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Vaughn Lohec with a photograph of her sister, Lauren Catuzzi Grandcolas.
photo by Chris Johnson

honoring a sister on nine eleven

by jane whitledge

SEPTEMBER 11 HAS NOT FADED FROM THE NATION'S MEMORY. Ceremonies will be held around the country and people will honor the thousands who died that day. For one Frisco woman, Vaughn Lohec, September 11th is a day to remember a sister's life and her bravery.

Vaughn Lohec's sister, Lauren Catuzzi Grandcolas, was one of the heroic people who died on Flight 93. Lauren had been in New Jersey for her grandmother's funeral and stayed on to visit the Lohecs who then lived in New Jersey. A car service picked her up from the Lohec house the morning of September 11. She wasn't scheduled for Flight 93, but got a chance to catch the earlier flight and took the opportunity to get home to her husband Jack in California. She was 38 years old and pregnant with her first child. Her last words were left on an answering machine, telling her husband there was a problem on the plane.

Vaughn makes choices about how she deals with her sister's death and chooses to honor Lauren's fun-loving nature. Vaughn says Lauren was the kind of person who took the time to get to know people, to be a true friend.

"Lauren felt strongly about people making their own choices. She felt it was so important that she verbalized it," Vaughn, a work-at-home mother of three, said. "She encouraged women to live life

to the fullest, to take time for themselves."

In the last moments of her life, Lauren Grandcolas and the other passengers of Flight 93 made the ultimate choice – death so that others might live. "Those people chose death instead of hitting a building," Vaughn says.

"It would be easier to stay in a dark place rather than work a little harder to be a little better," Vaughn said. Friends and family of Lauren are all working to be better in honor of Lauren's sacrifice. The Catuzzi family has formed The Lauren Catuzzi Grandcolas Foundation to honor Lauren by supporting projects that echo her interests and her spirit. The foundation selects worthy endeavors each year and makes

financial contributions in her name. Past recipients have been the Texas Children's Hospital Neonatal Unit in Houston, a Birthing Room in Lauren's name at the Marine County Hospital in San Raphael, CA and the Houston Area Women's Shelter. Lauren was in the process of writing a book when she died and Vaughn has undertaken the task of finishing it. "I want to build on her inner strength. I am a much stronger person than I was. She always wanted me to be the person I'm moving toward becoming. I am so different than I was before."

The last few days before Lauren's death, Vaughn had a chance to see her sister as the mother she would have become. She took special time with her niece, Emily and nephew, Matthew, reading with them, sharing secrets and dancing. At her grandmother's funeral, Lauren talked about death – sharing with her family that she was at peace with the thought of her own death. "We are very thankful for those words," Vaughn says.

Since Lauren's death, Vaughn's life has changed. She and her husband Phil had another daughter, Elizabeth and they moved to Frisco. Vaughn looks at each day with new eyes since her sister's death. She has been reading a book that poses a theory that when death strikes one person, someone else is missed. "Lauren was the one taken but I was left. I was missed."

Vaughn now sees her life as an opportunity to make the right choices and to search out the purpose for her life. She sees it as an opportunity to share her experience with others. "I live my life for two people. Lauren is always with me."

Jane Whitledge is a freelance writer living in Frisco.

"She wasn't scheduled for *Flight 93*, but got a *chance* for an *earlier flight*."