

## My Son Christopher: A 9/11 Mother's Tale Remembrance

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*Paying tribute to a firefighter lost in the 9/11 attacks, My Son Christopher is an endearing picture book.*

Maureen Crethan Santora's memorial picture book *My Son Christopher* is a heartrending tribute to a firefighter who died on September 11, 2001.

Christopher was born into a happy, loving family and enjoyed playing with action figures and making messes as a child. He found school boring and resented having to follow the rules, but he found solace in playing the clarinet and playing basketball with his sporty friends. He studied history in college and became a teacher, but he dreamed of being a firefighter. He made the transition to that career in February of 2001. And as part of the FDNY, he was one of 343 firefighters who lost their lives on September 11, 2001.

Narrated by Christopher's mother, the book chronicles Christopher's playful youth, rambunctious teenage years, and goal-oriented young adulthood as he identifies and then follows his dream of saving lives as a firefighter. Direct language conveys his love of generic "play," an oft-repeated refrain. Repetition does not always work in the book's favor, though: While the repeating idea that Christopher was special because "he was my son" supports the book's loving themes, its continual declarations about his love of sports and dislike of following the rules are belabored.

A baseline knowledge of the historical events that led to Christopher's death is presumed: The book describes September 11 as a "hate filled day" where "a special group of heroes ... risked and gave their lives to help others" without further details. An illustration of the Twin Towers appears, labeled with a "Marriott Hotel" sign, but there's no additional context. The messages to "remember" the firefighters who died that day and to avoid "hatred" are undermined by this lack of specificity.

The illustrations vary in quality. An image of Christopher sitting at his desk at school bears a misshapen face, and a cartoonish drawing of Christopher playing basketball appears in a different style than the rest of the images. Some irises are drawn as perfect circles and teeth as perfect squares, and the effect is disconcerting. The book's portrait-style illustrations, such as Christopher's middle school picture where he shows a friendly smile and various textures play in, are more accessible.

With a tender message of parental love, the picture book *My Son Christopher* honors those who make the ultimate sacrifice for others.

AIMEE JODOIN (September 26, 2024)

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