

Tunnel to Towers

Through grief, forgiveness, a chance to honor

By EMILY CLARK

For Patrick McGarry, the 12 greatest words in the English language are ones that all Catholics know by heart: “forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us.” It’s a forgiveness he sought from a penetrating hate, stemming from a deliberate act of violence inflicted on thousands of innocent people. One of the many was his little sister Katie McGarry Noack, who perished when the North Tower of the World Trade Center collapsed on September 11, 2001.

Decades later, as the country observes the 25th anniversary of the attacks, McGarry, a 1986 graduate of Fairfield University, will channel his love, forgiveness and the grief he still feels into a worthwhile act of remembrance. Beginning March 8, he plans to embark on a 3,000-mile cross-country bike ride from San

Diego to St. Augustine, Fla., with a goal of raising \$100,000 for the Tunnel to Towers Foundation, an organization that supports first responders, veterans and their families. The work they do, he said, is “sacred.”

“Katie was so giving, so loyal. I will never forget her, but I also want to do something in her name,” said McGarry, a Brooklyn native who now lives in Ponte Vedra Beach, Fla. “This ride is a thank-you letter to the people who tried to save her. I think there was more good and love that day than acts of evil, but it took me many years to get through the hate.”

Thirty years old in 2001, Katie, the youngest of the five McGarry children, had just gotten married and started a new job for a financial services company. She was, her brother said, at the pinnacle of her life. Then tragedy struck the day Katie

attended a meeting at Windows on the World, arriving just 10 minutes before the first plane hit. McGarry, on a fishing trip with friends in Montana at the time, watched it all unfold from afar.

“I wanted to put my hand through the TV to save her, trying to will a different outcome. It was shock, horror, sadness all at once. It was hard,” he recalls, still choking up at the memory. When he returned to New York three days later, McGarry and Katie’s husband Brad, who made it safely out of the Towers that Tuesday, spent days looking for her in the city, until they called off what became a futile search.

Though the events of September 11 were intensely personal for McGarry and his family because of the loss of Katie and his cousin John as well, it’s also because he himself survived the earlier attack on the World Trade Center in 1993.



“I was on the 95th floor the first time it happened, and I could never go back. It felt haunted to me,” he said. Years later, he realized he likely had a form of PTSD. “But back then, we didn’t talk about things like that. And then Katie was there. It’s been 25 years, but it seems like it just happened. I don’t think I’m alone, but I tried to bury it. Everything. It’s still hard to believe.” In total, McGarry knew 45 people who died on September 11.

Though he has had a full life with his wife Mariana and two sons, a successful career in Florida and endless opportunities for golf, the pain of losing Katie and facing—twice—the violence of terrorism and the hate that followed remained buried until some challenges at work prompted him to go to church at lunch time each day—with nothing but his faith and a Jimmy John’s sub.

“I went into this beautiful basilica downtown that had three things I treasure in life—quiet, incense and Gregorian chants,” he said. After sitting and praying for several days, he went to Confession, something he hadn’t done in quite a while. When the priest asked what he wanted forgiveness for, McGarry realized it all circled back to the tragedy of 9/11. “For the hate,” I said. “The hate I feel for the people who did this.” Then I left, and I felt like I weighed 50 pounds lighter.”

McGarry calls that moment in the confessional a beginning—one of healing, of realization, of opening up about his grief. When the COVID-19 pandemic hit the following year, he turned to the outdoors for respite – and found it through long bike rides on the Florida coast. It’s a solitary act, he said about biking, with lots of time for thinking and reflection. A decade of the Rosary here, an Our Father there, and he started to open up about his grief. “It’s not some-

thing you get through. It’s something you live through, and not all of it has to be bad,” McGarry said. “Recovering from grief is part of who I am. So, I thought this bike ride would be good.”

“This bike ride” is the culmination of thousands of miles of riding and thousands of hours of training, extensive outreach to neighbors and friends, to Fairfield University and St. John’s University, Katie’s alma mater. It’s to draw attention, not for McGarry himself but for his mission: to raise awareness for Tunnel to Towers, to continue the dialogue about grief and to keep alive the memory of his sister, a young woman McGarry said was “awesome, loving. She’s worth remembering.”

“Through the training, I see that grief is love, but it’s also kryptonite. It’s given me strength and the energy to pull through some really hard stuff,” he said. “I embrace the fact that I am flawed and imperfect, because we all are. One of the best parts of being Catholic is believing that, if you forgive, we’ll be together again, but I have to earn that.”

In these last weeks before McGarry takes off on this 44-day ride—from San Diego, over the mountains of Arizona and New Mexico, through the lower south, along the Gulf Coast and eventually into Florida—he keeps the presence of his sister close by along with the motto of Tunnel to Towers, inspired by the words of St. Francis of Assisi: while we have time, let us do good.

“Tunnel to Towers and the work they do is sacred to me,” McGarry said. “Like Mother Teresa said, ‘Not all of us can do great things, but we can do small things with great love.’”

(For more information about Patrick McGarry or Tunnel to Towers or to donate to the ride, visit www.aridetoremember2026.com.)

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the Parable of the Prodigal Son in light of the Sacrament of Reconciliation, which has its roots in the Old Testament.

“It is one of the most neglected sacraments of our day and yet one of the most important,” he said. “When we play the part of the Prodigal Son, we become more joyful because we have experienced God’s love and mercy, and then we become like the father with love outpouring for others. In confession, we experience the grace of God and become who he intended us to be.”

Morrow said he once was a secular, materialistic and scientific-minded agnostic, who got converted by an evangelical Christian who led a Bible study.

“The grace of God was at work,” he recalled. “I went to Bible study but didn’t believe any of it. I was going to show them but became convinced the Bible is the most trustworthy document from ancient history.”

He has a deep devotion to

the Blessed Sacrament and said, “The Eucharist is the prime sacrament to strengthen God’s grace in us because he gives us the very gift of himself. It helps us choose to do the right thing and live our life, regardless of what suffering or obstacles we have.”

Deacon Patrick Toole, founder and executive director of the St. Jerome Center, said, “I was extremely grateful for the turnout and for how well the conference was received. Seeing people from every stage of life come together for two days, focused on Scripture, was deeply moving. Many attendees shared that they gained a clearer understanding of the Bible and felt more confident engaging with God’s Word in their daily lives. That kind of renewal is a real blessing, and it shows how important solid, accessible Scripture teaching is for the life of the Church.”

Father Joseph Marcello, pastor of St. Catherine of Siena, praised the presenters and said, “I love the words of St. Peter in the New Testament: ‘Always be ready to give a reason for the hope that is in you.’ Dr. Hahn, Dr. Bergsma

and Dr. Morrow helped us all to go deeper into the reasons for our hope. Each of them approached this vast topic not only with rigorous scholarship, but also with living faith. They spoke beautifully and compellingly of Sacred Scripture, addressed so many of the questions in people’s minds, and equipped all of us to speak joyfully and confidently to others of the beauty, truth and goodness of the Catholic faith.”

Father Marcello said he was “grateful to God and to the many whose hard work made it all possible.”

Among the young adults was Liesl Heston, a Stamford accountant, who persuaded her boss to let her attend during the busy tax season. In explaining why it was important, she said, “These guys are my Kardashians.”

“So many young people are here because we grew up at a time when we were divorced from tradition, and we’re seeking something we didn’t even know we were lacking,” she

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