



# Rest in Peace

*Det. Edwin Ortiz*

On July 4, 2011, Det. Edwin Ortiz, who retired out of the 40 Squad in January 2005, passed away from cancer contracted

as a result of his work on the rescue and recovery from the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001. In addition to his time spent at Ground Zero, Ortiz also worked extensively at the Staten Island Landfill at Freshkills, sifting through the debris of the World Trade Center. In 2007, Ortiz was diagnosed with advanced colon cancer and his death was deemed in the line of duty.

Born and raised on the lower east side of Manhattan, Ortiz came from a police and military family, and felt a desire to serve his country and a fierce sense of patriotism that lasted throughout his life. His father and an uncle were both WWII and Korean War veterans.

Although he originally attended the Borough of Manhattan Community College, Ortiz transferred to Pace University where he was well on his way to becoming an accountant. But while working to put himself through college, a cousin who was a cop in the 7th Precinct (and who eventually retired from Warrants) convinced Ortiz to take the civil service exam.

"Ed was more business-oriented," says his wife Daisy, "but the opportunity to join the force came at a good time," and with two young daughters from his first marriage to support, Ortiz took advantage of the timing and joined the NYPD. He was appointed to the force in January 1985.

Known as a man who gave his all, Ortiz was a tough cop, but one who had a sense of humor. "Throughout all of his commands," says Daisy, "he was well-regarded and very well-liked. Ed was such a nice guy that everyone remained friends with him, even throughout Ed's retirement and illness."

For all that the Police Department meant to Ortiz, the most important effect it had on his life was that it was where he met his wife Daisy, herself a second grade Detective who retired out of the 33 Squad in 2005. Unlike Ed, Daisy had

no cops in her family. She grew up in Spanish Harlem on East 116th Street at a time when good jobs were scarce, so when the opportunity to become a Police Officer presented itself, she grabbed it. "It was something I had never given a thought to before, but it worked out" -- beautifully.

They met in training in an Academy class that included DEA Board member Brian Hunt. Daisy and Ed started out together in Neighborhood Stabilization Unit (NSU) #5 in the 30 Precinct. "He'd be on one corner," she says, remembering with a laugh, "and I'd be on the other, and sometimes he'd drive me home." They stayed together ever since.

Ed landed at the 6th Precinct, and then transferred to the 10th; but when the City was besieged by the phenomenon of underground social clubs resulting in the tragedy of the Happy Land fire, Ortiz was assigned to the newly formed Social Club Task Force. He later moved to the Bronx Tactical Narcotics Team, where he earned his gold Detective shield in May of 1991. When COMPSTAT took off a few years later, Ortiz was selected to handle computer work and analysis and was transferred to the PIMS (Police Information Management System). Around 1995, he was moved once again to the 40 Squad where he remained for the rest of his career.

"Ed was always interested in current events," says Daisy, noting that her husband had the TV and radio blaring when he was home, and that he loved listening to Fox News and various media pundits, including Sean Hannity, Rush Limbaugh, and Glenn Beck, and that even when he was too sick to venture out, he asked his wife to run to the mall to get an autographed copy of Beck's latest book for him. Before he fell ill, he would attend the concerts the various personalities would stage, she says. "He'd be out there in his lawn chair. He just loved them."

Through the years together, he and Daisy saw Ed's eldest daughter Marceline become a teacher in Pennsylvania, and Jennifer become a doctor in Hoboken. Their youngest daughter Bernadette followed in her family's civil service footsteps and works for the Department of Defense in Washington, DC. Ed and Daisy have four grandchildren, ranging in ages from 18 years to 18 months.

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"Ed's dream," she noted, "was that in retirement they would travel in an RV and be able to show their grandchildren the country that he loved so much." So, when Ed and Daisy both retired, they bought a 40-foot Winnebago, and even though their plan to journey across the U.S. was cut short by his cancer diagnosis, they managed to take the grandbabies down to Disney World as promised. They had a great time and hoped to return.

This past Christmas season — the first in decades without her husband — Daisy did not have the heart to put up a tree or hang the holiday lights outside their home. "That was Ed's thing," she added, noting that although they are Catholic, in their religiously mixed community some of their Jewish neighbors called Ed's annual outdoor display his "Festival of Lights." Instead, she bought the grandchildren a few Disney items to compensate for not being able to fulfill their promise to take them back down to Florida.

"In 2001, the attacks on the World Trade Center hit Ed very hard," Daisy says, "and his chief concern was for the 9/11 families. Of course, he would come home from the Landfill sad, but he was very dedicated to the work they were doing there. Years later, even after he fell ill, he said he wouldn't have had it any other way." She added that they never suspected that they, too, would become part of that special 9/11 family, and her husband was stoic about his prognosis, even when doctors told him there was nothing more they could do.

"He never stopped and asked, 'why me?' Instead," Daisy says, "his attitude was always one of acceptance. 'Why not me?'" What kept him going, she says, was his "girls" — his daughters and grandchildren. "He just wanted to spend time with his family. The children gave him comfort all the time. Throughout his illness, Ed never gave up. He fought it until his last day, and he never let it beat him. That was the most important thing. And he never considered himself a hero, just an ordinary guy."

At the time of his passing, Edwin Ortiz was 56 years old. He is buried at the Ascension Cemetery in Woodland Hills in Rockland County, New York.

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