

Every time I reflect on the tragedies of 9/11 I think of this story that appeared in Westchester Magazine. I attended a memorial service for Sharon at Winding Ridge this past Saturday. We must never forget the tragedy that happened on 9/11. Please visit our memorial garden at AF Veteran Park (Multipurpose Building). The names of all the Greenburgh victims are on a plaque. Also visit our 9/11 Memorial Wall at Richard Presser Park. Over 1,000 tiles are on this wall --which was paid for by the Rotary Clubs.

PAUL FEINER

Anniversary Story Package: 9/11 Victim Sharon Balkcom's Family On Keeping Her Dream Home at the Winding Ridge Condos in White Plains, NY, After Her Death in the September 11 Attacks
By Dana White Published August 12, 2011 at 12:36 PM



Sharon Balkcom, 43

In 1999, after 40 years spent living in East Harlem apartments, Sharon Balkcom found her dream house: a \$240,000 condo in Winding Ridge, a brand-new development off Route 119 in White Plains. "She was so excited," recalls her older sister, Joan Balkcom, an assistant principal in the New York City school system. "She told the developers exactly what she wanted, from fixtures to carpeting. We'd come up every Saturday to take pictures and watch the progress. She wanted real estate; she wanted to live in Westchester. And it was close enough to the City that she could get down to Wall Street every day."

It was a typically independent move for the career-minded Balkcom. Single after a brief marriage in the 1990s, the outgoing executive lived life on her own terms, from vacationing solo to learning to swim. Her mother, Rosalee, and her late father, Nathaniel, used education and the church to keep their three children on the right path. A math wiz, Sharon got into the Bronx High School of Science (as did her little brother, Gordon). While at Colgate, where she majored in International Relations, Sharon traveled alone to Barbados for an independent-study project on women who sold goods in the marketplaces. "She wasn't afraid to take a risk," Joan says. "I was the one who was always afraid." Sharon lived in her dream house for less than two years. On the morning of 9/11, she parked her new Volkswagen Passat at the Metro-North station in North White Plains and headed to work at Marsh & McClennan, the insurance brokerage and consulting firm, where she was assistant vice president for

technology. She had a big presentation that morning and wanted to get in early. Her office was located in the impact zone where American Airlines Flight 11 hit the North Tower; no traces of her were ever recovered.

Ten years later, Joan, Gordon, and Rosalee sit at the dining-room table in Sharon's condo, where Joan has lived since 2003. "Sharon worked very hard for this house," says Joan, "and we didn't care what we needed to do as a family—we were going to keep it." It was a year before they could bring themselves to erase her voice from the answering machine. "I think about her every day," Rosalee, 84, says softly. They struggle to find words to express their pain and grief, which seems as raw as ever. The best thing to do is look around Sharon's former home, where memorial quilts and photographs tell the story of a life taken too soon. Sharon belonged to Phi Delta Sigma, a sorority for African American businesswomen. Its symbol is the butterfly, and whenever Joan would find a butterfly "thing"—a pin, a vase—she'd give it to Sharon. After moving into her condo, her collecting accelerated, and, today, the condo brims with countless butterfly collectibles, from plaques to lawn ornaments.

"I have a new respect for butterflies and the freedom they represent, and how happy-go-lucky Sharon was, how free she felt to go out and do whatever she wanted to do, whatever she set her mind to," says Joan, who wears a butterfly pendant around her neck along with a locket containing Sharon's picture. "It's strange for me, because I feel like I'm living her dream. I'm in her dream house. I'm driving her car."

In the days after 9/11, Winding Ridge placed lit candles on her steps and held prayer vigils at the condo, and, in 2002, the development installed a memorial garden and bench near the clubhouse. For the 10th anniversary of the 9/11 attacks, as they do every year, the community and the Balkcoms' relatives gather there for a memorial service. "It's become a tradition," Gordon says.

Of the three, Gordon has been the most active in 9/11-related causes; he is the point person for all the legal matters and 9/11-related mail they receive. In 2009 and 2010, he ran in Sharon's memory in the World Trade Center Run to Remember, and he helped to create a scholarship in her name at Colgate. He has attended Ground Zero memorial ceremonies every September, while Joan and their mother prefer to attend the memorial at The Rising. Joan and Rosalee have never been to Ground Zero. "I just can't go," Rosalee says.

On the 10th anniversary, Joan will gather her nerve and go with Gordon to downtown Manhattan, for the 9/11 Memorial's dedication ceremony. Afterward, she'll drive Sharon's car back up to Westchester, and, if it's still light outside, she'll drive past the memorial garden at Winding Ridge, as she often does, "just to look. Just because."

Visit our web site at www.greenburghny.com and view archived Supervisors Reports.

To unsubscribe to list send an e-mail to:

imailsrv@cit-e.net

Please put the following in the body of the e-mail:

Unsubscribe gblast