



Left: Upon completion of his flight training in 1993, Lieutenant Eric Cranford (shown here in Corpus Christi, Texas) trained for and flew helicopters for the navy. He loved flying and the perks of being a pilot! *Image courtesy of Emily C. Cranford.*

Below: When they were 15 years old, Eric Cranford and Emily Cozort attended a Valentine's Day banquet together. They felt very grown-up! *Image courtesy of Emily C. Cranford.*



## “How Did You Get Through Something So Terrible and Sad?”

by Emily C. Cranford



Emily and her beloved dog Guinness Tou-Tou. *Image courtesy of Emily C. Cranford.*

People often tell me I am strong and brave. They ask, “How did you get through something so terrible and sad?” The person I loved most in the world was killed in the 9/11 attacks. It was a normal Tuesday morning. My husband, Eric Cranford, kissed me goodbye with a twinkle in his eye, and that was the last time I saw him. How was I to know that morning would forever be a part of history?

Eric and I grew up in a small town in North Carolina. When we were children, we played together, rode our bikes around town, shared snacks at school, and sang together at church. After a dance in elementary school, he told me we were going to get married when we grew up! When we were teenagers, we held hands, made up our own secret code language, and hung out with our friends. Eric and I each had big dreams!—he wanted to be a pilot, and I wanted to help people—so after college, we went off on our own adventures.

But we stayed friends and kept in touch. When we were 29, he asked me to marry him, and I said yes! Being married to Eric was so much fun. Friends would often ask us what our secret was, and we would answer, “We know how to play together!” We would play Monopoly, ride our bikes around Washington, DC, sing together,

have food fights . . . and it made solving grown-up issues so much easier because we knew how to have fun.

When he died just one year after we were married, I felt like a part of me died, too. I was devastated, heartbroken, and scared of what my life would be without him. Our family was broken and lost without him.

How do you get through something so terrible and sad? Here’s how I did it. My secrets!

**First, you have to feel those sad emotions.** That’s the hardest part. It’s easier, though, if you share them with family and friends, people who love you. And no matter how sad or lost you feel, there is always hope. There is always something to look forward to. That’s what I told myself on the saddest days.

### ERIC A. CRANFORD ENDOWED SCHOLARSHIP AT NC STATE UNIVERSITY

This scholarship was established by Emily C. Cranford and Fred and Betsy Cranford in loving memory of her husband and their son, Lt. Cdr. Eric A. Cranford. Eric was on active duty at the Pentagon in Washington, DC, when he was tragically killed in the terrorist attack on September 11, 2001.

Sometimes I would think of something simple that I enjoyed, like warm chocolate chip cookies or orange bubblegum, and that would be enough to make me smile a little bit.

### Second, do something for someone else.

Our family wanted to honor Eric’s memory in a lasting way that would help others. Both of his parents were teachers, so it was decided that a scholarship in his name was the best way to do that. Working with North Carolina State University, we set up a scholarship to be given to a deserving student from our home county. Twenty years later, students are still receiving this scholarship! They usually write a letter to me at the beginning of the school year, and I enjoy reading each of them.

Me, I got a dog!! And boy, did we ever need each other. I named her Guinness Tou-Tou Cranford, a reminder of the vacation Eric and I had taken to Ireland and of his beagle when he was a child. She was a sad



Eric and Emily Cranford on their wedding day, August 4, 2000, in Playa del Carmen, Mexico. *Image courtesy of Emily C. Cranford.*

little thing who had been abandoned and hurt. For the first few months, she wouldn’t let anyone near her but me. She hid under the bed if anyone came into the house! Taking care of her comforted me. And she got better, too. We had fabulous adventures together—road trips, beach days, hikes. Guinness and I joined a pet therapy team and visited a local nursing home.

### And third, take the best parts of you and use them to move forward, to become an even better you.

I’m outgoing, creative, and like to learn. I learned to mountain bike, sew, and make jewelry. New hobbies helped me fill some lonely hours. I read Harry Potter. Several times! I joined a mentor program and spent time tutoring and hanging out with 10- to 12-year-olds. I took classes at the local community college and decided to go to graduate school. I earned a master’s degree in occupational therapy and enjoyed venturing out on a new career path. I opened my heart and fell in love again.

It’s been 20 years since Eric died. The events of 9/11/2001, including his story, are part of history classes now. I knew at the time that history was being made. The world was changed on that day. But for me, it was all about one blue-eyed boy who danced with me when we were 8 years old and loved me his whole life. I still miss him every day.

Am I strong and brave like people tell me? Maybe. We’re all stronger and braver than we think. We don’t get to choose what happens to us. But we do get to choose how we react to it and how we let it change us. I choose to live a life full of love and adventure. 🌸

*Emily C. Cranford grew up in Drexel, Burke County, and attended college at NC State University. She currently lives in California with her fiancé, Jeff, and their miniature poodle, Pippin. She and Pippin are a pet therapy team. They visit schools, libraries, and care centers where they meet lots of interesting people! Emily comes home to North Carolina often to spend time with her family and friends.*

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## What happened on 9/11?

The term “9/11” is shorthand for four coordinated terrorist attacks carried out by the extremist terrorist group al-Qaeda on the morning of September 11, 2001. This fall is the 20th anniversary of the event.

Nineteen terrorists hijacked four commercial airplanes, deliberately crashing two of the planes into the upper floors of the North and South Towers of the World Trade Center complex in New York City and a third plane into the Pentagon in Arlington, Virginia. (The Pentagon is the headquarters of the US Department of Defense and a symbol of the US military.)

The Twin Towers ultimately collapsed because of the damage sustained from the impacts and the resulting fires. After learning about the other attacks, passengers on the fourth hijacked plane, Flight 93, fought back, and the plane was crashed into an empty field in western Pennsylvania about 20 minutes by air from Washington, DC.

The attacks killed 2,977 people from 93 nations: 2,753 people were killed in New York; 184 people were killed at the Pentagon; and 40 people were killed on Flight 93.

*Image courtesy of the National Park Service.*