



STORY BY Rosamund Burton | PHOTOGRAPH BY Roger Kisby

New Yorker Jackie Cannizzaro-Harkins, 45, lost her firefighter husband, Brian, during the 9/11 attacks. Their son's love of the Wiggles brought her in contact with the group's manager Paul Field, 56, whose first daughter had died as a baby.

JACKIE: Christopher never slept as a baby. Brian and I discovered he liked the Wiggles and they calmed him, so in the wee hours of the morning, we'd all watch Wiggles videos.

About five o'clock on 9/11, I heard that Brian was missing. For two weeks I thought, "Maybe he's alive, and they'll rescue him." We were living with my mum and the TV was in the main room, and the images of the aeroplanes crashing into the Twin Towers were played continually. It was so painful. So my rule was when Christopher was awake, the Wiggles were on the TV, as they put a smile on his face.

Soon after a friend bought tickets for a Wiggles concert in Connecticut. Tired and stressed, I took my crying one-year-old. Afterwards, we met the Wiggles. I remember crying with these complete strangers, and they were so kind. I felt I had known Paul forever. We had a shared understanding of extreme loss, as in 1988 he and his wife, Pauline, had lost their seven-and-a-half-month-old daughter, Bernadette, to SIDS.

We kept in touch. Paul told me the Wiggles had dedicated their new video, *Wiggly Safari*, to Brian. He and the Wiggles later came to Brian's

firehouse in Brooklyn, and donated \$US50,000 to the Brian Cannizzaro Memorial Fund.

In 2003, Paul asked me to come to Australia. "Australia?" I thought. "I've hardly been to New Jersey." I live on Staten Island. I was born here, and it's kind of all I know. I was so overwhelmed by his generosity, and terrified because I would be solely responsible for Christopher. Paul said, "Bring some people with you," so Brian's brother, Charlie, and his wife, Tammy, came.

Paul and his family were so welcoming. We went to Paul's mum's house and had a mass. Everybody got up and spoke about their grief and I spoke about Brian. That moment of connection made me feel that I wasn't alone.

We visited a firehouse in Australia, and went to the zoo. Paul's children taught Chris to play cricket. I came out of my sadness during that time. I was still figuring out how to be a single mom, having lost the love of my life, but I came back from Australia feeling I could do anything.

I married John [Harkins] in 2005 and we had two more boys. John is a wonderful man and an amazing dad to Christopher. But our second son, Kyle, has autism and that's chal-

lenging. Also, having Brian die on this pedestal, revered as a hero, is not easy for John.

I don't see Paul very often, but it's always a life-enriching adventure. One time when he was in New York we saw *The Boy from Oz* on Broadway, and I was crying and cheering, as Paul brings that out in me. Paul has this life in him that is so contagious and inspirational, and I've always felt that I could tell him anything. His faith and love for his family shines through.

I made a promise to Brian that I'd be happy, and Paul has helped me get there through reaching out to me, sharing his family, opening up his heart, and our life-changing trip to Australia.

PAUL: I've been manager of the Wiggles since 1998. My brother Anthony [the "Blue Wiggle"] and I had had a decade of touring Australia with our band the Cockroaches, so I understood the business.

Two months after 9/11, in November 2001, the Wiggles toured the US. At a show in Connecticut someone came backstage and said, "There's a woman with her son out there whose husband was a firefighter and killed in 9/11." It was very intense and emotional when Jackie told us the story about Brian. He was her uni sweetheart with such zest for life, who had joined the New York City Fire Department and taken his father's badge number.

I thought it would be great to bring Jackie and Christopher out to Australia for a holiday. Jackie was overwhelmed and in tears on New Year's Eve when we were beside the Harbour Bridge, with the world's best view.

We had a get-together at Kellyville [in Sydney's north-west] where I grew up. A family friend, who's a priest, gave a mass. He spoke to Jackie about Brian's story, talked about my father's death, and the loss of Pauline's and my daughter, Bernadette, in 1988. It was a very healing ceremony. We all became very close on that trip.

We share similar backgrounds. Jackie is an Irish Catholic, and was Jackie O'Mara originally. She always loved Italian surnames, so she hit the jackpot when she married Brian Cannizzaro. My background is a mix of Italian and Irish, too.

We share in common that experience of profound grief. It's like being thrown off a cliff. You honestly don't think you'll laugh or be happy again. Even now the wound is still there. Jackie told me that recently she dropped off Christopher for a sleepover at a friend's, and she was alone in the car sobbing uncontrollably, as it was like saying "goodbye" to Brian again. But with me, and I'm sure with Jackie as well, I never want to lose that. I don't want to be dulled. I don't *not* want to be upset about Bernadette's loss: she deserves it.

People I meet now don't know that Bernadette ever existed, and no doubt in Jackie's case it's the same. She married John, who has a law degree and was with the New York harbour police. He's a lovely guy. When I'm in New York I get together with John, Jackie and the boys. Other times I catch up with Jackie for a coffee. I included her in my new book, *Gimme Shelter*, about servicemen and women and their relatives, and their struggles after a disaster.

Jackie has been through so much and still has a lot to deal with, but she's a life force. She's effusive, she seeks the joy in life and she's always looking for the positive. ■

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