

3/14/79 - 3/15/18

**KIA during Operation Inherent Resolve - the War against ISIS.
Lt FDNY E302; Lt Commack FD Station 4; MSgt Combat Search
and Rescue Special Missions Aviator 101st Jolly Green Helicopter
Rescue Squadron, USAF.**

In Honor of Christopher J. Raguso

Greater love hath no man than this, than to lay down his life for his friends. John 15:13

Written by Captain John N. Raguso

I almost don't know where to begin describing my oldest son Chris...the past year since his untimely passing, when he gave his life in service to his country while supporting a special ops mission against Islamic terrorists, has been a whirlwind of countless memorial ceremonies. The USAF, FDNY, the Commack volunteer fire department, Suffolk County, the towns of Huntington and Smithtown, and the schools where he grew up in Elwood, NY have all paid homage to this brave and selfless warrior and first responder. The lives of our family have been changed forever and not for the good...there's a new normal without the comic book hero persona of Lt Chris in our everyday lives, creating a giant hole in our hearts and spirits that will never, ever be filled. It's taking us a while to learn to deal with this sudden and tragic loss, to make some sense of it and to put it in perspective...and it's definitely going to take a while longer. The following is a brief summary of FDNY Lt Chris Raguso's professional life and accomplishments.

The Revelation of Helping Others... Morphing From Self to Team

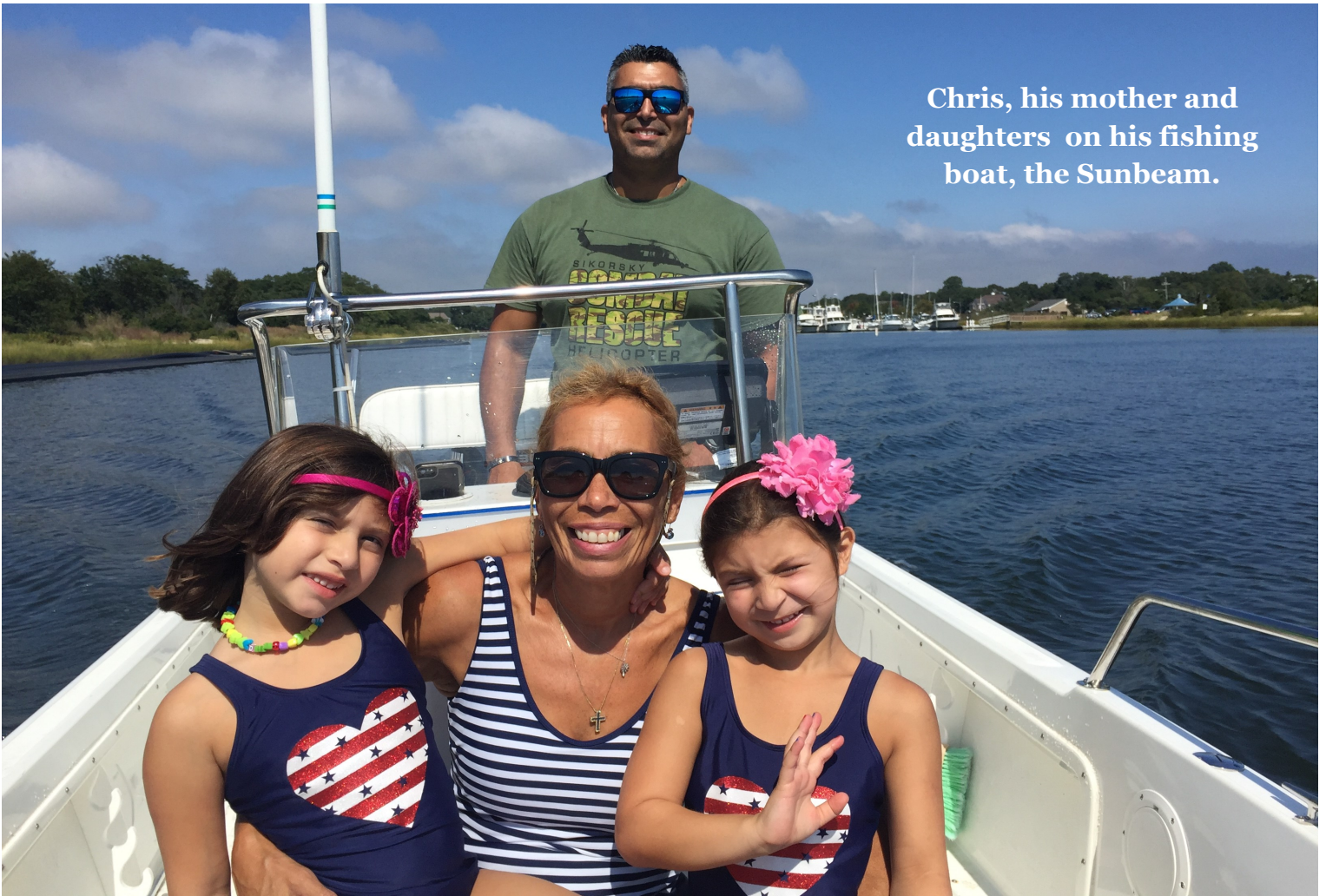
Chris was born in Flushing Queens on March 14, 1979. But the moment that started a huge shift in Chris' life was joining the Commack Fire Dept in 2000 as a volunteer fire fighter and this seemed to be right in Chris' wheelhouse. He had a chance to be a member of a proud team, to be a part of something that was bigger than himself, and to do good deeds for the community. This new lifestyle gave Chris a sense of purpose and Chris' professional career path started to take shape. When

Chris had a chance to join my brother Joe, who was the borough commander and a 2-star chief at NYPD, much to our disbelief, Chris passed on this opportunity to follow his one, true calling...he wanted to be a NYC firefighter. He took the FDNY exam, physical aptitude test, got a high score and waited for his turn to be called.

In the interim, Chris had the chance to become a New York State firefighter at the Westhampton Beach airbase. Chris joined the NYANG, went to boot camp, was a squad leader and came back as an airman first class. Then 9/11 happened and the entire world changed. Chris spent a year at the Dept of Defense fire academy down in Texas and became a certified USAF firefighter.

In 2004, Chris was sent to the Iraq war with his best buddy Ed Kelly and they saw the world in a totally different way...death and mayhem were everywhere. The moment that changed Chris' life forever occurred during an attack on their airbase in Baghdad. Chris and Ed were standing outside of their tent during an attack on their base when an enemy mortar round whistled in and landed 10-feet away, but didn't explode. Chris and Ed hastily evacuated the area and EOD came by later to detonate the round...it wasn't a dud, the good Lord just decided to spare Chris and Ed at that moment and that changed everything.

Chris was a totally changed man when he came back from the Iraq war. He mentioned something about "being the tip of the spear" on his next deployment. He didn't want to be mission support anymore; he wanted to be the mission. But that would have to wait...FDNY



Chris, his mother and daughters on his fishing boat, the Sunbeam.

called and he was scheduled to be in the next class at the Randall's Island Rock in March 2005. They made him a squad leader and gave him a challenge...get all 25 of the recruits in his squad to pass the course, and he could pick any fire house in the City to start his career. That was all Chris needed to hear. He had his group out there running and practicing their drills each day, both before after class. He willed them to succeed and they did. All 25 made it and Chris chose E249/L113 as his preferred landing spot, one of the most active houses in the city located in East Flatbush Brooklyn, the "borough of fire". His brother rats didn't know it yet, but the "Rogers Ave Rat House" would never be the same.

Chris listened and learned from some of the best and most experienced fire-fighters in FDNY and was awarded six citations for bravery in his first few years on the job. He even gave up a medal to a brother rat who had promised his dad that he would be a hero one day...that was Chris. He didn't care about the glory, it was all about doing the job that made a difference. Chris looked good in a uniform and wore all three proudly (USAF, FDNY, CFD), understanding the history of each service and being true to their core beliefs and high standards of excellence.

Flight Path

In 2007 Chris' 6-year commitment to the military was up, but the USAF convinced Chris that if he re-enlisted, they would send him to helicopter school to get his wings. It was an offer he couldn't refuse...to be a special missions combat search and rescue aviator. He took a leave of absence from FDNY and over the next 16-months, Chris passed flight school, gunnery school, engineering school and the dreaded SERE (search, evade, resist, escape) school with flying colors. His graduate class was a 5-month tour in Afghanistan in 2008, where he learned firsthand what it meant to fly into harm's way and save lives. There were many wounded marines who were happy to meet Chris and his crew.

Chris married the true love of his life, Carmela DiChiara in April of 2009 after returning home from Afghanistan. Chris continued to grow at FDNY and the student ultimately became a teacher, helping to train the new recruits in the ways that he was taught. Giving 99% was slacking off...Chris demanded 110% at all times from himself and his students and it was contagious. The legend of Chris was beginning to take shape, the career path had become a true calling...this was the road that



the Lord wanted Chris to take. His daughter Mila was born in July of 2011 and now Chris was a proud daddy and family man. Chris returned to war in 2012 for his second tour of duty in Afghanistan, where he and his crews once again saved the lives of many marines and coalition forces who

were wounded in battle. When he returned just before Christmas, Carmela gave birth to their second daughter Eva Rose. Life was great. Chris was called off to war yet again in 2015 and fought with the SEALs in eastern Africa for a five month tour of duty. In October 2016, Chris was promoted to Lieutenant at FDNY and his base of operations moved to Queens, ultimately landing at E302, located just north of JFK airport.

In the summer of 2017, Hurricane Harvey devastated the Houston, TX area and the 106th Rescue Wing was sent into action, plucking a total of 546 Houston residents out of the flood zone and bringing them back to safety. Chris was a big part of that operation, flying in 60-to-80 knot winds with the 101st Jolly Greens helicopter squadron. The Go-Pro camera on his helmet documented his crew's bravery and courage for the entire world to see on night time news. According to USAF records, Chris' Rescue 1 HH-60 PaveHawk crew saved 135 Houston residents during their brief stay down south. Two weeks later, they followed up in the aftermath of Hurricane Maria, rescuing numerous survivors in Puerto Rico, Florida and the US Virgin Islands. All told, we guesstimated that Chris and his crews had saved over 400 souls during his 888 hours of flight time...not a bad ratio.

Last Mission

Chris' last tour overseas started in January of 2018. He had promised everyone that this would be his last time going to war. He couldn't pass on this, since he had a trio of new flight engineers to train up and this needed

to be done in-theater, face-to-face. His departure overseas was low-key and devoid of the usual family histrionics. As per his request, it was just him and Carmela. He would reach out to us periodically via facetime, so we stayed in touch, but I knew that he was doing extremely dangerous work. We heard through the grapevine that his group was set up in the western Iraq desert and were working with special ops teams, chasing the last remnants of ISIS into Syria and eliminating this threat once and for all...you can draw your own conclusions about what they were doing. We had a facetime birthday party for him the night of March 14th, his 39th year on earth. The next day was to be his last. I'd like to forget that day, the Ides of March, which was the worst moment of my life. He died on a mission near the Iraq/Syria border while supporting coalition forces in Operation Inherent Resolve, the war against ISIS. I will never forget the image of the three uniformed USAF personnel knocking at my door at 8:30 the night of March 15, 2018 and telling us that "we lost Chris today"...my wife and I both became physically ill, flashes of which still last to this day with the thought and reality of losing our oldest son.

But why? Why did the Lord take this young man who was a life saver, a difference maker, a leader, a teacher, a larger-than-life action hero, a fantastic son, a great big brother, a loving husband and an exemplary father? Why?

A Story of Inspiration

The trite expression that "only the good die young" really hits home. Chris was a great combination of his mom and dad. Tough as nails, focused, driven, compassionate and loving. But why take him? Why not take a drug dealer, a dishonest politician, or a murderer? As I struggle to comprehend the gross unfairness of this catastrophic loss, I have been seeing a strange collection of signs that are beginning to give me some



perspective. When we were down in Delaware at the Dover air force base to receive his remains, his buddies from L113 were out getting gas when the truck in front of them had a large blow-up goose in the back, looking straight at them. The helicopter that brought his body back from Dover AFB had a tail I/D number of 113... Chris was a member of L113 at FDNY. The first C-130 on the flight line at the Westhampton AFB when his remains arrived in NY, different than the rest with a bright orange tail, bore the I/D number of 302...E302 was Lt Chris' last command at FDNY.

So what does all of this mean? The only rationale that I can formulate from this tragedy is that Chris had a great story to tell. By taking Chris now, we are all overwhelmed by the heart-break of this loss and the world will see it, know it, touch it and cry with us as we feel the pain. His story will be told and others will be inspired by his selfless deeds as the ultimate 3-time first responder and will want to be like him and to walk in his shoes. Sacrifice one good man for 10 to replace him and 100 more to replace them. This will make the world a better place, just like Lt Chris Raguso did in real life.

In retrospect, if the Lord would have taken him back in 2004, none of these good deeds would have ever come to fruition. Chris had 14 glorious years of "extra time"

and he made the most of it. He lived life large and at full-speed, loved his family and made the world a happier and a better place. He earned every one of those 14 extra years. His legacy is his beautiful wife and their charming girls, both of whom look and act just like their dad. We are eternally grateful for them and will love and support them until our final days. We must continue to tell Chris' story to his wife and children to inspire them to be great and to remind Carmela, Mila & Eva and his brother Marc that he loved them more than anything and will continue to always be there and love them in spirit.

To this day, I still get calls, letters and e-mails from empathetic Americans all over the USA that tell me stories about how their son, daughter, husband, wife, brother, sister or best friend was inspired by FDNY Lt Chris Raguso's lifetime of service and sacrifice and how they volunteered in some way to make their own difference for their community and country. Yes, Chris' story of inspiration continues to impress those who hear it and it will, for as long as we tell it for the world to hear. Maybe his sacrifice and call to duty will inspire the next generation of heroes to rise up from the mist and to make a difference, just like Chris did for the 39 years and one day that he walked and flew on the face of this earth.



John and Chris Raguso