something of his back," says his sister, Michele Miller. "Even though it's an object, it's something he wore all the time — a piece of him."



His wad of cash reflected a HEROIC 'RITUAL'

"Being a firefighter was all he ever wanted," says retired firefighter James Boyle, of his son, Michael Boyle, 37, of Engine Co. 33 in the East Village. Michael was near the lobby of the North Tower when it collapsed, killing him and pushing his body six stories underground. In June 2004, 2½ years after Michael's remains were found, James got a call telling him \$74 in cash had been recovered with Michael's DNA on it. "It was remarkable," says James. "I took it home and showed everybody." The wad of bills — three \$10s, four \$5s and 24 singles — was a collection for the firehouse's dinner that night. It was Michael's turn to buy groceries and cook. "It's part of the ritual of being a firefighter," explains James. "They take it very seriously."



His phone card meant 'HONEY, I'M HOME'

Kenneth Basnicki, 48, had just been promoted to financial marketing director for BEA Systems, a Toronto software company, when he attended a conference at Windows on the World. As a successful salesman, he was often on the phone, but saved time for fun with his wife Maureen and their two kids. "Some days I would see him parked in the driveway. He would call and say, 'I



have to make a conference call, I'm still working," recalls Maureen. "A short time later, he'd come in and say, 'Honey, I'm home.'" When the NYPD gave Maureen his burnt AT&T phone card, she says, "It was another way of my husband saying 'Honey, I'm home.' Another kind of home."

