

Still Seeking Justice for Family Lost on 9/11



While Keeping the Memory Alive



Sue Kim, Christine and Peter Hanson-Photo Courtesy of Eunice Hanson

Eunice Hanson settled into a comfortable chair in the cheerful sun room of her colonial-style home in Easton. Calming colors and carefully chosen artifacts grace the room. Walls of windows look out into lush green woods all around. Originally a deck, it's

Eunice's favorite place in the house.

"I love this room, but it's lonely," she said. She misses her husband, C.Lee Hannson, who died Nov. 13, 2018 at the age of 85. Married for 64 years, they were childhood sweethearts and shared years of joy and contentment, followed by unfathomable grief.

The Hansons lost their beloved son, Peter Burton Hanson, 32, daughter-in-law Sue Kim Hanson, 34, and granddaughter Christine Lee Hanson, 2 1/2, in the Sept. 11, 2001 terrorist attacks. Christine was the youngest of eight children who perished on that terrible day.

Peter, a software salesman and proud father, was vice president of marketing at TimeTrade in Waltham, Mass. Sue, a doctoral candidate in microbiology immunology at Boston University, planned to present her dissertation in October. Christine was their first and only child.

20th Anniversary

Eunice and Lee survived the early years by traveling to lobby Congress and law enforcement authorities in their never-ending quest to find out who had committed the terrorist attacks and why. They made frequent trips to New York, Washington and Guantanamo Bay in their quest for justice. They worked with other victims' families to establish memorials in honor of their lost loved ones and established various tributes and memorials to their lost children.

This will be her third 9/11 anniversary without Lee. She is grateful for the loving support of her daughter Kathy, who she sees often, and granddaughters, Alexandra, 23, and Nicole, 21. She has a circle of "true friends" who have been there for her every step of the way. She doesn't know how she could have done it without them.

"It never gets easier," Eunice said. Each anniversary brings back the memories, but the

20th anniversary is especially difficult, she said. Not only does she no longer have Lee for mutual support, but she also must confront the reality that the perpetrators have still not been brought to trial and continue to languish at Guantanamo Bay after all these years. This is a terrible disservice to all of the victims' families, she said.

Eunice is happy and excited that the town of Easton will be holding a 20th anniversary remembrance ceremony on Saturday, Sept. 11 at 10 a.m. at the 9/11 Memorial on the memorial green in front of the Easton Public Library. Some of her friends are organizing the family-friendly event. A whole generation of young people weren't even born on 9/11, and it's important for them to learn what happened, she said.

Heavy Hand of Fate



Peter Burton Hanson-Photo Courtesy of Eunice Hanson

Peter, Sue and Christine boarded United Airlines Flight 175 from Boston to Los Angeles on the morning of Sept. 11, 2001. Eunice recounted the fateful turn of events that changed their travel date from Sept. 10 to Sept. 11.

“Peter was going to California on business and decided to take the family,” Eunice said. “Sue was from California and her family there had never met little Christine. Sue was going to sit for her dissertation in October. Peter thought it would be good for her to go to California and visit her family while he was doing his business.”

They were supposed to go on Monday, Sept. 10, but Peter was called to a meeting in town and postponed the flight to the next day, Sept. 11, she said.

Eunice recalled a phone conversation with Christine a few days earlier. “I’m going to Disneyland,” her granddaughter told her. “I’m going to see Mickey Mouse. I want to see you, Nana.” Eunice explained that they would see each other the following week.

“When the phone rang on Tuesday morning sometime after 8, Lee went to answer it,” she said. She didn’t understand why he would be calling.

“Peter said the plane was being hijacked,” she said. “He asked Lee to call the FBI and the police and tell them about Flight 175 was being hijacked. “That was the worst moment of our lives.”

Lee did as his son requested, Eunice said. They had the TV on and saw the planes flying around. “Peter called again a short time later and said, ‘Dad, the hijackers have box knives and killed a stewardess. They moved us to the back of the plane.’”

He didn’t know where they were but thought the hijackers were going to crash the plane into a building. ““Don’t worry, it will be quick,”” he said.. “Then Lee heard him say he said softly, ‘Oh my God, Oh my God.’ Lee heard a crash. He hung up the phone and was never the same. He lost the sparkle in this eye. His face got dead.”



Sue Kim Hanson-Photo Courtesy of Eunice Hanson

Lee and Eunice watched in horror on TV as Flight 175, carrying their loved ones, crashed into the South Tower at 9:03 a.m. A short time earlier, at 8:46 a.m., a plane later identified as hijacked Flight 11, had crashed into the North Tower

“You just wonder how people can do that,” she said. “That thought has gone through my head. From what I’ve seen on TV I’ve started to understand it. There’s that much hate.”

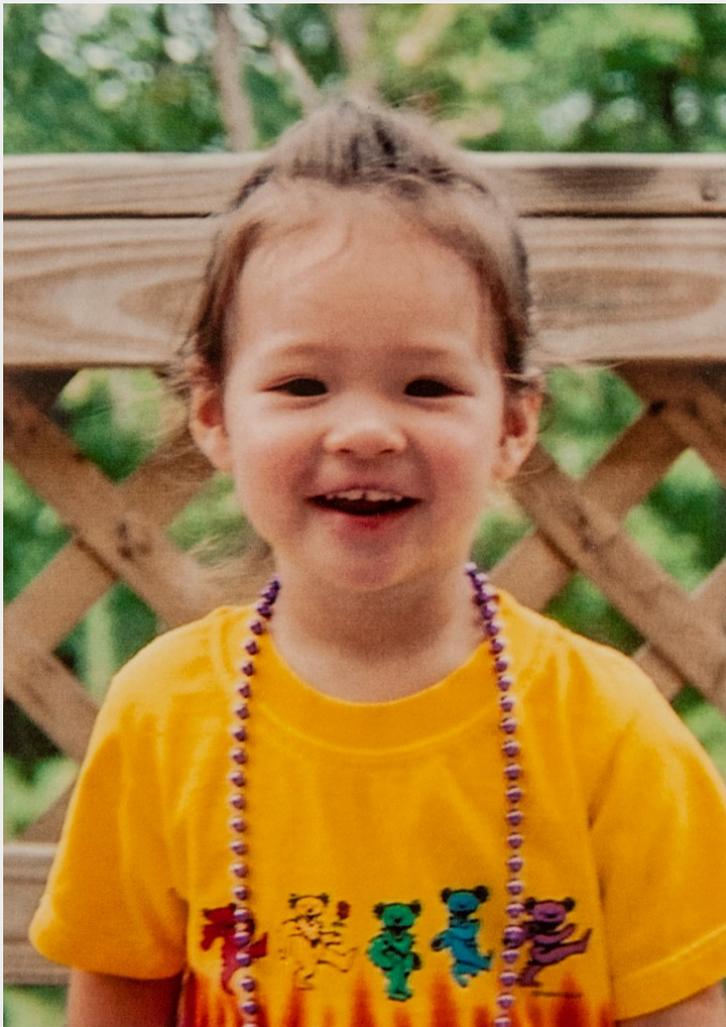
Nineteen terrorists from al-Qaeda hijacked four commercial airplanes on that terrible day. They deliberately crashed two of the planes into the upper floors of the North and South Towers of the World Trade Center complex and a third plane into the Pentagon in Arlington, Virginia, according to the 9/11 Memorial & Museum.

The Twin Towers ultimately collapsed because of the damage sustained from the impacts

and the resulting fires. After learning about the other attacks, passengers on the fourth hijacked plane, Flight 93, fought back, and the plane crashed into an empty field in western Pennsylvania about 20 minutes by air from Washington.

The attacks killed 2,977 people from 93 nations: 2,753 people were killed in New York; 184 people were killed at the Pentagon; and 40 people were killed on Flight 93.

Living with Grief



Christine Hanson-Photo Courtesy of Eunice Hanson

Eunice and Lee survived the grief during the early years by working with other victims' families to seek justice and establish memorials in honor of the victims. They worked on Connecticut's 9/11 Memorial at Sherwood Island State Park with another victim's family

and other supporters. Eunice said the flowers created from pieces of metal from the Twin Towers are especially meaningful and beautiful. She and Lee always attended the annual ceremonies while he was alive.

Locally, they worked with town residents to erect the 9/11 Memorial at the Easton Public Library, in memory of all of the victims. They were instrumental in the establishment of the Hanson Exploration Center at Connecticut's Beardsley Zoo in Bridgeport in 2003. The center was created and named in honor of their family.

"That was our favorite," she said. "It's a real log cabin. The outside is nice too; they have butterfly plants and a stone bench. The bench that's sitting on the porch was made by one of Peter's very good friends. It's made of cane. It's beautiful, beautiful.

"I love Gregg Dancho," she said. "What a man." She was referring to the zoo's longtime director, who worked with them and made it happen.

Peter is remembered annually by the Peter Burton Hanson Humanitarian Award given to a Joel Barlow High School student who best exemplifies Peter's dedication to social justice, human rights, volunteerism and passion for living. At Northeastern University, Eunice and Lee were instrumental in creating and endowing the Peter Burton Hanson Memorial Lectures and Writing Award.

Eunice modestly credits Lee with leading the charitable outreach. "I don't think Lee had a mean bone in his body," she said. "I think that's what attracted me in the beginning. You were around a lot of tough guys. He was never tough. I liked that."

Eunice and Lee recorded their story for Story Corps. You can listen to it [here](#).

Early Years

Eunice, who was born in 1935, and Lee, born in 1933, grew up in the Roxbury suburb of Boston. They met at a Baptist Church youth group when she was 11 and he was 13. The

church offered activities for city youth, Eunice said. Lee's father was the assistant pastor at the Baptist Church. An Army Chaplain, he was called to duty in World War II and died in Newfoundland in 1944.

Eunice's family was Greek Orthodox, but she went to the Baptist Youth Group a few times. They didn't see each other again for some time. Eunice went to Roxbury Memorial, an all-girls school, and Lee went to Boston English, an all-boys school. They met up again a few years later and started dating. "We went 'steady' when I was 17," Eunice said.

The couple wed three years later in the Baptist Church where they had met. Eunice was sad to learn the Greek Orthodox Church didn't recognize her marriage because she married outside the faith. "After all, there is only one God," she said.

Years later, she was touched when the priest at the Greek Orthodox Church on Park Avenue in Bridgeport said a Mass for Peter and his family following the terrorist attacks. At last they were recognized, and that meant a great deal to her. "I miss the Mass and the music," she said about the Greek Orthodox Church of her childhood.

Lee received his bachelor's degree in business from Northeastern University and a master's degree in business administration from Boston University. He served in the United States Army in Germany from 1955 to 1957 and remained in the Army Reserves until 1967. He began his career in international finance at General Electric, where he was manager of finance for the Singapore facility.

Life Overseas

Lee's first overseas assignment was in Germany, where the family lived for a time and later joined him in Singapore. Kathryn was 9 and Peter was 2 at the time. They loved living overseas, and the children thrived, Eunice said. They traveled widely on their vacations in addition to coming home to the U.S.

They moved back to the States in 1976 and bought the house in Easton where Eunice still lives. Kathryn went to Joel Barlow High School for her senior year. Peter, who was in third grade, went to Samuel Staples Elementary School. Kathryn graduated and went off to college. Peter continued his education at Helen Keller Middle School and Barlow. He made friends easily and often had them over to the house. Some of them were in a band. When Eunice would tell them it was time to go home, they would serenade her with "Good night, sweetheart," she said. "I loved that!"

Lee left GE after 25 years and continued in finance with London-based Smith Industries until his retirement in 1999. Both of them were active in the community. Lee was a member of the Easton Board of Finance, where he served the town for 25 years. He was a deacon and treasurer at the Congregational Church of Easton, and a creator of the church's Memorial Garden. He was a member, past president and treasurer of the Easton Exchange Club.

Eunice has a long history of community service as well. While living in Germany she worked with refugees from Hungary and Poland who escaped during their respective revolutions in 1956 and after. In 1988 she was one of the founders of the Alpha Home of Bridgeport, a shelter for homeless families, now part of the YMCA. The organization was run by volunteers. As president for five years, she raised the funds to support its operation.

She was Easton's registrar of voters for more than 20 years, starting in 1988, secretary to the Conservation Commission for 10 years and assistant town clerk for two years.



Eunice and C. Lee Hanson-Photo Courtesy of Eunice Hanson

Pursuit of Justice

Eunice and Lee traveled to Washington, Alexandria, Va., and Guantanamo Bay in an effort to seek justice for the victims of 9/11 by bringing the perpetrators to trial. That day has still not come, after all these years.

They made a final trip to Guantanamo Bay in January 2018, the year Lee died, so he could tape his deposition before a judge. His health failing and his dementia worsening, he managed to successfully tape the deposition, Eunice said. They traveled in inclement weather, and a sudden wind gust almost blew him off the stairs as he climbed to enter the plane. But he held on — and made sure Eunice held on too — before stepping into

the plane.

Lee was moved deeply when soldiers lined up and saluted him as they were departing from Guantanamo Bay for the final time. The same soldiers later attended his funeral and the memorial lunch that followed. Their presence and respect touched Eunice's heart.

"It's time for the government to really put this thing out there and let us go to trial," she said. "We need justice. The 9/11 families are praying and they've been praying for 20 years. The U.S. government had a report on what happened, how it happened and who it happened by. They've been reluctant to release it."

Sept. 11, 2001 is etched into the brains of people who are old enough to remember, much as Pearl Harbor and the assassination of President John F. Kennedy are times that older generations remember clearly. But for a whole generation that wasn't even born on 9/11, it's an important part of history of U.S. history that they need to learn and study to prevent it from happening again.

Eunice looks forward to attending the Easton 9/11 ceremony on Saturday, Sept. 11 at 10 a.m. on the memorial green. She's grateful for the support of the town and hopes that families will bring their children. The ceremony will begin with the procession of flags, followed by the Joel Barlow High School choir offering patriotic songs. The monarch butterfly exhibit, built by Connecticut's Beardsley Zoo, will be on display in remembrance of Christine.

Representatives from the U.S. Coast Guard, the National Guard, Life Star, and American Red Cross will participate. Dr. Thomas McMorrان and Easton police, fire and emergency services personnel will speak.

The National September 11 Memorial & Museum launched The Never Forget Fund, an initiative and fundraiser to support educational programs for students and others to

understand more deeply the history of Sept. 11 and how it shaped the world.

“We must never forget,” Eunice said.

Photo at top: Eunice Hanson at home. — Rick Falco Photo