

Ground Zero hero dies nearly 10 years after exposure to toxic chemicals of September 11

By Ben Chapman *Daily News*
Sunday, July 10, 2011



People mourn at the funeral for former NYPD officer Edwin Ortiz on Saturday.

Norman Y. Lono for News

It took nearly a decade for the toxic chemicals of September 11 to kill retired NYPD Detective Edwin Ortiz - but in the end they did.

Ortiz, 56, was a first responder at Ground Zero who spent a year sifting through debris taken to Staten Island.

He never gave a thought for his own safety as he fulfilled his duty, but on July 4 he died from cancer caused by the toxic dust.

"Ed wanted to help people after the terrorist attacks - he didn't think about the danger," said his wife, Daisy, a retired NYPD detective.

"It wasn't until he got sick that it hit us," said the grieving widow at a Saturday memorial service for her husband, held near their Rockland County home. More than 100 friends, family members and fellow cops came to the emotional event at St. Boniface Church.

The loved ones wept as a coffin bearing the dead cop was carried out of the church and to Ascension Cemetery in Woodland Hills.

Ortiz had a remarkable career as a cop. He joined the NYPD in 1985 and made detective in 1990, spending the next 15 years of his life working in the Bronx's gritty 40th Precinct.

"He gave the job 110% from day one," said Detective Brian Hunt, a former partner.

Ortiz was tough but had a sense of humor. He joked that he couldn't be buried in the Bronx because he'd be interred next to a "bad guy" he'd put in jail.

He also had a gentle side he showed with his three grown daughters, four grandchildren and a mutt he named "Felony."

Ortiz retired in 2005 and was diagnosed with advanced colon cancer two years later. His doctors believe exposure to 9/11 toxins brought on the disease because of the severity of the illness and the fact that Ortiz had no family history. In 2008, the NYPD acknowledged this likelihood, upping his pension from half of his salary to 75%.

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