United in tragedy, pair's bond strong

By LENN ROBBINS

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The view from heaven was spectacular yesterday.

The view from heaven was one of smiles and wide eyes, of hugs and embraces, of love and hope.

Christine Spencer of Middletown, N.J., is certain her late husband, Robert, was looking down at his son and namesake, Robert, 9, whose grin was threatening to leave stretch marks on his face.

The youngster's father was one of the nearly 2,800 innocent victims killed in the 9-11 terrorist attacks that took down the Twin Towers.

Keith Pryde is just as sure that his sister, Julia, was reveling in the scene at the Beekman Beach Club at the South Street Seaport. He's certain Julia will be watching on Sept. 8, 2012, when he marries his fianceé and Robert serves as the ring bearer.

Julia Pryde was 23 when she was one of 32 whose precious lives were ended by a mad gunman on the Virginia Tech campus on April 16, 2007.

You wonder how so much death and sorrow could lead to the affirmation of life and joy that was so evident yesterday as the Yankees celebrated Hope Week by recognizing Tuesday's Children, a charity which matches children who lost a parent on 9-11 with a mentor.

You wonder how Keith and Robert, who have had to overcome grief most of us can never fathom, found one another.

But one thing is certain as you watch Keith ruffle Robert's hair while they did a battery of interviews -- this was meant to be.

"The first time we met Keith, we knew he was perfect for Robert," said Christine.

Keith Pryde saw a 2008 Tuesday's Children ad in a local newspaper looking for mentors. He says he thought about Julia, thought about society, thought about himself and picked up the phone.

Tuesday's Children paired Keith with Robert and a miracle was born.

"I couldn't have found a better mentee," Keith said. "Robert is funny, smart, full of energy, like most kids his age, just a great kid to be around -- lots of fun."

Robert, who'll turn 10 next month, believes Keith is the perfect mentor for him. Keith was honored yesterday as Tuesday's Children's 'Mentor of the Year.' Keith attends Robert's Little League games; they play video games, take trips to places such as the Liberty Science Center.

When Robert was asked what he wants to be when he grows up he replied "a mentor." "I want to help people. It feels good."

This is the mother of feel good stories. Just as Pryde was humbly accepting his award, he and Robert were awed by the appearance of former Yankees manager Joe Torre and current Yankees Mariano Rivera, Phil Hughes, Curtis Granderson, Steve Garrison and Cory Wade.

The mentors, mentees and Yankees enjoyed a barbecue lunch on the river before boarding a water taxi for a loop around the Statue of Liberty and up to the Stadium, where the Yankees played the Seattle Mariners last night.

The ride turned into a free-for-all with kids and Yankees bombarding each other with water balloons. The Yankees soaked each other with buckets of ice water.

Hughes told The Post that of the five charities the Yankees will recognize this week -- each gets a $10,000 donation courtesy of the Steinbrenner family -- he chose Tuesday's Children.

"As being a secondary New Yorker, for five years now, you feel closer to the events of 9-11," said Hughes.

Torre, a native New Yorker, choked up a couple of times yesterday as he recalled the events of 9-11, the Yankees' dramatic charge to the World Series and Game 7 loss to the Arizona Diamondbacks.

"We were reminded of a whole group of heroes -- the policemen and firefighters and EMS workers," said Torre. "We dial a number and they pick up."

Yesterday also brought to mind still another group of heroes -- mentors