

WTC kin find solace with relics' return

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Mitchel Wallace ran to the World Trade Center as soon as he saw the first plane hit, telling a friend who urged him to flee, "I have to help."

The family of the heroic 34-year-old court officer, who worked at Manhattan Supreme Court on Centre Street and was a trained medic, recovered parts of his uniform -- holster, badge and hat -- without a trace of his body.

But now they cherish a gold ring, embossed with his initials, which his mom displays in a glass cube in a living-room cabinet with photos of her son, who was single, and her grandkids.

The NYPD turned over his ring -- charred and slightly cracked -- five years after the terror attacks.

"I cannot tell you how much it means to me and my family to have something of his back," his sister, Michele Miller, wrote in a thank-you note to the department's WTC personal-property unit.

Miller, who had sent the NYPD a description of her brother's ring and a photo of him wearing it, told The Post, "Even though it's an object, it's something he wore all the time -- a piece of him."

But thousands of other possessions of the 2,752 people killed on 9/11 have yet to go home.

Eight years later, the NYPD says it is still holding about 17,500 items that belonged to WTC victims in the basement of One Police Plaza.

The stash includes 449 pieces of jewelry -- watches, rings, earrings, necklaces, bracelets, cufflinks, pendants and broaches.

Other items include wallets, cellphones, handbags, organizers, briefcases, books, cosmetics, keys, paperweights and letter openers.

The NYPD says it has returned some 116,500 items -- 87 percent of the total 134,000 cataloged.

But while Miller and other 9/11 relatives were eager to recover their loved ones' belongings, many did not jump at the chance, the NYPD says.

WTC property clerks have positively identified the owners of 409 "invoices" -- one or more personal objects believed to belong to a 9/11 victim -- and notified next of kin.

"They just haven't been picked up yet," said NYPD Inspector Edward Mullen.

Some distraught families, he said, can't bring themselves to collect the emotionally charged items.

"It's a traumatic experience for them," he said.

The NYPD has followed up with letters and phone calls to those families, Mullen said, adding that responses have included, "I'm seeing a psychiatrist," "I don't want to deal with it right now," and "I'll pick it up when I can."

"We tell them, 'It will be here when you're ready to get it,'" Mullen said.

Several 9/11 families have claimed items in the last two years, he said.

Last April, the mother of a passenger on American Airlines Flight 11, which struck the north tower, got back her daughter's ring after sending in a photo of it. Returned with the ring was a "mutilated" dollar bill.

Last year, the mom of a WTC victim recovered a gold ring and bracelet.

And in 2007, the husband of a woman on Flight 11 recovered her wedding ring.

Many others wonder about their loved ones' lost possessions, some likely destroyed in the WTC's fiery collapse.

Some bodily remains of Christopher Traina, who worked at Carr Futures, were recovered but not the gold chain and crucifix he wore on 9/11.

His mother, Teresa, had bought it for his birthday. She got a letter from the NYPD saying it might have found something of Christopher's, but she never heard back.

Linda Pascuma recovered a clasp from her stockbroker husband Michael's Rolex Oyster watch but not the wristband or timepiece. She keeps the clasp in his bedroom end table.

"My son desperately wanted that watch back," she said. "If somebody took that watch, I would buy them a new one to get it back."

Laurie Spampinato, who lost her husband, Donald, a Cantor Fitzgerald employee, said she also had tried in vain to reach the NYPD after getting a letter asking for more information about his items, including a lost Coach portfolio, a Rolex watch and a gold ring inscribed with their wedding date and the words "I love you forever, Laurie."

"It makes me feel I didn't complete my job," she said. "If there's something out there, I should be making every attempt to recover it."

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