

Please tell her I love her: They were the 'masters of the new millennium' but Mike Pelletier and at least 22 other Canadians found themselves fatally trapped in the eye of the Sept. 11 terrorist storm

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The men, and they were mostly men, who worked near the top of the north tower of the World Trade Center were what American writer Tom Wolfe would have called "masters of the universe." Handsome, with smooth golf swings, computer smarts, impeccable credentials, impressive alma maters, and nerves of steel: masters of a new millennium.

They excelled in a deal-making culture where millions of dollars could slip through their fingers in a moment. And they remained fearless while all around there was talk of recession and the crisis in consumer confidence.

The Canadians who found themselves atop the north tower on Sept. 11 were from the same mould: High flyers, who on that clear, late-autumn day, would have enjoyed a breathtaking glimpse of all of Manhattan before the offices became hell on Earth.

One of those men was Michael Pelletier, a movie-star gorgeous French Canadian. Born in Winnipeg, he'd lived all over Canada, from Montreal to Calgary to Toronto to Ottawa, where he worked for two summers as a ceremonial guard on Parliament Hill. He'd been a top scholar and hockey star at St. Lawrence University in Canton, New York and played pro hockey in London, England, before settling on a career in the frenzied world of high finance and commodities trading.

Pelletier, 36, was by all accounts, sensitive, humble and brilliant. He could perform advanced mathematics in his head, wowing colleagues and friends. Highly competitive, he excelled at his job of buying and selling energy among different states and power companies in the

northeastern United States. He worked for TradeSpark, a division of the gigantic trading house Cantor Fitzgerald, which had almost 1,000 employees and occupied the top floors of the north tower.

But although Pelletier was required to work in the eye of the storm, he didn't want his family there.

He and his wife Sophie, age 30, a delicate blond beauty from France, bought a stately, two-storey home in the quiet city of Greenwich, Connecticut, a 45-minute commute from New York City. There they were raising two-year-old Sydney and three-month-old Nicolas in French and English. Sydney, who was fluent in both languages, called her beloved daddy, "Papa."

Pelletier hated the commute. In the mornings, he didn't see his children, and by the time he arrived home in the evenings, around 6, there was only an hour to play with them before they were in bed.

On Sept. 11, the alarm clock went off at 5 a.m., as it always did, but Pelletier didn't get out of bed until almost 5.30 a.m. Sophie woke up with him, and while he was dressing, she nursed the baby. When he left the house to walk to the train station, she was back dozing in bed.

Every morning, he would lean into bed and hug and kiss Sophie and tell her he loved her. That morning, she was half asleep when he said good-bye and later, she would search her memory for the feeling of their last embrace and even what he was wearing -- a short sleeved dress shirt and khakis. "I only wish I would have held him longer," Sophie would say later in an interview.

It was Sydney's first day of preschool and Michael would miss the fanfare and the heartache. He kissed his wife Sophie goodbye and said he'd call her later to hear all the details. And she knew that was a promise he'd keep. They were deeply in love and described by others as a "magical couple." He called his wife at least 10 times a day, if not 20. Not a conversation or event could pass without him calling to tell her about it.

He managed to shower, dress, and be on the 6:08 train for downtown Manhattan. He was at his desk on the 105th floor of the World Trade Center, north tower, by 7:15 a.m.

That same day, another Canadian, brimming with bravado and charm, kissed his wife goodbye and headed toward the twin towers. David Barkway, who'd turned 34 a week earlier, was the managing director in the capital markets group at BMO Nesbitt Burns in Toronto. He and his wife were visiting from Toronto. A golf tournament and business meetings for him, shopping and sightseeing for her.

Barkway was a product of Bay Street, starting at Canada Trust, then moving to BMO Nesbitt Burns, where he started on the bond desk, and eventually led the capital markets group. He

worked on the trading floor, where 500 traders bought and sold futures, derivatives, stocks and bonds in controlled chaos. He and six other traders were responsible for raising capital for corporate clients who needed funds for new ventures. He was an expert at coming up with cash in creative ways.

His wife Cindy marvelled at her husband Dave's ability to hold four or five conversations at once. He could easily have two phones going, a cell and a land-line, while simultaneously messaging someone on his Blackberry wireless pager and talking to someone standing in front of him.

The couple met at Carleton University in 1989 while he was studying economics and law and she was studying English. Barkway came from Cornwall, where his parents, Peter and Mary, and brother Stephen, still live.

These few days in New York were a rare but precious getaway for the couple. Cindy was five-months pregnant. They'd left their two-year-old son at home with relatives and were staying at the four-star Times Square Hilton.

On Sunday night, the couple dined at the Gramercy Tavern, near their hotel on 42nd Street. On Monday, they ate at Del Frisco's Steakhouse on the Avenue of the Americas. Tuesday morning, David had a breakfast meeting at Cantor Fitzgerald while Cindy planned to shop in the boutiques of SoHo. David hoped to meet in person the clients he dealt with on the phone.

When Barkway left he never mentioned where he was having breakfast. Cindy assumed it was at a diner somewhere in Manhattan. Barkway grabbed a cab south to the World Trade Center. His meeting was on the 105th floor, north tower.

In another city, another couple was speeding through traffic. It was the first day of the Los Angeles Kings training camp and Garnet "Ace" Bailey, the team's long-time chief pro scout, was on the verge of missing the action. His wife Kathy had mistakenly set the alarm an hour late, and it looked like he wouldn't make the Boston to Los Angeles flight. One of the guys Bailey had signed, an enforcer named Ken Belanger from the Boston Bruins, was skating. Bailey wanted to see how he measured up.

Bailey was a master of an entirely different universe. A native of Lloydminster, Sask., he'd spent 10 seasons in the NHL, playing with several different teams. In his final pro season, '78-'79, he played with the Edmonton Oilers when they were in the World Hockey Association. Coach Glen Sather signed Bailey, in part to provide a veteran mentor for a young man named Wayne Gretzky.

Gretzky was 17, Bailey, 30. He took the young player under his wing, teaching him how to

dress, behave and deal with the media. He also protected the young superstar from headhunters on the ice.

One night, the Oilers were playing in Quebec City, where the Nordiques' huge bruiser Gilles Bilodeau kept knocking Gretzky around. Bilodeau probably had 70 or 80 pounds on the rookie's 146-pound frame.

Bailey, who was on the fourth-line and had no ice time, was furious. He told Gretzky to skate in front of the Oilers' bench next time he had the puck. Gretzky did. A second later he heard a whistle. When he looked back, Bilodeau was flat on his back. All the Oilers, including Bailey, were looking behind them into the stands as though someone had thrown something. Bailey, of course, had clocked him with his stick when he skated by on Gretzky's tail.

After retiring, Bailey coached in Wichita, Kansas, and in Houston, before joining the Oilers' scouting staff, where he stayed for 13 years and five Stanley Cups. He went to work for the L.A. Kings in 1994 on Gretzky's urging, but Bailey kept his home in Lynnfield, a Boston suburb. Although he was a big, hockey tough guy, Kathy's sisters teasingly called him a "haus frau," because he ran the house with an impeccable eye for detail. Not only did he keep ducks, chickens, turkeys and a well-stocked fish pond, he was also a gourmet cook. He hated being away from Kathy and his 23-year-old son Todd, who lived at home and was his constant fishing partner.

On Sept. 11, Bailey and his wife zipped through traffic to make his flight, which was to leave Logan Airport shortly before 8 a.m. She pulled up to the curb, he kissed her good-bye and ran for the gate, where he met up with another Kings scout, Mark Bavis. Bailey made the flight with two minutes to spare. Another five minutes, and he would have missed it.

Although Bailey wasn't booked in first class, Kathy left the airport knowing he'd end up there. He'd spent so many years flying across the continent, scouting games in Toronto, New Jersey and New York that he was known by virtually every airport employee in Boston. He was always upgraded. She knew, with certainty, he'd be seated up front, near the pilots, chatting with all his cabin mates.

On the morning of Sept. 11, both Michael Pelletier and David Barkway were on the 105th floor. Ace Bailey was in the air. Other Canadians were also in the wrong place at the wrong time. They, too, would later be described by family and friends as "larger than life" or "on top of the world."

Ralph Gerhardt, 34, was a vice president for Cantor Fitzgerald. The graduate of Don Mills High School in Toronto, with a BA in Economics from the University of Western Ontario, he

came from a Toronto power family. His dad, Hans, was a well-known Toronto hotelier and former general manager of the Sutton Place Hotel. The sandy-haired Gerhardt was known as a fun loving, people person, who used to organize buses to Oktoberfest in Kitchener. He worked on the 106th floor.

Donald Robson, 52, was a partner and bond broker at Cantor Fitzgerald Securities. He and his wife, Kathy, had two sons, Geoffrey, 22 and Scott, 17. They lived in Manhasset on Long Island, where Robson was vice president of a golf club. He loved Canada, his homeland, and was a loyal fan to his hometown baseball team, the Toronto Blue Jays. His office was on the 103rd floor.

Ken Basnicki, a 47-year-old father of two from Etobicoke, worked for BEA systems, one of the world's leading e-business software companies. His love of competition extended beyond business to the playing field. He was an avid mountain biker, golfer, skier and snowboarder. He'd just been promoted to Financial Marketing Director. He was attending a financial services conference at the Windows on the World restaurant, located on the 106th floor.

Arron Dack, 39, worked at a midtown Manhattan start-up called Encompys, where he was vice president and director of global sales. His company specialized in providing hi-tech financial services to some of the biggest players on the market.

Dack, who lived with his wife Abigail and his two young children in Montclair, New Jersey, grew up in Toronto, graduating from Jarvis Collegiate. He had a degree in computer science and molecular biology from the University of Toronto and a masters in business from the University of Boston. Fluent in French and Spanish, he'd lived in Brussels and London. Before Encompys, he'd been president of Braid Inc., which specialized in messaging middleware and integration. Tuesday morning, Dack was also at a breakfast meeting at the Windows on the World.

While these men were making deals, making money, making their mark, a tragedy was unfolding that would change everything.

At 7:59 a.m., American Airlines flight 11 left Boston's Logan Airport for Los Angeles. There were 92 people on board, including one Canadian, Alexander Filipov, a semi-retired electrical engineer, born in Regina and living in Concord, Massachusetts since the '50s. He wasn't supposed to be on that American Airlines flight, but had switched his ticket from a Delta Airlines flight at the last minute.

At first, it must have seemed like a routine flight for Filipov and the other passengers. The hijackers who were sitting among the passengers waited until the plane reached cruising altitude before launching their assault on the plane's crew, using small knives.

Radar tracking records show Flight 11 began its flight westward, then made a hard southerly turn after crossing from Massachusetts into New York State.

One flight attendant aboard the plane managed to call her supervisor in Boston. She reportedly told him that a man seated in business class had stabbed several flight attendants and passengers, then he and the other terrorists forced their way into the cockpit.

American Flight 11 then took aim at New York City.

At 8:14 a.m., United Airlines Flight 175 left Logan International for Los Angeles with 65 people aboard, including Ace Bailey, sitting at the front of the plane.

Flight 175 headed at full throttle toward New York City. One passenger used his cellphone to tell his parents that his plane had been hijacked and terrorists had gained control of the cabin and killed a stewardess.

If passengers were herded to the back of the plane, as has been speculated, the man who knocked Gilles Bilodeau on his back to protect Wayne Gretzky, wouldn't have been among them.

Barbara Pothier, Bailey's sister-in-law, is certain Bailey would have taken on the hijackers. "I know absolutely he would have tussled with the hijackers. If he'd seen a stewardess being roughed up, he would have stepped in."

Gretzky agrees. In a commemoration for Sports Illustrated a few weeks ago, he wrote: "I guarantee you one thing: Ace was not at the back of the plane. I'd bet my life that he rallied some people together and fought those guys tooth and nail before the plane went down. Anyone who knew him would make the same bet."

At 8:45 a.m., Flight 11 slammed into the north tower of the World Trade Center. It cut a gaping hole in the building above the 90th floor. Twenty minutes later, at 9:05 a.m., Flight 175, carrying Bailey, approached Manhattan from the northwest and plowed high into glass and steel of the south tower.

The north tower trembled and swayed when it was hit. Those who could, fled, escaping down crowded stairwells. Above the 90th floor, smoke poured into the offices of Cantor Fitzgerald. Those who ran to the stairwells quickly found there was no escape. The plane had cut through the four stairwells that served as fire exits, destroyed the elevator bank, the communications system, the sprinkler system and the power supplies.

Most of those who were trapped retreated to their offices and stuffed wet clothing or towels

beneath their doors. If they had cellphones, they called their families. Many of them must have sensed they were saying goodbye; others had no idea. But in each phone call that has come to light, these steel-nerved men remained remarkably calm.

On the 106th floor, Ralph Gerhardt called his father Hans in Toronto. The two were very close, and this could have easily been a routine, friendly call.

"Hi Dad. Something just happened at the World Trade Center," he said. "We either got hit by a bomb or a plane. I am OK. We are OK. I love you, but I have to go now. We are evacuating. Call you later."

Gerhardt said he was going up to the 109th floor to find his girlfriend, Linda Luzzicone, 33, who also worked at Cantor Fitzgerald, so they could leave the building together. Hans tried to call his son back, but his cellphone was always busy. He assumed his son must have lent it to others so they could call their loved ones.

Hans Gerhardt and his wife Helga did what thousands of others with loved ones in the towers did that morning: Turn on the television and watch. He knew that the smoke billowing out of the tower was coming from where his son's office was located.

His son was in trouble and there was nothing that he could do.

Ken Basnicki, also on the 106th floor, called his mother in Etobicoke. "The building is full of smoke," he told her. He wasn't certain if he could get out.

Arron Dack called his office in midtown Manhattan from the restaurant atop the north tower to say he was alive.

David Barkway, on the 105th floor, couldn't reach Cindy by phone, so at 9:01 a.m. he banged out a message on his pager to his colleagues at BMO Nesbitt Burns in Toronto. He said things were serious and he was in the northeast corner on one of the top floors. He was going to try to get out.

Michael Pelletier, also on the 105th floor, managed to call his wife Sophie just after the impact. It was 8:55 a.m. She was in the parking lot of her daughter's day care. Sydney was still in her car seat, while she'd already loaded three-month-old Nicolas into the stroller.

She was juggling so many things, she wasn't even going to answer the phone, but she knew it would be Mike, wishing Sydney good luck at day care, so she picked it up.

"Soph," he said, in a voice she'd never heard before. "An airplane has hit the building."

At first she thought he was kidding. "We're trying to get out," he went on to say, "and please remember I love you."

She asked him what she should do. He told her that they desperately needed help. She agreed to hang up and call 911.

In retrospect, she wishes she hadn't hung up, for she never did reconnect with her husband. And when she phoned the Greenwich police department to tell them that a plane had hit the World Trade Center, they hadn't yet heard of the disaster and seemed to think that she was joking.

After she called 911, Sophie stood paralysed in the parking lot, overcome by the belief she had to save her husband. A woman passing by found Sophie and turned on her car radio, to assure her that help was on the way.

Meanwhile, one of Pelletier's best friends, Randy Christ, heard that a plane had collided with the World Trade Center. When he turned on the television in his office in Greenwich, Connecticut, his first thoughts were of Mike and a cousin who worked in the building.

Christ would learn later that tardiness had saved his cousin's life. His cousin emerged from the subway and was heading toward the WTC when the second plane hit the building. As he stood terrified, the smoking engine of the plane slammed down on the pavement in front of him. The police tried to herd him and dozens of others back into the subway. They refused and instead ran from the clouds of smoke. Unfortunately, they ran into a dead end, and it was only when someone opened the backdoor of a Burger King that they escaped the terror.

As soon as Christ saw the smoking towers, he called Pelletier, dialing both his cellphone and office number. It took him 30 minutes to get through. By this time, it was almost 9:30.

"Who is this? Who is this?" Pelletier shouted into the phone.

Christ had known Mike Pelletier for 13 years, and this was the first time he had heard fear in his voice.

"It's me, it's Randy," Christ said.

"Thank God. Thank God. Stay on the line. Don't leave," Pelletier said.

"I won't hang up. Don't worry, I won't hang up."

"I'm OK," said Pelletier. "But it's really bad in here. It's really bad. Don't hang up. You've got to get another phone and you've got to phone someone to get us help, to get us out of here."

Christ tried to think of what he could do to help. He knew from watching TV that there were rescue workers trying to get into the building. He moved closer to the TV so he could tell Pelletier what was happening.

He told him that a passenger jet had hit the building, and that a second had slammed into the other tower. He explained that it was a terrorist attack. While they were speaking, another plane hit the Pentagon. He told him that, too. As he revealed each detail to Pelletier, Pelletier relayed it to others in his office.

"We've been attacked by terrorists," Pelletier yelled, but his energy was waning.

"The smoke is getting really bad, Randy," Pelletier said.

He explained how he had opened a window and he and others were sticking out their heads so they could breathe.

Christ, watching the TV, tried to figure out where his friend was in relation to where the plane had crashed. Pelletier was about 15 floors above where the plane had sliced into the building. He told his friend that if he could make it down the 15 floors, he and his co-workers could probably escape.

"We can't get out," said Pelletier, who sounded more fatigued. He explained that the exits were blocked and it was now too smokey to see.

Christ prayed that the rescue teams would reach his friend in time. He could hear Pelletier's laboured breathing.

"You've got to call Sophie. You've got to make sure she's OK," Pelletier said. "Please tell her I love her. I love her so much."

"She loves you too, Mike."

On another phone, Christ called Sophie and told her to get home. He also called his girlfriend and told her to drive over to the Pelletier house to meet Sophie when she got home from driving Sydney to preschool. He told Pelletier this.

"That's good. That's good. You've got to take care of her."

Those were among Pelletier's last words to his friend. He either passed out or his phone stopped working. Christ was so panicked by then, he can't remember what was said. When the phone went dead, he didn't want Pelletier to think he'd broken his promise to him and hung up, so he called back several times. There was no answer. He left a message.

"I'm here, Buddy, I didn't hang up on you. I didn't hang up on you. I'm here. Call me back if you can."

There was no return phone call.

Christ left his office and drove to Sophie's house.

Sophie, meanwhile, hadn't gone home but had gone to the nearby Red Cross. She was still overcome with the sensation that she had to do something to help her husband. She sat in the Red Cross offices, breastfeeding her son and watching the television replay of the plane crashing into the south tower. Randy Christ phoned again, urging her to get home. This time, she complied, somehow getting herself behind the wheel of her car.

As she was driving, with Nicolas strapped in the back seat, she listened to the radio. Two minutes from her home, she heard this announcement: "Ladies and gentleman, the World Trade has disappeared. It is gone."

While her mind couldn't grasp what that meant, her body reacted immediately. She started to gasp and felt like she was going to crash the car.

"I felt like throwing up, or crying, or dying, but I had to keep it together because my baby was in the back," she'd say later.

She made it to the driveway, where Randy and his girlfriend Paula were waiting. They helped her from the car, where she collapsed.

Cindy Barkway was in a cab heading toward SoHo when she looked out the window and saw that in the distance a skyscraper was on fire. It was just before 9 a.m. The cabbie said he thought it was the World Trade Center.

It looked bad. When she got out of the cab in SoHo, few of the stores were open, so she slipped into a drugstore where everyone was standing around the radio, staring at it, trying to make sense of what they were hearing.

Two passenger jets had crashed into the towers of the World Trade Center. Terrorists had hijacked the planes. A third plane had crashed into the Pentagon.

At first, she was afraid to leave the store. Then, she realized she had to return to the hotel. Dave was probably on his way there, too. He'd be worried about her.

She started walking north, and moved with the urgency of the crowd, one person in a vast ocean of thousands. She wanted to stop at a pay phone and call her mother in Brampton, but every one she passed was being used. She kept moving, moving toward Times Square and the Hilton where they were staying.

Suddenly, people started screaming. It spread like a wave from south to north. One of the Trade Center's towers had collapsed.

Panicked, Cindy knew she had to get back. Dave would be worried about her. She got in a cab, but it seemed to be moving slower than the pedestrians. It took almost half an hour to travel 15 blocks. The cabbie let her out in Times Square, which was filled with thousands upon thousands of people, many of them staring up at CBS's gigantic television screen, which was carrying live coverage of the disaster.

She turned to watch too, and as she did, her disbelieving eyes saw the north Trade Center tower collapse. It was 10:28 a.m.

Everyone in Times Square screamed and Cindy fled to her hotel. Dave wasn't there. She phoned her mom.

"I'm fine, but I don't know where Dave is," she remembers saying.

"He's fine dear, don't panic."

"But I don't know where Dave is," she said again.

She hung up and turned on the TV. Again, she watched the plane crashing into the tower and the towers collapsing. She wished Dave would come back. Just then, the phone rang. It's Dave, she thought.

But it was someone calling from the New York office of Nesbitt Burns. He had bad news, and good news.

"Your husband was in the World Trade Center, but he's OK. He messaged us, he was going to get out," she remembers him saying.

At first, she was shocked to learn he was there, in the centre of the disaster. But she took the

phone call as a "really positive thing." He'd sent the message at 9:01, which meant he'd had lots of time to get out before the tower collapsed at 10:28 a.m.

The New York office offered to send someone over, but she didn't want to make small talk with a stranger. She spent the rest of the day by herself, taking phone calls from family and friends calling from Canada, and watching CNN.

As the hours wore on, she started to worry that maybe Dave had been injured. He'd had a full 90 minutes to get out of the building, but maybe he'd suffered smoke inhalation or been burned. She called any and every emergency number that was flashed on her television screen. They were always busy.

At one point, she left her room to go out in the hall to get more tissue and toilet paper. She'd exhausted the supply in her room from crying. Her door closed behind her. The security guard who came to let her back in her room, told her that if she needed another key she had to go down to the front desk.

"I can't leave. I'm waiting for my husband," she said.

"Well, when your husband gets back, send him down."

"But I don't know if my husband is coming back. He's in the World Trade Center," she sobbed.

After that, word spread through the hotel that there was a woman staying there whose husband was missing. They offered to get her anything she needed, but what she most needed they couldn't deliver.

She was alone in New York, five-months pregnant, and missing one husband. By this time, it was late Tuesday afternoon. She tried to remain positive as she waited for her parents to arrive. They left Brampton after she called to tell them that Dave had been in the World Trade Center; however, when they arrived in New York, they weren't allowed into Manhattan. Instead, they were forced to stay outside the city in a small motel.

Their daughter lay awake all night watching live footage of firefighters searching the rubble for survivors.

Cindy would say later in an interview that watching those rescuers pick through the twisted carnage gave her great hope. She knew that she would find Dave the next morning. In the hours that followed, the world would learn the details of a terrorist operation directed at the symbols and centres of American power: the government in Washington and finance in New York.

New Yorkers began to understand just how many thousands of people might have perished in the attacks. Early-hour estimates were as high as 10,000 or 20,000 since 40,000 people worked in the towers. No one knew how many had escaped.

The Canadian consulate in New York began taking calls from people who feared a Canadian friend or relative might have been caught in the disaster. Files were opened on more than 1,000 unaccounted for Canadians, although the estimate of Canadians actually lost in the attacks was between 50 and 100.

Those with family lost in the World Trade Center attempted to get into New York, which proved to be almost impossible. All air travel in North America had been halted, and passenger jets that had been en route to the U.S. were grounded, many of them at Canadian airports.

The families of the Canadians who'd been atop the north tower scavenged for any information on their loved ones.

Maureen Basnicki, the wife of BEA financial director Ken Basnicki, was a flight attendant for Air Canada and was grounded in Germany. It took her days to get back to Etobicoke to be with her two children, Erica and Brennan.

Arron Dack's mother, Selena Forsyth, a freelance writer living in Port Hope, Ont., drove to New York to look for her son.

Sophie Pelletier's mother, who was in California, got in her car and drove to Connecticut. It took her only 42 hours to cross the continent. Michael Pelletier's parents, Marcel and Lillian, who lived in Port Moody, B.C., had to wait an excruciating six days before they could get a flight to New York. His brothers, Dan in Vancouver, and Ron, in Calgary, had similar difficulty, as did sister Kristina, who was teaching English in Hong Kong.

By that time, they'd all but given up hope that Michael was alive. However, when Marcel Pelletier arrived, he dutifully went to New York and put up posters of his son around the city, hoping that someone might have miraculously seen him alive.

On Wednesday, friends of Ace Bailey crowded his Boston area home to comfort his wife and son. At the Los Angeles Kings practice rink, the team proceeded with the second day of training camp. During the scrimmage the players were assigned either black or white. Skaters with white jerseys wore black bands on their arms to honour Bailey and Bavis. Later in the week, the team cancelled its first pre-season game.

Hans and Helga Gerhardt drove to New York the day after the terrorist attacks. Hans, who was very close to Ralph and had visited him in New York only two weeks earlier, was returning with the hope of finding his son. He knew that if he were to locate Ralph, it would be in one of the many hospitals treating burn victims and smoke inhalation patients.

Ralph's apartment was on Lexington Avenue and 26th Street, eerily close to the Lexington Avenue Armoury, where thousands who had someone missing met. On Thursday, Hans Gerhardt taped a picture of Ralph alongside the hundreds of other pictures and posters of lost loved ones. The photos were all taken during happier times: weddings, family gatherings, picnics. The posters carried personal details: Names, weight, tattoos, scars.

On Thursday, Hans and Helga learned that their son might be alive after being overwhelmed by calls from relatives and friends in Germany, Canada, Japan and the U.S. who had seen Ralph's name listed on the World Trade Center Survivor Database.

It read: Ralph, Gerhardt. Found and okay. Thu Sep 13 07:25:57.

Hans raced across the street to the emergency command post, shouting, "They found our son! They found our son!"

"It's a tremendous stress having your hopes raised so much," he told a reporter later. As he waited for confirmation, he realized it was probably a hoax. By dawn Friday, the report was finally dismissed. He was devastated.

Operating on very little sleep, the Gerhardts continued to search hospitals for their son. At each stop, they were moved by the kindness and generosity of New Yorkers. On a Web site set up by the Gerhardt family after the attacks, Hans wrote: "Candlelight vigils were held all over the city, gospel singers appeared on busy street corners. People were handing out flowers, flags, strangers hugged you, offered any help from paying your bus fare or just crying with you."

A few days later, while they were waiting at the armoury, New York Governor George Pataki visited. Hans and his other son Stephan, who had finally arrived after being stranded in Texas, pushed through the crowd to thank Pataki for the support New Yorkers had shown them. The moment was captured by a writer for the Albany Times-Union.

Hans held up a homemade poster and said: "This is my son." He then thanked the governor for all the help his family received. Pataki hugged him and then nodded from the picture toward Stephan, "Your brother?" He nodded and the governor hugged him, too.

"God bless you," Pataki said.

"It is very difficult and they are doing it carefully," he said, referring to the excavation effort going on at the World Trade Center.

The governor and the Gerhardts hugged again. Pataki's eyes filled with tears. "We love you," he told them. "God bless your son."

That same day, the Gerhardts provided samples of Ralph's DNA to coroners. It was scavenged from personal effects, such as a toothbrush or comb. "It was a very difficult moment for me," Hans later wrote. "The two Canadian coroners visiting us also brought us closer to accepting and understanding the finality of the situation."

When Cindy Barkway saw her parents' faces on Wednesday, her hopes of collapsing in their arms vanished. They were red-faced and tired. "They looked terrible," she recalled in an interview. "I realized that I was going to have to be strong."

Leaving her parents to answer her hotel-room phone in case Dave, or someone who knew where Dave was, called, she began her search for him. At the Lexington Avenue Armoury, she waited five hours to register her husband as one of the missing. All around her, others were as lost and confused as she was.

"It was so emotional. There were so many people looking for missing family."

A man waiting beside her was searching for his wife, who worked in the south tower. He'd tracked her progress from the 90th floor to the 76th floor, but then had lost track of her. He hoped she'd made it out. A neighbour was watching their two kids.

Later Wednesday evening, Cindy and her mother went to the Cantor Fitzgerald crisis centre, which had been set up at the Pierre Hotel, across from Central Park. Because Dave had been meeting with Cantor Fitzgerald clients when he disappeared, she thought she might learn something about his whereabouts.

When she arrived, people were taping up photos of missing loved ones. They all worked on the top floor of the north tower where Dave had messaged from. Still, she believed he was OK.

Howard Lutnick, CEO of Cantor Fitzgerald, spoke to the crowd of his survival and unimaginable loss. He'd only lived because he'd been late that day, taking his son to kindergarten. His brother Gary, age 36, was missing, as were hundreds of his employees. He, like Pelletier and Barkway, had been on the 105th floor.

As Lutnick sobbed, he described how he waited at the bottom of the tower as people

emerged and then fled down the street. He didn't meet one person who'd escaped from the Cantor Fitzgerald floors.

He said he had recruited people to come work at his company, saying it was "the greatest place in the world. And this is what happened."

Cindy felt out of place at the gathering. Still, she moved through the room, gathering information that might help discover what had happened to Dave.

One man told her he'd received a call from his brother who had worked on the 105th floor and was trapped because the airplane had cut through all escape routes.

"No one could get out," he told her.

Cindy turned to her mother, and said: "I have to get out of here." Outside, in the ash-filled New York air, she wept. "He's gone. Dave is gone," she repeated. "Nobody from his floor is alive. He didn't have a chance to evacuate."

She spent another sleepless night watching live television coverage of firefighters picking through the rubble for survivors, realizing that Dave would not be among any who were found. The next night, she returned to the Pierre Hotel and spoke to a trader who had skipped work on Sept. 11 and because of it, he was alive. His wife had been crying for two days she was so happy he didn't go to work. He just felt awful. At the gathering, he didn't see one person he had worked with at Cantor Fitzgerald.

Lutnick again spoke. About 700 of 1,000 workers were dead. Those who survived had been late, or were sick or on vacation. He promised to take care of their financial needs as best he could.

Then entertainer Carole King stood up and began to sing You've Got a Friend. If she hoped that the 1,500 people in the room would sing with her, she was mistaken. Everyone wept as she sang.

"It was a devastating moment," said Cindy.

Although she knew her husband was gone, she didn't want to leave New York City. It seemed too final. Still, the next day, she called Dave's dentist in Toronto, asking him to send dental records. She called the hospitals once more, quietly hoping for a miracle. At lunch, she went to a nearby church to say a prayer during the three minutes of silence on the official Day of Mourning.

When she arrived for the service, 10 minutes early, the church was nearly empty. By noon, it

was jammed. Every nearby office building and store had been drained of workers, who'd come to say a prayer and heap the collection plate with donations for New York firefighters.

Saturday morning, she got into her parents' black Lincoln for the drive back to Toronto. In New York, she'd been one of thousands with stories of loss. In Toronto, she was one of the few and all attention was on her.

Some people told her not to give up hope because her husband might still turn up.

"I'd look at them and shake my head. I was there, I saw what happened. He's gone. He's just gone," she said.

She was conflicted: wanting to hide away, yet seeking company. "When I'm alone, it's the hardest."

In her Etobicoke neighbourhood, where she and Dave lived since spring, her neighbours brought food to fill her freezer. "Everyone has been so kind."

There were memorials for David Barkway in both Toronto and Cornwall. More than 1,300 people packed St. James Anglican Cathedral in Toronto to honour the proud father and dedicated, driven businessman, who loved golf, the odd cigar and a good laugh. At the front of the church there were two photos, one of Barkway in a golf cart, the other of him with his boy Jamie.

Colleagues at BMO Nesbitt Burns have started a trust fund for his children. Cindy Barkway is trying to find peace as she nurtures the child growing inside of her.

In the weeks after the attack, there were memorials for the other Canadians involved. The number of Canadians missing stood at 23.

Neither the coroner nor Foreign Affairs would release the names, but others who perished included those who were at AON Corp., a large insurance brokerage located on the 90th floor, right where Flight 175 hit the south tower. They didn't stand a chance.

Among them were Peter Feidelberg, 34, and his wife, Meredith Ewart, who had married only 18 months earlier, and who both worked for AON Corp. They'd grown up in Montreal but wanted to try their luck in Manhattan. There was also 45-year-old Michael Arczynski, a long-time Montreal resident who'd recently taken a position with AON in the risk services department and lived in New Jersey. And also Christine Egan, 55, a nurse and epidemiologist with Health Canada in Winnipeg, who was in her brother's AON Corp. office to see the panoramic view of Manhattan when the plane struck. Both she and her brother died.

In the days after the terrorist attack, Sophie Pelletier felt like dying. Her soul had been ripped apart. She knew, however, that she must stay alive to care for her small children. That's what Mike would want. When his two-year-old daughter asked where "Papa" was, her mother told her that he was at work. But eventually, Sophie explained he was in heaven.

"Papa is in your heart, and he's in the sky," Sophie said.

The little girl listened very carefully and didn't ask any more questions for several days.

At her father's memorial service, Mike Pelletier's sister and brother sang a song they'd written about the tragedy, about the dusty death and his smiling face. A children's story written about Mike, called "The Laughing Prince and the Rainbow," was also read.

Sydney and Nicolas are among the 1,300 children whose mother or father worked at Cantor Fitzgerald and lost their lives on Sept. 11.

One month after Pelletier died, Randy Christ sent a letter to his dozens of friends across North America. "Join me in writing a letter to Sydney and Nicolas that they can read 10, 15, 40 years from now during that quiet time that they will want to share with their Papa. Please tell them whatever you feel appropriate so someday they can feel strength through your words."

The letters will be bound in a book, to be called "Let me tell you about your Papa."

Christ wrote: "I could not begin to understand what Sydney and Nicolas will go through the rest of their lives without their father around to hug them, give them a 'time out' and to tell them how special they are, but I know I want to be there when they say 'Can you tell me about our dad?'"

In the past week, Sydney has woken up in the middle of the night screaming, then she looks out her bedroom window at the dark sky, wondering where her Papa is.

Shelley Page wrote for the Weekly.