



Impacted by 9/11, Nursing Student Shines at Work, School

Angelica Milik ignored her 10th-grade math teacher, choosing instead to stare out the classroom window. She couldn't understand why smoke billowed from the World Trade Center north tower. She hadn't seen the first plane strike but watched as the second plane slammed into the south tower.

St. George Academy, less than a five-mile drive from where the twin towers stood, had a clear view of the iconic buildings. Milik could see the explosion. She could see papers fluttering from the upper floors of the buildings only to realize the papers were people jumping to their deaths.

"The world was coming to an end," she recalls thinking. "It was mayhem."

Sept. 11, 2001, forever impacted the native New Yorker's life. Milik defied her school's leadership and left the building in the late afternoon to go home. During normal times, with the mass transit system, it took about 30 minutes to make the commute. This time she did it on foot. Walking with thousands of others, many covered in white ash, she

made the two-mile walk to the Manhattan Bridge and across to Brooklyn where a classmate's relative drove her home.

She can't remember how long the walk took. She doesn't recall many details from that day. It's still painful. When she got home it was dark, near 7 p.m. She said a few words to her mom before going straight to her bedroom, getting her pet ferret, Frejia, from its cage, and crawling in bed where they slept until the next morning.

Milik was a 14-year-old high school sophomore at the time of the attacks. Now, she's a 39-year-old mother of three, engaged to be married and a second-semester nursing student at St. Louis Community College. She is following in the footsteps of her mother, aunt and grandmother – all nurses – and fulfilling a role she felt compelled toward as she walked with throngs of dazed people through Manhattan.

"It's a family thing," said Margaret Wadolowski, her aunt. "She comes from a family with very strong female role models."

It's because of that singular focus to help others, to connect with people, to provide comfort that the St. Louis chapter of the March of Dimes awarded Milik the Student Nurse Heroes in Action Award.

"I nominated Angelica because she is truly a hardworking and determined individual," said Beth Nett, supervising nurse on the general surgery floor at Mercy South where Milik has worked since 2021. "She is dedicated to providing excellent patient care no matter how challenging of a day she is having. She is one of the most hard-working [patient] techs we have on our unit and she strives to do her best in everything, including her work, school and family life."

Eye on the Prize

On Sept. 10, 2025, Milik earned an A on an exam in her nursing theory class. Two weeks later, she earned another A in the same class. Not remarkable, considering she carries a 4.0 grade point average.

Quite remarkable considering just several hours after the first exam, she gave birth to her third child, Johnny.

When she was told to go to the hospital on the afternoon of Sept. 10, Milik couldn't have been more excited about bringing her son into the world. She just desperately wanted

him to be born before the clock hit midnight. He came at 12:35 a.m. on Sept. 11, a day forever etched in her mind as a day of misery and horror.

Wadolowski, who is also her godmother, told her that Johnny served as a blessing; that he represented a new and beautiful life to help heal the pain of that day.

“That day has meaning for us New Yorkers because of the terrorist attacks,” said Wadolowski, who changed careers from the financial industry to nursing 13 years ago. “We’ve all been through so much and Johnny being born on such a very sad, traumatic day, he brings joy to that day. I don’t want to say it makes up for what happened, but we no longer look at this date as just a bad event; it’s a good event. In that way, he changed that for us.”

Johnny joined sisters Amalia, four years old, and Gianna, two. Milik learned she was pregnant with her son Jan. 4, 2025, the day after her mom, Krystyna Wozniak, died of breast cancer.

Milik’s fortitude impresses Carolyn Godfrey, PhD, a professor in STLCC’s nursing program. Godfrey and Chris Lefler, MSN, an assistant professor with the program, assured Milik that it would be alright to take a semester off to get through the pregnancy. She didn’t want to delay her education.

“They didn’t know what kind of student I am and the drive I have and the kind of the person that I am,” Milik said.

After she decided to enroll for the fall 2025 semester, her instructors put a plan together to help her stay current with her studies. While she was out for the two weeks after giving birth to Johnny, the nursing faculty provided clinical accommodations such as simulation and case studies to ensure she received the credit hours required. Faculty also recorded lessons, made certain material was in Canvas, and remained available to assist in any way possible.

“My content for women’s health and obstetrics is online,” Godfrey said. “And the various activities that correlate with test material was available online as well. I used the flipped classroom methodology, which is beneficial to learning.”

The compassion, care and kindness the nursing program showed Milik served as a perfect example of why she says she loves the College. When she decided to go to nursing school, she asked several nurses at Mercy South to recommend a school.

Almost unanimously, Milik said, they suggested St. Louis Community College.

“The College’s staff genuinely cares. You read all these things about nursing instructors who are trying to weed students out of being in school. It’s not like that at all at the College,” she said. “If I can say anything about my experience, it’s the absolute opposite. They want you to succeed. They genuinely go out of their way and form relationships with students.”

STLCC’s Nursing Program

The College sends more registered nurses into the St. Louis workforce each year than any other local institution. It graduates around 260 students a year and more than 90% of the alumni pass the National Council Licensure Examination within months of graduating. In all, the College has more than 700 nursing students at any given time, including the licensed practical (LPN) nurse program and the LPN/paramedic-to-registered nurse bridge program.

Nursing is offered at the Florissant Valley, Forest Park, Meramec, South County and Wildwood campuses. The prerequisites to get into the program at the College can also be taken at any of the campuses, along with transferring from other colleges and universities.

The classes are taught by current and former working nurses who have hundreds of years of experience in the field. Students get hands-on learning experiences with the latest technology at a competitive cost.

Circuitous Path

Becoming a nurse hasn’t been easy for Milik.

She started at St. John’s University in Queens, New York City but left after her sophomore year to take care of her mom who struggled with health issues for years. She then worked in the restaurant industry as a bartender and server for more than 15 years.

The service industry is what indirectly brought her to St. Louis. Not for a job, but for Jeff Summers, now her fiancé. Summers is also a student at STLCC and is finishing up his prerequisite classes before hopefully starting nursing school in 2027. The couple met through Facebook, commenting about how to deal with angry customers in the service

industry. It was April 2020, the beginning of the COVID pandemic, and both worked in the restaurant business and spoke a common language.

With restaurants almost completely shut down, they had plenty of time to banter through comments before Summers asked if he could send a private message. Soon they graduated to FaceTime, and they talked for hours, every day, for months. Summers eventually flew to New York for a week and soon, Milik was on a plane to St. Louis.

She visited in July and, after receiving her mom's blessing, she decided to stay.

Each step provided her more responsibility and a clearer signal that she wanted to continue to ascend. She's scheduled to earn her associate in applied science degree in nursing in December 2026. She wants to get into critical care and work toward a bachelor's degree as soon as she can.

The associate nursing degree is a great stepping stone into the profession. A registered nurse with an associate degree or a bachelor's degree does the same work. Going through a community college is less expensive and gets a student into the profession sooner. Many hospitals will help their employees get further education, which is necessary to get into leadership and, typically, higher pay.

Eventually, Milik could see herself as a certified registered nurse anesthetist or earn a doctor of nursing practice.

"I'm always reaching," she said. "I always want to do more. I learned through working as a tech that I do love health care, and I fell in love with the disease process, with the medicine, with the science of medicine, and I just wanted to pursue it. I wanted to know more."