

A Day for 9/11 Kids

Newsday - Friday, April 29, 2011 Melanie Lefkowitz



Shay Mahon was only 21 months old when her father, Thomas, a broker for Cantor Fitzgerald, died on Sept. 11, 2001.

"She claims she remembers him, but it's really through stories we've shared with her over and over," said her mother, Beth Mahon, of Locust Valley.

Yet somehow, Shay shares her father's love of cooking -- "He was a phenomenal cook," Beth Mahon said -- and asked to spend the day Thursday with chefs at the TriBeCa Grill in Manhattan.

Shay was one of more than 120 children who lost a parent on Sept. 11 and participated in Tuesday's Children's Take Our Children to Work Day, which occurred at 30 different workplaces in New York City, ranging from fire houses to City Hall to [MTV](#) .

"I think it's good for my daughter to be around other children who have this bond," Beth Mahon said. "I think she's ready for it -- she wasn't for a long time. She approached me to do this today."

An estimated 3,000 children lost a parent on Sept. 11.

Many of these children barely remember the parent who died, yet are surrounded by references to the 9/11 attacks and the world they made. It creates a unique challenge for them and their families, as their loved ones seek to help them honor the lost parent's memory, while trying to give them a normal life.

Tuesday's Children created this event eight years ago as a way to salve the wounds of kids who once proudly visited their parents at police stations, fire houses or in the gleaming and glamorous Twin Towers. The group's executive director, Terry Sears, said the children, teenagers and young adults who lost their parents can also find comfort in each other's company.

"Nobody else understands -- this is different," Sears said. "These kids need to be together, want to be together, and we help make opportunities for that to happen."

Ten children from the metro area visited the Friar's Club in midtown Thursday, where seasoned comedians coached them on jokes, improv and ventriloquism, and later performed. Comedy and loss may seem like an unlikely match, but for the children at the Friar's Club, many of whom aspire to be actors or comedians, it was natural.

"Comedy really lightens me up -- it's funny; it's hilarious, and you laugh a lot," said Brendan Fitzpatrick, 11, of Eastchester, whose father, Thomas Fitzpatrick, worked at Sandler O'Neill & Partners on the south tower's 104th floor. Brendan said he came to Thursday's event because "I wanted to learn about comedy."

He deadpanned: "I don't know that many good jokes, though."

Brendan said he also appreciates meeting other kids with stories like his. "It's just that we all get to communicate and learn about each other," he said. "You make friends."