

110 STORIES

by

Sarah Tuft

CAST OF CHARACTERS

MOM, 60s-70s, New Yorker leaving voice-mails for her daughter on and after 9/11

NARRATOR, any age, gender, ethnicity

GARRETT FISHER, 29, heading to his job on the 69th floor of the South Tower on 9/11

OFFICER HERNANDEZ, 20s, NYPD police officer on patrol near the World Trade Center on 9/11

FF DON CASEY, 40, FDNY firefighter from Staten Island responding to the World Trade Center on 9/11

FF LOU TRAZINO, 48, FDNY firefighter and Lower Manhattan resident, teaches his daughter how to ride bike after 9/11

KAREN SLADE, 35, Lower Manhattan resident looking for her son on 9/11

TERRENCE, 60s, African-American, homeless man living in an alley near the World Trade Center on 9/11

LILLIAN, 50s, African-American, homeless woman living in an alley near the World Trade Center on 9/11, Terrence's wife

THOMAS, 60s, White, homeless man living in an alley near the World Trade Center on 9/11

PROBATIONARY FF JASON CASCONI, 22, the new FDNY Proby scheduled to start at Ladder 9 in Lower Manhattan on 9/12

RO SHEFFE (sounds like "chef"), 51, Lower Manhattan resident shepherding his bulldog to safety on 9/11

BOLIVAR ARELLANO (BOWL-i-var ar-e-YA-no), 56, Ecuadorian-American, staff photographer for the New York Post on 9/11

CARY SHEIH (sounds like "Shea" Stadium), 29, Port Authority engineer descending from the 72nd floor of the North Tower on 9/11

PAUL ADAMS, 36, FDNY EMT, responding to the World Trade Center on 9/11

BJ, (AS REMEMBERED) from FF DON CASEY'S story

DR. JIM SNYDER, 36, child psychiatrist volunteering at the World Trade Center site after 9/11

SUSAN FLIS (rhymes with "Miss"), 45, White, licensed practical nurse from upstate New York, volunteering after

9/11 at Javits Convention Center and World Trade Center site
(child's drawing description by Lynn Eldredge)

NATALIE ROUNDTREE, 46, African-American, licensed practical nurse from New Jersey volunteering after 9/11 at Javits Center, wore make-up and a Stars & Stripes bandana

TONY ESOLA, 33, ironworker (Local 483) from New Jersey volunteering at the World Trade Center after 9/11

MITCHELL PERITZ (PEH-ritz), 44, chiropractor and body worker, volunteering at the World Trade Center site after 9/11

MERLIN DURHMAN (rhymes with "sermon"), 35, firefighter and K9 handler from Colorado, born in New York, volunteering with her dog, Kermit, after 9/11

GLENN JINKS, 41, telecommunications manager from Texas operating a mobile phone bank for 9/11 families and rescue workers

RESCUE WORKER (AS REMEMBERED) from MERLIN DURHMAN's story

MICHELLE WYLDE WILLIAMS, 30, actor volunteering with the Salvation Army after 9/11

FATHER BOB DEMING, 59, Episcopal priest for the Diocese of Connecticut volunteering as Chaplain after 9/11

ELIZABETH GILBERT, 30s, New Yorker and author, sharing her observations of the day in an email sent to friends on 9/11

SAMPLE BREAKDOWN OF ROLES FOR EIGHT ACTORS

Actor #1: Mom, Susan Flis, Narrator

Actor #2: Garrett Fisher, Probationary FF Jason Cascone, BJ (As remembered), Rescue Worker (As remembered), Narrator

Actor #3: Officer Hernandez, Lillian, Natalie Roundtree, Michelle Wylde Williams, Narrator

Actor #4: FF Don Casey

Actor #5: FF Lou Trazino, Ro Sheffe, Bolivar Arellano, Tony Esola, Narrator

Actor #6: Karen Slade, Merlin Durhman, Elizabeth Gilbert, Narrator

Actor #7: Terrence, Paul Adams, Dr. Jim Snyder, Father Bob Deming, Narrator

Actor #8: Thomas, Cary Sheih, Mitchell Peritz, Glenn Jinks, Narrator

SAMPLE BREAKDOWN OF ROLES FOR TWELVE ACTORS

ACTOR #1: Mom, Susan Flis

ACTOR #2: Narrator

ACTOR #3: Garrett Fisher, Probationary FF Jason Cascone, Rescue Worker (As remembered)

ACTOR #4: Officer Hernandez, Michelle Wylde Williams

ACTOR #5: Lillian, Natalie Roundtree

ACTOR #6: FF Don Casey

ACTOR #7: FF Lou Trazino, Bolivar Arellano

ACTOR #8: Ro Sheffe, Tony Esola, BJ (As remembered)

ACTOR #9: Karen Slade, Merlin Durhman, Elizabeth Gilbert

ACTOR #10: Terrence, Father Bob Deming

ACTOR #11: Paul Adams, Dr. Jim Snyder

ACTOR #12: Thomas, Cary Sheih, Mitchell Peritz, Glenn Jinks

ACT ONE

MOM

(leaving voice-mail)

Hi, sweetheart, it's your Mom and I guess I'm waking you up to a horrific day in New York City. I presume you're still sleeping which is a good thing.

(nervous laugh)

If you haven't, if you haven't... if you don't know already, there've been some attacks on New York City. So turn on your cable TV. Ahhh - But I'll be in short, ah, there've been some bombs, there've been some explosions, there've been planes - two commercial planes - that were hijacked ploughed into the Twin Towers at about nine this morning - two different planes - and the second Tower... half hour later another explosion and Kaplatz! We have one Twin Tower still standing and on fire. Of course, the whole city's been closed down, all the subways... I'm gonna try you on your cell. Maybe you're on your way somewhere on your bike - um - but I love you very much, sweetheart, and you're safe and I'm safe and the people we love are safe. So talk to you later. Bye.

NARRATOR

"110 Stories" is based on first person accounts collected in the days and weeks following September 11th.

SCENE 1: alive in new york

GARRETT FISHER

I am alive in New York.

NARRATOR

Garrett Fisher, web applications programmer.

GARRETT FISHER

I would not say I am alive and well but I certainly am alive. I work - worked - for Morgan Stanley on the 69th floor of the South Tower. I came out of the subway that morning in front of the building at about nine o'clock. People were yelling and sort of panicking and running around. I figured there was a car accident or something so I just kept walking, thinking about the work I have to do and stuff, if you can believe it. Then I saw people looking up at the sky. So I looked up and saw all this smoke and huge amounts of burning paper and junk flying way up in the air. Even though I was certainly surprised and taken aback, I was so confused and clueless, that I sort of still kept walking toward the building. You know, I wasn't on the side where you could see the hole. I just saw the smoke. There were cops and firefighters everywhere so I figured there was just a fire or something. Whatever. There've been fires up there before.

OFFICER HERNANDEZ

Well, I was at Federal Plaza, which is jus' a few blocks away. At first, I thought it was jus' a military plane, y'know, a missile - breaking the sound barrier. So I didn't think anything of it. I jus', y'know, looked up.

NARRATOR

Officer Hernandez, NYPD.

OFFICER HERNANDEZ

I didn't even see it 'cause I was writing in my memo book, y'know, my entries. So I asked people, "What is it?" Y'know - "What was that?" And they said, "A plane." So what happens? I run to the scene. The funny thing is, when you go to The Academy, they tell you when you hear shots fired, you're gonna go towards the shots fired but people are gonna be running away. And that's when it hit me - I was like, "I'm going towards it.

(chuckles)

I'm going towards the flames. I'm going towards the building that is burning." So I was like, "Okay!" Kept on running.

GARRETT FISHER

Then about thirty seconds later - all of a sudden - there was a HUGE fucking explosion pretty much directly above me. It was so indescribably loud. Oh my God, I was just like, "Holy fucking shit!!" And I must have frozen there for a few seconds, I was so completely shocked out of my skull. I swear to God, I thought I was imagining it. You know... you get up, hung-over, have a quiet private morning and then something like that happens and you think you're still in bed dreaming or something. And as I was still walking towards the building - I must have been on autopilot - all of this shit: huge burning shit - started falling and smashing into people right in front of me. And there was this deafening noise.

OFFICER HERNANDEZ

People were jus' hit with the debris - the arms, the legs, the head - stuff like that. All over the place! It was jus', y'know, a little... crazy.

GARRETT FISHER

People started to really run crazy in all directions. I started to go over to help them but as soon as I got another ten feet, an object, like, an ENORMOUS object - I think it was a piece of concrete with a window attached - I mean, just fucking huge - slammed right on top of this couple, this poor couple, you know - tourists or whatever. The guy had a backpack on and this girl with a pink sun visor. I just imagine now how she was probably so excited about wearing her little pink hat. And they absolutely without a doubt got completely flattened and killed right in front of me.

OFFICER HERNANDEZ

You name it. Like, the lady next to me - she got hit with a piece of the engine, like, this big... in the leg... And it was from here down - the whole thing was wide open.

GARRETT FISHER

Fiery pieces of unidentified stuff were totally raining down around me. At that point, I just realized I couldn't help these people, that I just had to start running.

OFFICER HERNANDEZ

And that's it, y'know? I saw the explosion of the plane and I jus' saw pieces of the plane coming my way and I was like, "Time to go!" and started running.

GARRETT FISHER

I've never run so fast in my entire life. There were cops running next to me yelling...

OFFICER HERNANDEZ

Get back! Get back! Run! Run!

GARRETT FISHER

You know shit is bad when cops are running WITH you. I was passing like, everyone, I was running so fast. People were falling down, getting trampled, grabbing each other, helping each other up. Everyone was on cell phones and dropping their bags - a woman grabbing her baby out of the carriage and taking off. There were five or six car accidents around me - people getting out of their cars - running and screaming.

OFFICER HERNANDEZ

The guy next to me - he died on the spot 'cause, y'know, he got hit in the head so... right in the head. Got hit. Dead.

GARRETT FISHER

My plan was to get to the river and swim to New Jersey. I swear to God, I know it sounds ridiculous now - but at the time, you have to remember, I had no fucking idea what was going on. I didn't see any plane; I just saw the explosion. People were yelling that we were being bombed and stuff. It definitely felt like we were being shot at. I really had no clue. I just thought - I was going to get killed. I mean, I'd already seen like, ten people get killed in about five different ways around me. So I figured if we were being attacked and the whole island was going to blow up - which I had every reason to believe given my surroundings - then I would want to be in the water. No? So I took a sharp left on Canal Street and headed for the Hudson.

SCENE 2: nine o'clock and 14 seconds

FF DON CASEY

Okay. I'm usually one of the first guys up in the firehouse. I mean, I have a daughter and all, you know, used to that routine and gettin' up early.

NARRATOR

Firefighter Don Casey, FDNY Ladder 9.

FF DON CASEY

So I'm sittin' in the kitchen, waitin' for all the guys to start rollin' in, start the day off, you know? We share a firehouse in Lower Manhattan with Engine Company 33. And Jeff Walz...

NARRATOR

Lost on September 11th.

FF DON CASEY

... he comes walkin' in and he has a funny story about a cop pullin' him over 'cause his seat belt didn't work in his car? So he goes upstairs to get dressed. And Kevin Pfeifer...

NARRATOR

Lost on September 11th.

FF DON CASEY

... he comes in with his bag of fruit, drops it on the table, goes up to get dressed. And that's usually when the guys start wakin' up, start mullin' around. The Engine Officer comes down. And we're just BS-in' around the kitchen table like always. And a run comes in.

NARRATOR/PA SYSTEM

(female voice preferred)

Engine.

FF DON CASEY

And it's 8:47. So the Engine officer, says, "Ahhh Mother!" 'Cause officers don't get overtime after 8:45 so he wouldn't get the overtime. It's in their contract, I dunno. So he gives a little like, disgruntled huff. And just then, Bobby Evans...

NARRATOR

Lost on September 11th.

FF DON CASEY

... comes runnin' in - says, "A plane just hit the World Trade Center!" And I'm like, "Get outta here!" He goes, "Yeah, yeah!" So we all run out to the fronta quarters to see this big gaping hole in the World Trade Center. Well, the Ladder Company runs out.

(MORE)

FF DON CASEY (CONT'D)

The Engine's already on their rig pullin' out. So the Ladder Officer tells us, "C'mon, get your gear on! Be ready for when the ticket comes!" So we're just standin' around the housewatch lookin' at the TV sayin', "Where's our ticket? Don't tell me they're waitin' till nine o'clock to save the city a coupla dollars!" And sure enough, at nine o'clock and fourteen seconds -

NARRATOR/PA SYSTEM
(female voice preferred)

Ladder.

FF DON CASEY

-- we get our ticket to go down to the World Trade Center.
(beat)

John Tierney - he was our Proby - being the officer says, "Get your gear on. Get ready to go," he figures he should go. Well, Probys only ride till nine o'clock. So when the ticket came at nine o'clock and fourteen seconds, this kid was actually off-duty. But he's standin' in the middle of the street as the rig's pullin' out. He's like, "Should I go?" I tell him, "No! You're not goin' down there! You'd be workin' all day and not even get paid for it! What are you, nuts?" He says, "Well, the officer told me to get my gear on and get ready to go." So I'm like, "Welp, if he told you that, I guess, c'mon."

NARRATOR

Firefighters David Arce, Gerard Baptiste, Michael Boyle, Robert King, Jr., Keithroy Maynard and Probationary Firefighter John Tierney - all lost on September 11th.

SCENE 3: the most beautiful day

FF LOU TRAZINO

My daughter'd been after me to take the training wheels off her bike. Well, you know, she's still five - gonna be six in December - so I didn't really think she was capable. So I kept telling her, "Jill, you're gonna have to wait. Wait till Daddy thinks you're ready." "No Daddy, I'm ready."

NARRATOR

Firefighter Lou Trazino, FDNY Engine 33.

FF LOU TRAZINO

So we sat down, looked at my schedule. "Okay on Tuesday, Daddy's going to be off." And we drew, up on the calendar, a bicycle. And that little bicycle was the day we'd take her training wheels off. That morning, we stepped outside and said, "Aww, what a great day this is. This is the most beautiful day!" Jill, of course, goes, "Daddy, you're going to take my training wheels off my bike today!" I said, "Sure. Absolutely! It's a great day. It's a great day for it."

KAREN SLADE

It was such a beautiful day. And my son, Ian, was so excited to be going back to his school. So we're back to our normal life, back to all the little things we love about New York. We'd just moved to the financial district 'cause, you know, Tribeca had out-priced us years ago.

NARRATOR

Karen Slade, writer.

KAREN SLADE

That morning - we're not usually "on time" people - but that morning, we woke up early so I could walk Ian to school. So we walked through the World Trade Center - past that statue of the man on his laptop. And Ian leapfrogged over these brass sculptures - these little brown balls he used to leap over every day. We walked under that sky-bridge that connects World Trade 7. There's a Jasper Johns inside and Ian said, "Oh Mom. We've never been in there." And I said, "Well, let's go this afternoon." When we got to school, I kissed him good-bye on the forehead and headed to the Farmers' Market 'cause I needed to like, stock the house. I stopped in a "99 Cents Store" and bought a pack of sponges. And thought I heard a car accident. I went out and saw this woman running. Her face looked... she was terrified and she was on her cell. But nobody else on the street was running - just this one person. So I thought, "Oh my God. She's having like, a really bad day or something." Then I saw all these papers flying in the sky and I thought, "Is there a ticker tape parade today?" You know, "Today's September 11th. Was there a Yankees game?" I'm not much up on sports.

FF LOU TRAZINO

We were in Jill's schoolyard when I heard that plane roaring down. It went from this gigantic airplane - it looked so huge over the city - to this... so small up against that building, then just went in... the nose, the fuselage, the wings, the tail... disappears. And as it was going in, the building lit up like a jack-o'-lantern. I knew we'd all be going to work that day, that this was gonna be the most enormous rescue operation the city had ever seen. I also knew I had to get my family home. But before I could work out a plan, I saw Engine 33 flying by. I could see all the figures in there - I couldn't make out who - but I knew they were going down pretty cockily, like they always were, to put that fire out.

SCENE 4: crying crazy

TERRENCE

Well, I witnessed the whole thing. It totally crippled us, the homeless people, totally crippled us 'cause World Trade Center was like, base.

NARRATOR

Terrence, Lillian and Thomas, residents of an alley near Wall Street.

TERRENCE

We'd go down there - four-thirty, five o'clock in the morning - take care of our personal hygiene... clean up, wash up n' get our meals. Now it's no more. Some of us go to Beaver Street but it's so crowded, by the time you take a shower, your whole day's shot! Now we got nothing. Got nothing! I will say this to you - my friends here saved a lot of lives. People just raced into this alley, went up against that wall and it was pitch black. My friends here got 'em out, took 'em to the hospital and came back and gave out masks. I was on Church Street coming out of a bookstore - me and my wife here. I could practically see the passengers on the plane, the first one. Crash! And I told her, "Oh Shit!" Excuse my French. And then she started chanting and...

LILLIAN

... praying...

TERRENCE

... praying...

LILLIAN

I started praying and for some reason, the Lord just led me to pray for the people!

TERRENCE

The next thing we know, the second building blew. BOOM!

LILLIAN

And I started crying crazy! And I started praying, praying - being that I'm spiritual? So like, the souls - I was praying for the souls.

TERRENCE

I got a feeling I gotta go into therapy behind this 'cause it keeps playing back to my mind. I need some kind of counseling. I keep telling her that. Because to witness that, to see... it's having a devastating effect on me. Because I saw the whole thing initially - at close range. Ask Thomas. He was here.

THOMAS

I woke up, went down to Beekman Hospital, cleaned up in the bathroom, which is my normal routine. I swept the alley around eight-thirty in the morning and I heard a jet go over. Then we heard the explosion. I put down the broom and went to the end of the alley. The North Tower was in flames, all the upper floors - nothing but fire. So I helped direct traffic with a guy from the hardware store; I've known him for a few years.

(MORE)

THOMAS (CONT'D)

We were getting all the civilian traffic to go north so the emergency vehicles could get in. Then I heard another plane and saw a big ball of flame come up in the air, like I've never seen in my life. Pardon my language, but it was like all hell was breaking loose. We came back to the alley and it was thick with dust and people who'd run from the buildings. So we helped them get to the hospital. I knew the way even in the dark, just make a right and go straight. That's when I went in the bathroom. My clothes were covered with dust. I looked like Frosty the Snowman! So I cleaned my mouth and my nose out and washed my head off. I said, "I'm getting outta here." My first thought was to head to Chinatown. I figured a terrorist isn't going to bomb Chinatown. There's nothing up there to bomb but some egg rolls and some ducks hanging in the window. So that's where I went.

SCENE 5: you wanna go to fires

PROBATIONARY FF JASON CASCONE

Being a Proby, a probationary firefighter, which is what they call us our first year on the job, is probably the toughest job in the Fire Department.

NARRATOR

Probationary Firefighter Jason Cascone, FDNY Ladder 9.

PROBATIONARY FF JASON CASCONE

You constantly have to be on your toes and make sure everything is done. You can never be doing nothing. Like you can't really be hanging out watching TV or anything. If there's a dish in the sink, you gotta clean it. If there's dust on the floor, you oughtta mop it. Clean the sheets! Check the rig! You gotta do everything! Everything's on you. And if it's not done, you get your chops busted. It's the best!! So when I first got assigned to Ladder 9, I was real excited about being in Lower Manhattan. Obviously it's the center of everything that's kind of busy and bustling. I brought a cake over to the firehouse just like tradition, you know - the new Proby comes by with something good, treats, whatever. Walked in the door, met the guys. John Tierney approached me, big smile, "Hey! How ya doing? I'm John." So you know, he gave a tour around the firehouse, showed me top to bottom, everything - the quarters, the rig - told me what I was supposed to be doing, spent some time with me just talking about fires and different, you know, Fire Department stuff. On September 11th - which was actually the day before my first official day on the job - I woke up to my mom rushing into my room, real excited, telling me, "There's a huge fire at the World Trade Center!" And like, for my mom to be all dramatic wasn't too out of the ordinary. But I go to the TV and sure enough, I see this huge fire. And the first thing I think is, "Ah man, I missed it! One more day, I would've been there." You know, if you're a fireman, you wanna go to fires.

SCENE 6: mister hudson

RO SHEFFE

From our living room two blocks away, we heard the first and watched the second plane crash into the Twin Towers. We grabbed Mister Hudson and ran. He weighs sixty-three pounds but is elderly. Fortunately, the elevators were still working since he has difficulty with stairs.

NARRATOR

Ro Sheffe, resident of Lower Manhattan - and Mr. Hudson, his bulldog.

RO SHEFFE

Once outside, we walked Mister Hudson on an endless carpet of papers that, moments before, had been on the desks of people no longer with us. The streets were filled with everyone staring up at the burning Towers. We saw things we wish we hadn't and hurried back inside our building.

SCENE 7: disaster

KAREN SLADE

Someone shouted, "We've been bombed." Somebody else turned and said, "No. A small plane went into the North Tower." I thought it was an accident, you know, "What a shame. Some small plane, some driver, some crazy... must have gone out of control." Then I saw the second Tower on fire.

FF DON CASEY

So when we first pull up, BJ - that's my mutual partner - BJ looks at me and goes, "Case, two Towers are burnin'?" I say, "Well maybe the plane went through the one Tower and hit the other. If a plane crashes, it's a disaster. Who knows what the heck is goin' on here?"

KAREN SLADE

I grabbed someone, "What happened?" He told me, "Another plane - we've been attacked." I said, "This is World War Three." And he said, "Yes, it is." So there's thousands of people on the street watching this fire...

FF DON CASEY

And I'm like, "Look at this coming down!" It looked like a desk at first, flying through the air.

KAREN SLADE

Then we saw what looked like a person standing on a ledge...

SCENE 8: give them wings

BOLIVAR ARELLANO

My name is Bolivar Arellano. For the last thirty-eight years, I am a press photographer. I came here in 1971.

NARRATOR

Bolivar Arellano, New York Post staff photographer.

BOLIVAR ARELLANO

I photograph civil wars in Colombia and Nicaragua and a lot of shootings and massacres in Ecuador, you know, people killed by the para-militaries. I don't like injustice so I use my camera as a weapon. My camera is my machine gun. Because in El Salvador, the military shoot people and they say, "Oh-oh, we didn't shoot the bodies. We just shoot the air." But in the paper, I made it show that they are liars. They publish my picture shooting the bodies. So to stay there, I would be dead. I have to move out. I thought I saw everything until the World Trade Center. Yeah - that day was Election Day so I shoot all of the candidates. And I was developing the pictures when my photo editor come in, "Bolivar, hurry up. There's a crash, accident, a plane!" So I took my car. And I pass like, forty red lights and about twenty minutes, I was right there under the two buildings. I start taking pictures. And I saw the first one. I saw him jump from the building. Then I saw when he touch the ground. No. His body was in pieces. It was dismember. So uh, the other eleven that jumped, I didn't want to see them touching the ground. So I take only the pictures looking up. And that is going to be forever in my mind because I was praying, you know, in my mind. I was praying, "Please, please God. You want to take them? Take them. But don't let them touch the ground. Please give them wings." You know because the beliefs of the Catholics is that God not only hear you prays but that God read your mind. So that was I am praying, you know, in silence and... but... he didn't listen to me.

SCENE 9: bad feeling

CARY SHEIH

At 8:48 on Tuesday, I'm in my office on the 72nd floor of the North Tower - reading my email like I do every morning. I'd just gotten off the phone with a traffic engineer.

NARRATOR

Cary Sheih, Project Engineer at the Port Authority.

CARY SHEIH

As I finish my usual peanut butter and jelly sandwich, I hear a loud explosion, followed by building sways and vibrations so tremendous, I'm thrown from my chair. I think maybe it's an earthquake but still thinking rationally, I know it's not.

FF DON CASEY

In the lobby of the World Trade Center, they have glass - big glass - about twenty feet high. And the last pane of glass in the corner of the North Tower's broken. And you could walk right through. So we walk in and the Mayor's there, the Commissioner's there - all the top officers are there.

(MORE)

FF DON CASEY (CONT'D)

We're the only company standin' there waitin'. And I turn to the guys and go, "I gotta bad feeling about this!" It's a line from a movie - what movie it is, I'm not sure - but the guys are like, "Yeah, yeah" - noddin', agreein', laughin'.
(chuckles)

Little did we know how bad of a feeling it was!

CARY SHEIH

As I pick myself up and run to the emergency staircase, I see debris and fireballs falling outside the windows. In the stairwell, people are pouring in from other floors. I spot a coworker and we hold and console each other.

FF DON CASEY

The Command Post is like, this suitcase where the Chiefs keep track of the locations of all the companies. What they do is like, I'm Ladder 9, right? So they'll write "Ladder 9" on this magnet and throw it up to where we're goin'. So we're in the lobby. We're waitin' and waitin'. We waited about two minutes! Then the big Chief of the Fire Department comes over, goes, "Okay, Ladder 9, walk with me." Brings us over to the B Stairwell and says, "Let us know when you get halfway up." I'm like, "Okay!"

CARY SHEIH

There are no public announcements in the stairwell, no more explosions and the building has stopped swaying. We all feel like we're out of imminent danger. As we head down the stairwell, people start regaining their composure. Some say this is a piece of cake compared to '93 when the stairwell was dark and full of smoke. Others joke about how Mr. Silverstein, who'd recently taken control of the complex, must be fuming. People begin to receive messages over their pagers that a 767 accidentally hit our building.

FF DON CASEY

We start ascending the stairs. I ask people, "What floor you from?" They say, "42" and "44." So I'm thinkin', "That's half the building just about evacuated. This isn't gonna be too bad." But there's reports of firefighters and civilians havin' trouble breathing.

CARY SHEIH

Then we hear shouts from people above us to, "Keep to the right!" And suddenly, blind people, asthmatics and injured people start filing down to our left. People are burned so badly --

FF DON CASEY

I hear someone scream, "Burn victim! Burn victim!" And as you made the turn, you could see this woman walkin' down the stairs. Her back was burnt to a crisp - all bubbly and crinkly. It was horrible.

SCENE 10: last rites

PAUL ADAMS

So we get to the triage area in front of the Towers - me and my partner, Moose. And they have a whole buncha people - about thirty, forty people - with green tags on, which means they're stable. But they're all just sittin' around.

NARRATOR

Paul Adams, FDNY EMT.

PAUL ADAMS

And we're kinda pissed off at one of the bosses for not gettin' these people outta there. So she's like, "Where's your triage tag?" I just look at her, "You gotta be fuckin' kiddin' me," and walk away. We start goin' more into the area. It was utter chaos - people comin' out with injuries, people just covered in blood. And this burn patient walks up to us. She was burned - seventy-seven percent of her body, third degree burns, half of her clothes just hangin' off 'er and still smokin'. She was comin' out of her office when the plane struck. And the fuel hit 'er and ignited. And she walked down eighty-eight flights with her girlfriend. So we put 'er on a stretcher - start doing patient care - Moose, y'know, doin' the burn sheets and the oxygen. And this priest comes up out of nowhere, kneels down next to 'er, asks if she minds if he gives her her last rites. She was very calm. She goes, "No, no, I don't mind." So he gives her her last rites. But he's got his job to do and we got ours. When he's done, we grab 'er, shoot 'er up to Saint Vincent's, drop 'er off and head back in.

SCENE 11: one step at a time

CARY SHEIH

Sometime around the 30th floor, we pass the first firefighters coming up the stairs.

FF DON CASEY

So there's one lane of traffic comin' down and one lane of traffic goin' up. All the traffic goin' up's firemen.

CARY SHEIH

They reassure us we're safe and we'll all get out fine. People keep filing down orderly and calmly, but stunned.

FF DON CASEY

I don't make too much eye contact with the civilians comin' down but everybody's calm. I can't believe how calm they are.

CARY SHEIH

As we descend, the smell of jet fuel becomes so unbearable, people cover their mouths with anything they can find - ties, shirts, handkerchiefs. Every few floors, emergency crews pass out water and sodas from vending machines they'd split open.

FF DON CASEY

On the 13th floor, our lieutenant wants to switch over to the A Stairwell because we hear it's less concentrated. And I see BJ isn't with us. So I get on the radio, "Roof to 9-OV."

BJ (AS REMEMBERED)

Yeah, 9-OV.

FF DON CASEY

Where are you, Beej?

BJ (AS REMEMBERED)

I'm on the 10th floor.

FF DON CASEY

Well okay, I'll wait for you on the 13th floor. We're switchin' stairwells.

CARY SHEIH

Around the 15th floor, emergency crews begin diverting us to a different stairwell. They lead us out of our stairwell, across the hallway where I see exhausted firemen sitting on the floor trying to catch their breath. I think, "Why? What's going on?" This whole operation seems very confusing.

FF DON CASEY

So while I'm waitin' for BJ, there's this woman sittin' in a chair going, "Ahhhh, ahhh!! I'm not gonna make it. I'm not gonna make it!" And these firefighters are trying to help her. So their officer says tells one of his guys, "Open up that office and we'll sit her in there till she calms down a bit, keep her from blocking the stairwell." So the guy's tryin' to like, finesse the door open. I say, "Yo, Bro! It's a glass door. Just break the stupid door. No one's gonna be bothering you tomorrow, like, 'Why'd you break my door?'" So he takes his halligan, knocks a hole in it, reaches his hand in and opens up the door. Then as they wheel the woman in, she falls off the chair and she's like, "Ahhhh, ahhh!" She was a real heavy-set woman. She wasn't going anywhere! And the guys are tellin' her, "Don't worry. We're not leavin' you here. We're gonna stay with you till the end." So BJ comes up, "Case, I ain't gonna make it up to the top." I say,

(chuckles)

"I'm not makin' it up to the top. I don't think anyone's makin' it up to the top.

(MORE)

FF DON CASEY (CONT'D)

We just take our time, comfortable stroll up the stairs one step at a time and do what we gotta do." "Yeah, but I'm overheating." So we walk through the offices, find a refrigerator with a buncha water in it, load up our pockets. He downs one. So I say, "Okay, we'll start goin' up some more."

CARY SHEIH

By this point, the firefighters are completely exhausted, but still pushing upward - one step at a time - with their axes, hoses and heavy outfits - up all those stairs. Some of us offer to carry up their gear a few flights but the firefighters refuse - each and every one of them.

SCENE 12: no thanks!

FF DON CASEY

Now we make it up to the 19th floor where we run into another company from our Battalion. And I feel my whole arm just go totally numb. Their officer comes over to me and says, "Yo, Bro, I seen this a hundred times. You're havin' a heart attack." I say, "No, I'm not. I'm not short of breath. I have no chest pains. It's just, I have loaner gear on. This isn't my gear." He looks at it and goes, "Alright, you're Kerwin?" "Nah, I'm Casey. I got Kerwin's coat on and I got Kerwin's pants on 'cause I left mine at home. That's why my arm's numb. It fits too tight around my shoulders and everything." So they take all the gear off and I'm like, "Yeah - now I can feel the blood circulatin' again." And as we're standin' there, this officer looks out the window onto the roof of a building at the base of the Tower and says, "You think you're having a bad day? Take a look at this!" And the whole rooftop's filled with about twenty people that had jumped from our building. I'm like, "No way! I just seen that jumper outside. Why the hell would I wanna see other people lying dead on a roof?" And as he's watching it, he goes, "Ohhhh man! Somebody just jumped and hit the corner of the building and totally exploded into a red... a red ball of liquid." I'm like, "Yeah. You want me to come over there and look at that? No thanks! I've seen enough of this shit already. I don't have to see anymore."

SCENE 13: rumble

CARY SHEIH

The wait in the hallway to get to the other staircase is excruciatingly long as we have to merge with people from other floors. Water starts to pour down from behind us.

FF DON CASEY

So two Port Authority cops come in with cylinders of oxygen. One of 'em comes over to me, "You alright?" I go, "Ehhh I had a little numbness in my hand but I got the feeling back now." He goes, "Well you want the oxygen?" I say, "Nah, I don't need it. Save it for someone who does."

KAREN SLADE

All I can think about is getting to my child. So there are thousands of people heading away and I'm the only one going upstream - back in to find Ian.

OFFICER HERNANDEZ

So I'm jus' with my back against the Tower. And I'm telling people to move. But the people are taking pictures of people jumping and they don't wanna move. I mean some people - I dunno if they're in shock or they're jus' being nosy - but they're jus', y'know, "We don't wanna go."

BOLIVAR ARELLANO

So a cop sees me take those pictures and tell me, "Get the fuck outta here!" I say, "Okay. I gonna go." But I walk very slow because I don't want to leave. So he come from behind me and push me, "Get away from here." He push me three times. Now I don't want to argue with a cop so I leave. But he had to go back to Liberty Street to push other people. So as soon as he's gone, I come back to the same place under the Tower and keep taking pictures.

PAUL ADAMS

So we're there under the Towers, dealin' with patients and all that - people with chest pains from walkin' down all those stairs and other, y'know, injuries.

GARRETT FISHER

A couple of blocks before the river, I come across a crowd around a news van with a TV. I can see the actual buildings in front of me and on TV. As I stand there watching them burn, I realize the plane had hit almost exactly on my floor, exactly on my side of the building and I'm barely able to breathe.

KAREN SLADE

I get to the school. "Where are the 4th graders?" "The 4th graders are in the cafeteria." I run to the cafeteria. "The 4th graders have been transferred to the gym." I run into the gym, find his teacher. She says, "Ian was taken." I say, "Who has him? Who has him?" She says, "Someone on your emergency contact list." I say, "There are three people on my contact list. You have to tell me who. You have to tell me who!" She says, "Brian and Stephanie. They said to go to their house on Water Street." I say, "Okay okay. Alright!"

FF DON CASEY

We catch up to a woman having a hard time. I said, "How 'bout you, hon? You need any air?" She says, "No, I have vertigo. I have trouble walkin' down stairs." She was a TBTA cop, you know - Triborough Bridge Tunnel Authority. I say, "You just hold onto my arm. We'll get you down to the lobby. So I'm talkin' to her, you know - tryin' to keep things calm, cool and collected. And just as that was goin' on..."

CARY SHEIH

... for the first time since the explosion, a sense of panic begins to grip me. Only floor 7, then 6. A few more to go, and I'll be free. I can't wait.

KAREN SLADE

... so I'm getting ready to go out of the school and I open the door...

BOLIVAR ARELLANO

... I get my back to the buildings just in case...

OFFICER HERNANDEZ

... I'm helping people into ambulances...

PAUL ADAMS

... and everybody starts screamin' and they're lookin' up.

CARY SHEIH

... floor 5, floor 4... then all of a sudden...

FF DON CASEY

... you hear a rumbling noise...

BOLIVAR ARELLANO

... a sound was crushing...

KAREN SLADE

... the loudest, most awful - like, "the earth is opening up and swallowing us up" noise...

PAUL ADAMS

... and the noise...

OFFICER HERNANDEZ

... becomes a roar.

FF DON CASEY

I don't know if you ever seen the manholes blow up here on the street? They rumble a little bit and then...

BOLIVAR ARELLANO

... I look up. I take one picture. And I say, "Now what I gonna do?"

KAREN SLADE

It's like some monster or something is about to step on us...

FF DON CASEY

... right outside the window of the office we're standin' in...

BOLIVAR ARELLANO

... I see a man run in front me and he's crying...

OFFICER HERNANDEZ

So I run to the door. Some guy's holding it closed but I open it...

FF DON CASEY

... and I walk out of the office. And the rumbling's gettin' louder now. You can hear there's gonna be an explosion but nobody knows what it is.

GARRETT FISHER

All you can hear is just this unbelievable rumble and the ground is shaking.

BOLIVAR ARELLANO

So I say, "It's no time to run. I gonna try to save this guy's life." So I jump and cover his body...

PAUL ADAMS

... and my partner runs past me. And I run and trip over a fire hose...

FF DON CASEY

... so somebody says, "Hit the deck!!"

OFFICER HERNANDEZ

And I'm telling people, "Getin!Getin!Getin!"

PAUL ADAMS

I get up. People are steppin' on my hand, knockin' into me...

FF DON CASEY

I jump into the corner of the hallway and bury my head into my arms...

KAREN SLADE

I open the door and I'm immediately pushed back in...

OFFICER HERNANDEZ

I jus' close the door...

BOLIVAR ARELLANO

... and I'm trying to tell this guy, "You survive, tell my family I love them." But the moment that I open my mouth...

FF DON CASEY

... I look up and see BJ flyin' by me, runnin' down the other side of the hall away from the window. And I'm like, "That's a good idea!"

PAUL ADAMS

So I get up and - I don't know where - but Moose runs past me, and I don't see him anymore...

FF DON CASEY

... so I get up and I start runnin'. But by the time - we don't even reach the other end of the hallway - there's BOOM!

CARY SHEIH

... a loud boom...

KAREN SLADE

... this unbelievable sound...

FF DON CASEY

... an explosion...

PAUL ADAMS

... and I just turn around and look and here it comes, around the corner...

CARY SHEIH

... the building begins to shake unbearably again. People start falling down the stairwell as smoke starts to rise from below. The emergency lights flicker and then go out.

FF DON CASEY

And the lights go out.

PAUL ADAMS

It goes totally from morning to midnight. It's just pressure, impact...

BOLIVAR ARELLANO

... this crushing come down. The dust come in, go through my throat, my ears, my nose, and I think, "Fuck! I gonna die and my family never gonna receive my last words!"

KAREN SLADE

The principal and police shout, "It's a shutdown. It's a shutdown. Everybody in the basement." And I say, "My child is missing! I have to go!" And I tear out the door...

PAUL ADAMS

It was like puttin' your face in a barrel of dust and breathin' it for ten minutes straight.

CARY SHEIH

I can hear the steel buckling. Rescuers below us shout for us to go back up the stairs.

GARRETT FISHER

... and a woman behind me quietly trails off, "Oh My God..."

FF DON CASEY

I'm like, "What the fuck was that?!" And BJ goes, "Whooah! I don't know."

GARRETT FISHER

I think all my coworkers and friends are dying right before my eyes.

BOLIVAR ARELLANO

So I am thinking, "I have to die. I have to die."

PAUL ADAMS

I'm thinkin' I'm dyin'. I slow my breathing down. I breathe like, once every thirty seconds so I don't take all this stuff into my lungs.

KAREN SLADE

It's blackness you have to swim through. Instead of fish, there's paper. Instead of whales, there's debris. And bits of fiberglass just fire-balling through the sky.

OFFICER HERNANDEZ

And that's it. I jus' let it pass. I've seen people shot. But nothing like this. This was nothing I could control. There was nothing I could do.

CARY SHEIH

I'm choking and shaking but manage to climb up to the sixth floor where it's completely dark and the water's up to my ankles. Guided by the voice of another firefighter, a fireman leads us with his flashlight to another staircase. But once we get there, we're told to hold. The other firefighter says something under his breath to our fireman indicating the severity of the situation. The look on their faces says it all. In hindsight, I believe he whispered to our fireman that the South Tower had just collapsed.

SCENE 14: just away

KAREN SLADE

So I'm running up Chambers. And the police are screaming, "In the subway! In the subway!!" I grabbed one of them and said, "My child's out there. I have to find him." He said, "Where is he?" I said, "With friends on Water Street." So he grabbed another policeman, put my hand in his and said, "Find your child!" And he handed me a dust mask.

RO SHEFFE

Air in the lobby, where we'd been trapped with other residents, was getting dense with smoke. We had no choice; we picked up Mister Hudson and ran. Outside, the streets are littered with neckties, briefcases and shoes, hundreds of them - mostly women's high heels - discarded by people running for their lives. After two blocks, we realize we can't carry Mister Hudson for much longer. Sixty-three pounds is sixty-three pounds! But we can't put him down as he wouldn't be able to breathe walking in the swirling currents of dust. We come across a restaurant being evacuated and ask if they have anything with wheels to save our dog's life. All they have is a furniture dolly. So we place a plastic dishpan on it, load Mister Hudson in, tie an electric extension cord to pull it and head north, stopping every few yards to clear the dust from Mister Hudson's nostrils.

KAREN SLADE

It's so black, we can't see anything. But we hear engines. We don't know if it's an engine on the street or an engine in the sky. But every time we hear one, everyone runs for cover. One time, this policeman literally covered my body with his.

RO SHEFFE

When we get to the Brooklyn Bridge, we emerge into an incongruously sunny day. The Bridge is packed with people trudging along, covered in dust, hair matted with sweat. Many are barefoot. All have shirts or handkerchiefs tied around their heads. I've never seen that many people at once so utterly silent. The only sounds were the rumble of buildings burning behind us, the wail of emergency vehicles and the shriek of F-16 fighter jets over Manhattan.

KAREN SLADE

When we got to City Hall Park, the policeman couldn't take me any further. It was barricaded off. So I went around City Hall and jumped over a fence to get onto that street under the Brooklyn Bridge. Usually I wear really high heels. But thank God, I had put on my Birkenstocks that morning. When I finally got to Water Street, I ran up seven flights of stairs and down their hallway, "Ian, Ian!" But when I reached their apartment - they'd left the door wide open - nobody was there. And I just fell apart. I was on the floor, crying and shaking and just... But very far down deep in my soul, I had this feeling that Ian was okay. So I headed back out to Brian's office.

RO SHEFFE

We stopped halfway across the bridge and looked back. All we could see was the black cloud we'd just escaped obscuring most of Lower Manhattan. We had no idea both Towers had been hit, no idea how many were dead, no idea where we were going - just away, with tens of thousands of others.

KAREN SLADE

So I start up Water Street and I see people covered with gray soot, like zombies rising out of the ashes. I get to Brian's office, which is in the NYU dental building and there were all these dental patients being wheeled out with their little blue bibs and their faces half-numb. I walk in and say, "I think my child is here." A nurse says she'll go check. And I see a telephone, "Oh my God. Does this phone actually work?" I go to dial - with my dust mask pulled up on my head - and I hear this little voice say, "What, Mommy, are you a nurse now?" And I turned and ran - and picked Ian up.

SCENE 15: RUN!

FF DON CASEY

It looked like something blew up right in our building. Everything is strewn all over. Dust everywhere. And everyone's gone. So we walk over to the B Stairwell to continue our ascent. And there's this kid with a Proby patch on his helmet. He's like, "Yo, Bro! We gotta get the hell outta here!" "Whoa," I say, "Calm down. Losin' your cool now is not the right thing to do. You gotta keep your wits about you." And I look at his lieutenant, "Right, Lieu? Cool heads prevail?" And the lieutenant didn't even hear me. He was just bitin' his nail, like he was losin' it, you know? So I say, "We're all gonna get outta here. But we can't leave just because we want to." Right then, we hear over a radio transmission, "We got a collapse on the 65th floor." I'm like, "This building? 65th floor? Oh shit! Wonder what that looks like." Less than a minute later, they say, "Okay everybody out. Evacuate the building." So I say to the kid, "Okay - NOW we're outta here."

CARY SHEIH

After huddling by the stairwell, we're finally given the green light to run for our lives. I make it down six flights and come out onto the mezzanine level. I don't know what I was expecting but I was not ready for this apocalyptic scene.

FF DON CASEY

We make it down to the lobby. And there's like, three inches of dust on the ground. And the command post is just sittin' there, completely deserted. Before there was like, fifteen guys standin' around that thing. We go up. We come down. It felt like minutes. But now, there's nobody here. Seemed like they just left us in there, you know?

CARY SHEIH

Debris is still raining down from all sides of the building. I'm running, coughing, completely disoriented by the strange new landscape at the World Trade Center plaza - burning trees, wreckage, fireballs - nothing short of a nuclear winter.

FF DON CASEY

As soon as we get outta the building, me and BJ start walkin', huggin' the walls just like we did on the way in. So I walk across the street, "Beej, what the hell is that over here?" 'Cause you could see like, three gigantic shards of steel and concrete sticking out of the ground.

CARY SHEIH

I climb over huge pieces of steel and make my way to the sky-bridge leading away. I look back and see the charred remains of the upper floors of the North Tower, where I'd been moments before.

FF DON CASEY

As we're waitin' for the other guys from Ladder 9, I see a priest, "Hey Father. How are ya?" And he says, "How are you?" I say, "Well, I'm walkin'. I'm talkin'. But my mind ain't gonna forget this for a long time. I saw a lot of bad stuff."

CARY SHEIH

And I begin to have this eerie feeling that the South Tower's not there. I can't be sure because of all the smoke billowing from the North Tower.

FF DON CASEY

So I turn to see what the 65th floor collapse looks like...

CARY SHEIH

... and as I'm trying to find the South Tower, I see the unthinkable happen right in front of my eyes...

FF DON CASEY

... my eyes look up and I see the glass poppin' out, one floor after the other, like they imploded it.

CARY SHEIH

The North Tower begins to disintegrate from where it was burning...

FF DON CASEY

... And to see those windows just blowin' out, floor by floor, I'm like, "Holy Shit! How'm I gonna outrun this?" You know - 110 stories, you figure - no way. And somebody yells...

COMPANY

(in unison)

RUN!

END OF ACT ONE

INTERMISSION

ACT TWO

MOM

(leaving voice-mail)

Hi sweetheart, it's your Mom.... sorry we keep missing each other but I got your message, ahhh - glad you're okay - but I do hope you're wearing your respirator. Um - Call me, but not too late. And call your brother. It was his birthday on September 11th, but you knew that...

SCENE 1: walkin' dead guy

FF DON CASEY

After the debris cleared, I didn't know where anyone was.

NARRATOR

Firefighter Don Casey, FDNY Ladder 9.

FF DON CASEY

A coupla blocks up, I ran into another guy from my house. We walked all over the place tryin' to find the guys. We come upon this bar where there's a coupla cops inside. And the owner of the bar waves us in. So we walk in. We sit down. We had a little drinka water. And they tell us, "The Pentagon was hit. The White House was hit. The two Towers were hit." And they're showing the buildings collapsin' on TV. And they said the second plane hit at 9:02. I didn't even know there were two planes! That's when I realized, "Gee, that rumbling was the South Tower comin' down." So I said, "This is ridiculous. I gotta go find my guys," and left. But by now, there's everybody and their sister's down there. Everybody! Just sitting around waiting for 'em to make the call so they could go in there and start searchin' for people. But I was like a walkin' dead guy, you know? I was just wanderin' like, spaced out - looking for anybody with a helmet on that had a "33" on it or another "9". I walked for about maybe another two hours. But I didn't find anybody.

SCENE 2: let's go!

PROBATIONARY FF JASON CAScone

That morning, first thing I did was call up Proby School.

NARRATOR

Probationary Firefighter Jason Cascone, FDNY Ladder 9.

PROBATIONARY FF JASON CAScone

I'd never worked a single tour in my life, wasn't sure I'd even know what to do. But before I could say anything, they're just like, "Report to your closest firehouse," and hung up.

DR. JIM SNYDER

That night, my friend from medical school calls me up about going in. At that point, it was the furthest thing from my mind, going there.

NARRATOR

Dr. Jim Snyder, M.D.

DR. JIM SNYDER

We talk about just wanting to be with family during a crisis and that's all I was doing - just wanted to be safe with my daughter. But as we're watching more of it on TV, I start thinking, "I don't feel right about not being there, not helping out." So I called my friend back and said, "Let's go!"

PROBATIONARY FF JASON CASCOE

So I went to my local firehouse where they'd already commandeered a city bus and were loading a bunch of tools onto it. And they said, "Let's go! We're going to the World Trade Center!" I think by that point, the first Tower had collapsed and they already knew we'd lost a lot of guys. So as we boarded, a Chaplain gave us each absolution.

DR. JIM SNYDER

We decided we'd grab another med school buddy and all go in together. I had MD plates on my car, which I never thought I'd need. But now they came in handy because here I am on this L.I.E. at three in the afternoon - where I normally can't go more than ten miles an hour - and I'm going about ninety-five, flying down this long empty road into the city from way out east - just passing policemen, everyone just waving. Very eerie.

PROBATIONARY FF JASON CASCOE

West Side Highway was closed, so we flew right down - this guy's hand down on the horn. Got down there. And all there was was a huge cloud of smoke. There was a four-inch layer of the dust on the ground and coming down from the sky, like it was snowing. There were papers everywhere - office papers, that kind of a thing. And everything was on fire. It was right out of a movie.

DR. JIM SNYDER

Me and my med school buddies decided if we're going in, let's go all the way to the front lines where we could do something informal but maybe more critical at the time - CPR, stop bleeding, tourniquets or whatever. Now don't forget, we now have two ophthalmologists and one child psychiatrist in the car. Wasn't exactly like we're the MASH unit or anything.

SCENE 3: just a toothbrush

SUSAN FLIS

Rumor is they're shutting down Javits Center before dawn and moving us up to the Pier.

NARRATOR

Susan Flis, Licensed Practical Nurse.

NATALIE ROUNDTREE

They say it's nicer up there. For the families. Very organized, high security - you know, so people can't steal supplies.

NARRATOR

Natalie Roundtree, Licensed Practical Nurse and Events Coordinator.

SUSAN FLIS

... or fake they lost a loved one to get the money. Well, now they're gonna need paperwork. So will we. Anyway, even if it all ends now, I'm still glad I came.

NATALIE ROUNDTREE

Me too. The first two days after it happened, I couldn't even leave my house I was so afraid. But by Thursday I thought, "You've got to stop feeling sorry for yourself when there are so many others out there suffering." So I bought some things to take over with my last little bit of money - water, batteries and peroxide. And I started to feel better already - like a surge of energy. So I called my girlfriend and asked if she wanted to go over. I was a little bit annoyed because she had to get all dolled up. I thought, "There are people lying under the rubble who are dead and she's fussing with her mascara. Maybe something's wrong with me but to my way of thinking, we are not going to pick up guys!" But I kept my mouth shut.

SUSAN FLIS

I drove down here from upstate. Just got in my truck and... well I knew, being a nurse, that I could help. Like I'll do anything that needs to be done. Plus I was in the military. I know how to organize supplies for MASH units. Like they were counting each and every single Q-tip! It's like, "No!" Y'look at whatcha really need and y'eyeball it. When it goes down a little or you know it's gonna be useful, you order it. I mean, they had cotton balls. I've been a nurse for years. I've never used a cotton ball. They had diapers! So I said, "What do you really need?" And they said, "Whistles" - to call each other because they were getting hoarse. Plus when you have a respirator on, it's hard to shout. And just things that you just wouldn't think of. Baby Wipes went like crazy because of that soot. Vicks Vapor Rub to block the smell of bodies.

NATALIE ROUNDTREE

When we first got here, there were hundreds and hundreds of boxes of Tylenol, Band-aids, you name it - that needed to be separated. So we just started unloading the boxes as fast as we could with tons more coming in. We had T-shirts, socks and underwear - even Extra Extra Large for the really really big guys. And the workers coming in from Ground Zero - how grateful there were. They'd been down there in the rubble. Some of them hadn't washed, you know, the kind of things you take for granted. And they were all so thankful for even a bar of soap. I mean, you woulda thought I was giving them a million dollars and it was just a toothbrush.

SUSAN FLIS

We had all kinds of people. I had one little man come up.
(to NATALIE)

Did I tell you about the one from Poland? He comes up - this little tiny thing, you know, like a child - he was this size - and he says, "I come from Poland. I love America. I come to help!" And I'm like, "Awwww," and I look at the State Trooper standing there. At this point, they only wanted cutters and welders. And they were just so rude, the cops, like, "We're not taking any volunteers." So I said, "Let me talk to 'em." So I'm like, "Well, what's your special skill?" And he goes, "I do anything. I sweep floors. I do anything." But we didn't need that. And the next day, this sweet little man was still standing there in the hot sun hoping someone might give him a chance. So I said, "Do you have a place to stay?" And he goes, "Oh yes! I come from Poland. I love America."

SCENE 4: auto-pilot

TONY ESOLA

You know, ironworkers responded to the Oklahoma bombing. Any kind of building collapse or disaster, we're the first ones into it with the heavy stuff.

NARRATOR

Tony Esola, Ironworker Local 483, New Jersey.

TONY ESOLA

So that's why when this happened, I knew I had to help. So Wednesday, the day after it happened, I went to Jersey City because I heard that was a staging area and the best way to get over. But there were hundreds and hundreds of people there. So I'm like, "How'm I gonna get over?" Then some guy came up and made an announcement, "We need ironworkers, five ironworkers!" We ended up rigging a big excavator machine, hooking it to a crane and lifting it on a barge. So that's how we ended up getting over. The second we get off the boat, we get hooked up with this guy from FEMA and immediately head right to Ground Zero. To get there, we have to walk through - I don't know what building it is - but there's no power down there - pitch black - so they give us flashlights.

(MORE)

TONY ESOLA (CONT'D)

And we start traipsing through like, three inches of water and debris, some fire hoses and stuff. And we hear the firemen was coming the opposite way. Someone says, "Move to the side! Move to the side!" So they come past us with just their flashlights going. That's when I get the first glimpse of, "Oh my God, this is like..." You know? It isn't a full body. It's a half. And they're carrying it. And it's another firefighter too 'cause it has the jacket on. That was the initial shock of the whole thing. We just keep walking. They bring us to the inside of the whole area, which nothing is recognizable. There are people going every which way, trying to do something. We're totally in shock at this point, you know, everything's as if it's been in a blender. There are a couple fire trucks right in the middle that are crushed by the debris - totally crushed, smashed, whatever. And that's when you start seeing body parts on the ground, all over the place. I didn't know if I could handle it. Then I realized I have a job to do. I just got into autopilot, just jumped in and I've been there ever since. I ended up working straight through until Thursday afternoon. Then I went down to the river and the police took me back over to Jersey. But the coolest thing was when we got off our boat, there were still hundreds of people there. It was myself and two other ironworkers - we looked like we were in a war - dirty, clothes ripped from the jagged metal. And when we stepped off onto the dock like, the whole crowd was cheering and clapping and stuff. As I got to the end of the crowd, a lady and her daughter came up to me and said, "We just want to thank you for helping," and this and that. I was like, "Oh my God, you're welcome." She said, "My husband is over there and I haven't heard from him since Tuesday." And that's when I kinda like, broke down and cried. That's when I decided I'm gonna go back every day. That moment right there was enough to cure me. She told me her husband was over there and her daughter was with her and she gave me a hug and I went on my way. I went back to my truck but my truck battery was dead because I'd left my lights on.

SCENE 5: i'll put on my cape

MITCHELL PERITZ

Oh yeah, the ironworkers. Holy Shit. It's sort of like working on petrified wood, these guys are so muscular.

NARRATOR

Mitchell Peritz, Chiropractor and Body Worker.

MITCHELL PERITZ

God, it's probably my second morning there, this guy was just thick, you know? He had no neck. His head was screwed into his shoulders. No wrists. Just fingers sticking out, like Popeye. So he was huge. Nice guy. Says, "Look, I can't move my arm." And he can't. I say, "Are you kidding me? I'd need a chisel to get into that thing!" He's laughing.

(MORE)

MITCHELL PERITZ (CONT'D)

He had a good ol' time. So after a whole series of testing, it looks like it's his intercostal muscle. I'm screwed. There's no way I'm getting through to this guy's intercostal muscle above his pec. So I did a lot of tissue work on his neck and upper traps. Then I actually went into the pec muscle itself. I let this guy know I was in his chest! So he got like, eighty to ninety percent of his movement back and went on his way. Another one came in with a fucked-up shoulder. I said, "Are you out of your mind? You want me to fix a fucked-up shoulder you've been using for years in fifteen, twenty minutes? No problem. Let me just get into a phone booth. I'll put on my cape."

SCENE 6: it'd do ya good

FF DON CASEY

So the next day, the Lieutenant calls me at home, "I'm fillin' out your CD-72." That's our accident report. And he read off what I'd told him, "Hurt the head, scratched corneas, knee injury." I said, "That sounds right - submit it." Ten minutes later, he calls me back, "The medical office says there's no medical leave. You're either light duty or you're workin'." I was like, "Workin'? What do you mean 'workin'? We don't even have a rig!" So he said, "You go down to the pile and you dig." I was like, "Whoa! I'm not goin' down there again! Do you really need me?" He goes, "To tell you the truth, there's too many people here already." So I said, "Well then, I ain't comin' in." But BJ said, "Case, you gotta come in and witness this - all the support we're gettin' from the neighborhood - people comin' by with food, lighting candles. It'd do ya good." So Saturday I came in to work. Me and BJ would answer the phones and help well-wishers bringin' flowers and everything. Just bein' around the firehouse, I guess, was good.

SCENE 7: without us even asking

NATALIE ROUNDTREE

Most of the people who came to volunteer wanted to go to Ground Zero. Not me. I'm not a trauma nurse. I didn't want to be in the way. So I stayed put at the Javits Center. Our operation was just as important.

SUSAN FLIS

I went. They needed people like us down there. The guys are gonna talk to a female before they talk to another guy. They feel safer. They're not gonna come up to someone that's in a suit or that has a little tag. You're there to give 'em water. You're there to check on 'em. This big old man let me put sunblock on him. I said, "Don't worry, it's not scented. It won't make you smell pretty."

DR. JIM SNYDER

Once we realized we weren't going to be resuscitating people, my ophthalmologist buddy taught me how to do eye washes. We'd yell "Eyes!" And seven to ten firemen would come over, take off their helmets and tilt their heads back. Their eyes were almost fully closed, the lids were so swollen. And we weren't just squirting them. We'd lift their lids up - a sort of in-their-face kind of thing - and all you could see was very deep red. Their eyes looked like they were bleeding, literally bleeding. And the pain - when you first squirt the wash in, their initial reaction is to tear tremendously. But then, they feel incredibly refreshed. So they drip and they go back.

PROBATIONARY FF JASON CAScone

It was chaos...

DR. JIM SNYDER

Total chaos...

PROBATIONARY FF JASON CAScone

'Cause we'd lost the Chief of the Department, all the upper management, all the guys who knew what they were doing. So we got lieutenants telling us this and that - hook up hoses, feed tower ladders, put out fires right and left. Different guys are arguing about what we should be doing. So I'm just standing there kinda in shock sticking with this one lieutenant. Whatever he tells me to do, I do it.

DR. JIM SNYDER

It was like in the old days when they didn't have fire hoses so they had to pass the buckets one at a time to the front, spill it on the fire and then pass the empty bucket back. That's what they were doing with the debris. They had twenty or thirty lines of hundreds of police, firemen and construction workers digging with their hands, loading buckets and passing them back down this long long line.

PROBATIONARY FF JASON CAScone

It was tough too because going in there, you're thinking, "We'll just dig through the rubble, find people," But the debris is all humongous pieces, you know - steel eye-beams and huge pieces of concrete and pulverized concrete dust. And there was this wire - steel wire mesh underneath the liquid dust - so you hafta go at it with a power saw with all the departments there. So it takes like, an hour to get just two feet of debris outta there. You kinda realize real quick that this isn't gonna be any type of quick rescue operation or anything.

TONY ESOLA

There's really no way to rush through it. There's a lot of rigging...

(MORE)

TONY ESOLA (CONT'D)

"Well, if I cut that piece, it'll effect that piece, which could effect that piece, so let me make sure I cut this right so this whole pile doesn't fall on top of me." There were times when I was cutting metal and once you get through, it just snaps and the pressure - the whole pile shifts. I've had a couple of scary moments because they're like, ten-ton beams and regardless of how big I am, ten-ton beams will just snap me up like a toothpick. So you've gotta have a good head on your shoulders. You've got to look at the big picture and think, "Okay that's the clean pick. Let's go with this one." Then just - piece by piece.

DR. JIM SNYDER

We started at the back of the line but as soon as they spotted us in our scrubs, without us even asking, they reached out and pulled us up to the front, in case they uncovered someone who needed medical help. So there we were - about five or six doctors, sort of scrawny, you know, nerdy, MD types - standing on beams hanging over that big pit of fire - in the midst of thousands of brawny strong firemen, police, construction workers. But they didn't make you feel any different. You pass something to them and they pass something to you. You yell for a bucket and they throw one at you.

SCENE 8: good people

GLENN JINKS

It's Saturday night in New York City. We'd been working around the clock since driving here from Texas in our 18-wheeler mobile telecommunications center and my colleague realizes he's run out of clean clothes.

NARRATOR

Glenn Jinks, Manager, MCI Telecommunications.

GLENN JINKS

Since the only way I can get any rest is if my colleague can relieve me, I send the new guy out to get his laundry done. After about two hours, I'm standing in front of our facility looking for the crew member to return. And out of the darkness appears a girl on a bicycle. I feel instantly I've known her my entire life. I wonder, "Is this my guardian angel sent to enlighten me as to what life is truly about? Or perhaps a person my angel sent to help me get through this difficult time of being a long way from home." She asks me if I'm part of the disaster relief effort. I tell her I'm running a mobile phone bank, set up for the families of victims and give her a tour. While we're talking, in walks the crew member with my co-worker's dirty laundry and some bad news. All the laundromats are closed till Monday. My new friend offers to wash the clothes. I think, "I've only known this person less than an hour and she's telling me she'll do laundry for a total stranger!

(MORE)

GLENN JINKS (CONT'D)

Does this sound weird or what?" However for some reason, I don't think twice. I offer to pay her but she refuses, saying she'll return in the morning. After my new friend leaves, I'm the laughingstock of the location. Everyone is harassing me saying this is New York, that this lady'll sell my colleague's clothes before the hour's up and I'll never see her again. I say I'm a pretty good judge of character and they're all very much mistaken. Or at least, I hoped they were. Well, she returned in the morning with the clean clothes, proving everyone wrong. As we say in my neck of the woods, she was "good people."

SCENE 9: good boy!

TONY ESOLA

That was a really rough night, the third night. It was still a rescue at that point. The dogs came in and there was hits all over the place. When the dog finds something, you take spray paint and mark an "X." So there are "X"s all over the place. The "X" doesn't necessarily mean it's a person, just a part.

DR. JIM SNYDER

When you find something, like a framed picture or a telephone or a pack of cigarettes, you know you're in someone's desk. So you stop and yell, "Dogs!" And everyone yells back back back - and they escort these dogs up to the front.

MERLIN DURHMAN

Me and my dog, Kermit - we're literally never separated.

NARRATOR

Merlin Durhman, Volunteer Firefighter and K9 Handler from Colorado.

MERLIN DURHMAN

So we're visiting my brother in Boston when it happened. And I'm just going crazy 'cause people are missing and there's a chance we can find somebody alive. So my union rep says, "Listen, you have a trained dog and they need you really bad. Just go." So I packed my car and went. And Kermit and I were shuttled right to Ground Zero from the very beginning. So I'm standing on top of the pile going, "Wait a minute. We've never searched for bodies before. How's Kermit gonna know what I want him to find?" So I pull out the tennis ball and hold it up so Kermit can see it. Well, my dog thinks the tennis ball is the greatest thing on the planet. He'll do anything for the ball, "Gimme the ball. Gimme the ball." So I walk up to a firefighter's butt sticking out of a hole. "Whaddya got?" He goes, "I'm pretty sure I got somebody here." So he pulls out of the hole and damned if he wasn't right. I get a big whiff of dead body. Perfect. I say, "Okay, Kermit, in there! Find him!" And acted as if I threw the ball in the hole.

(MORE)

MERLIN DURHMAN (CONT'D)

So Kermit sticks his nose in the hole, comes out and looks at me. I'm like, "Good boy!" That told him that that smell was what I wanted him to find. And from that moment on, he didn't stop. He was out to find that smell.

SCENE 10: sweet blessing

MITCHELL PERITZ

Now these dogs really work the pile. Long days, twelve hour shifts. And there's no gas mask for dogs. So these dogs had their sinuses clogged by the dust, their feet cut up from the rubble. And the cadaver dogs were going crazy because they'd find a finger or a piece of cloth with blood on it but there'd be no body. And they need to find bodies. That made them crazy. Eventually the ASPCA got down there and the vets did a great job with these dogs - cleaned them up, took care of their feet, put booties on them. I mean, everyone - everyone did the best they could to help everybody. There was no such thing as any living creature being less important than any other down there. So Merlin brings Kermit over for me to work on. Whatever she would say - their connection was unbelievable - he would listen to her. So she gets him up on the table and he's this sweet compliant loving creature. He would actually yield, I mean, completely let go. I probably worked on him twenty minutes to a half hour. And it was really simple and easy. So it kind of was this sweet blessing, in the sense of - here you have this genuine German Shepherd, full-blooded, who just had been on the pile for God knows how long... over-stimulated. And just by the act of gently touching, he shows his kindness. So in the end, being allowed to work on him was the privilege, much more than anything I could offer him.

SCENE 11: he was a proby too

PROBATIONARY FF JASON CASCONI

That first day, we dug till pretty late. I went home, basically laid in bed for about an hour, then got up and drove down to my new firehouse. It was September 12th - the first day I was actually due to report there. At that point, I had no idea what Ladder 9's fate was, how many guys they'd lost. I had asked when I was digging if anyone knew, but there were so many rumors flying around - the Mayor's dead, this guy's dead, another plane is coming - no one knew anything. So I walk through the door to my new firehouse. There's no rigs. A few people just scattered around. And everyone is kinda like in a daze, you know? And I'm like, "Hey, I'm the Proby. Here I am." Obviously I had no idea what to say. They're like, "You're right. You're right. Oh - you know that kid, John Tierney, that showed you around? He didn't make it." So I'm thinking, "Wow. I just met this kid last week and now I walk into the firehouse and he's gone." He was a Proby too.

FF DON CASEY

John Tierney was only in the house maybe a month. He was from my hometown on Staten Island - that's why I felt it was my job, I guess, to tell the family he was missing. But when we got to their house, his father couldn't even talk to me. He said he had to go to the city but he just walked back in the house. He wasn't goin' anywhere. He just couldn't stand there and listen to what happened to his son. But his mother, she kept askin' questions and, "Was he afraid?"

SCENE 12: didn't want to know

TONY ESOLA

For the first few days, it's really nothing but parts. Arms. Legs. Pieces of arms. That's all I seen were parts.

PROBATIONARY FF JASON CASCONI

Body parts.

SUSAN FLIS

We thought it was a mask at first. But it wasn't. It was a face. We lost most of the volunteers that day, especially the younger ones. They just walked.

TONY ESOLA

I started getting nervous. I had to get into my mode, into autopilot. So I pick up a torch, jump on a pile and say, "Alright guys, I'm with you. Let's start getting this outta here!"

PROBATIONARY FF JASON CASCONI

It's not natural. How many people picked up someone's arm or leg and put it in a bucket? No matter how much Fire Department training you go through, you're not gonna be prepared for that.

SUSAN FLIS

The second day, I team up with the two that were left... older men who - I don't know if they'd been through 'Nam or not - but they'd been 'round the block. The one guy asks me, "How can you be such a callous bitch?" It's not that I'm a callous bitch. I just believe that a body is just a body after we die. You still take care of it. You still respect it. But you can't... I dunno.

TONY ESOLA

I start cutting the metal. I cut it into little pieces so they could put it in a bucket and hand it off. Whole lot of cutting. But as I'm cutting... and like, that smell. You know how burning hair smells? And I'm just like, "Oh my God."

MERLIN DURHMAN

At one point, Kermit just keeps pacing this one area. It's like, a twenty-foot beam. And he won't get off of it.

(MORE)

MERLIN DURHMAN (CONT'D)

And I can't call him back. And he's never disobedient; This dog is so good! So the guys are like, "We're gonna have to get a crane down in there." Now I really have to go potty. And the dog has to go potty too. So I'm looking for a way to get off the pile to go find a corner to go whiz in when Kermit starts to dig at my feet. Well, Kermit's not allowed to dig. I taught him that because I don't want him ruining the yard - Number One. Number Two - he has a deformed left foot. So I'm thinking, "This is really serious 'cause Kermit just doesn't do this." So I step back and a firefighter says, "Oh my God. It's an arm." Turns out I'm standing on top of some poor fellow. He's like, eight to ten inches under my feet in the dust. And there's a big I-beam on top of him. And now I'm trapped 'cause as soon as this firefighter realizes it's a body, there's forty people cutting the beam and no way for me to get past them without walking over the dead guy. So we have to watch this guy get dug up. That's when I realized things were very different here than I'd pictured.

FF DON CASEY

I went down the second week - just once. And it was a horrible night. It was loud, you know, all these big machines movin' around. The Chief calls me over, shows me how this pile of steel is still burnin'. I was like, "Oh my God. How could anybody survive?" You know?

SUSAN FLIS

When you're down there - everyone's just standing there or sitting there and even when you're not on the pile, you're staring there. And everyone is feeling, you know, give us one person - of thousands of people - just give us one. At first, you want it to be a fireman or a cop. Or at one point, they lost a Transit Authority dog and I didn't care if the dog came up. Even a pigeon! It was like, you didn't care what came up, as long as you saw something alive out of all that gray. But it was nothing.

RESCUE WORKER (AS REMEMBERED)

Hey Colorado!

MERLIN DURHMAN

What?

RESCUE WORKER (AS REMEMBERED)

Don't you remember me?

MERLIN DURHMAN

No. Should I?

RESCUE WORKER (AS REMEMBERED)

I was on the pile with you. I just wanted to thank you. Everything you guys marked today was good.

MERLIN DURHMAN

You're serious.

RESCUE WORKER (AS REMEMBERED)

Yeah. There was one place where we found thirty bodies!

MERLIN DURHMAN

And I just lost it. I mean, I hit my knees. I was gagging and crying and sobbing all at once. The guy felt terrible. You see, I don't want to be right. I'd rather go home in shame and say to my trainer, "You know what? It didn't work. Kermit never found any bodies." I didn't want to know that there were that many people dead. I really didn't.

SCENE 13: oasis in the desert

DR. JIM SNYDER

The first day, we had no equipment. I'm holding a T-shirt over my nose. We're breathing in all this stuff. The second day, we're right there digging, hands on. But by the third day, the streets are lined with supplies. I'd been given my construction helmet, goggles, gas mask, two flashlights strapped to my belt, a pair of heavy-duty gloves. They wanted to put stuff on me I didn't even need. I could have gotten boots, clothes... I mean, I was suited up! It became like a street fair. I remember one guy running up to me on my way out, "Do you want some chocolates? Swiss chocolates?" I'm like, "Not really - no" He's like, "Take 'em, take 'em." So here I am - leaving the war zone with chocolates wrapped in gold. We're digging for survivors but you know what? Right at the corner, there's this makeshift buffet station with a choice of Italian, Chinese, all the famous chefs of New York sending down food. I don't think I've ever eaten so well. It's a plus and minus because you feel, "Wow! This is a wonderful oasis in the desert." But you almost feel like you should be suffering too, rather than eating chicken parmigiana.

SCENE 14: thank you

MICHELLE WYLDE WILLIAMS

I wake up not sure how I'm going to spend my day until I find myself washing yesterday's asbestos out of my hair so I won't get a double layer of it.

NARRATOR

Michelle Wylde Williams, volunteer.

MICHELLE WYLDE WILLIAMS

Then I head to the Salvation Army again, where the loading of way too many supplies is spilling onto the sidewalks. Finally a Major tells me to wait off to the side.

(MORE)

MICHELLE WYLDE WILLIAMS (CONT'D)

They can't tell anyone a van's headed down to Ground Zero because the volunteers would literally riot at the idea of some going and others staying. Craziness. Soon, we all have badges and are headed down. The next few hours are just like last night, offering water and Gatorade to man after man - and the very occasional woman - and all of them waving me away or accepting and always saying, not just, "Thank you," but "Thank you very much." One guy said, "No thank you. But you are a vision!" And at that moment, I so wanted to be the most beautiful woman in the world, the loveliest person alive - a distraction on any level. Maybe, just maybe, for that one moment, I was. I've never been surrounded by more men in my life. I've never been the only woman as far as the eye could see, with every man in uniform no less. I've never been a woman who thinks a man in uniform is appealing. Of course, none of this is appealing. But these men are all so respectful, so grateful. Many of them met and held my eyes longer than they normally would have, not searching really but definitely, definitely connecting. But everyone holds hugs longer these days. Everyone touches more.

SCENE 15: massage triage

MITCHELL PERITZ

There's an emotional benefit to anyone putting their hands on another human being as well as a benefit that goes beyond any explanation - of what happens when simply, you know, one person cares about another. And I really believe when you help another person carry a burden, you automatically lighten your own.

DR. JIM SNYDER

There was a lot of graciousness and camaraderie at the scene - people just embracing one another, you know, anyone you casually made eye contact with would be like, "hello," or nod or pat you on the back. It was like you were all on the same team; you all were just letting each other know you were there with compassion and whatever else you could give.

MITCHELL PERITZ

Most of the other body-workers at the site were women. So I'd say, "Who's next?" And these guys'd look at me, then look at each other. So I'd say, "Listen, if I had big tits, a tight ass and blonde hair, you'd be over here, right?" They'd say, "Yeah." So I'd say, "Well, I don't. So get your fucking ass over here. It ain't about that." And they're laughing. One guy asked me, "Will this make me gay?" I said, "Only if you take your dick out while you walk over." There was a way of talking to them, in just plain vernacular, that really got across that massage is not sexual. The bottom line about massage is that it's a tremendous source of health care. But this is not traditional massage therapy.

(MORE)

MITCHELL PERITZ (CONT'D)

These guys have been on a pile of shit, inhaling crap, at a non-stop record-breaking pace under dire circumstances. This is triage... massage triage.

SCENE 16: my men

MICHELLE WYLDE WILLIAMS

I saw my first body. When I first walked into our main staging area, there were three signs, "Hot Food," "Medical," "Morgue," - all pointing the same way. Not an hour later, I'm pouring sugar into a fireman's coffee and someone yells, "Hats off!" And everyone bows their heads. There in front of me is a body, but not really - just parts, in a bag, on a gurney carried by six firefighters. Then two chaplains say a prayer and it's carried away. I realize these two chaplains haven't moved since I arrived, that they're here to bless body after body. I don't know how many times I've heard "Hats off!" I don't know how many times I've been thanked in the last two days. I reached a point tonight when I simply stopped, walked out, looked over the rubble and all these men - all of my men - and I turned north and headed home. I have to tell you how amazing the people are down there - the construction workers, the firefighters, the cops. They are unflagging. They are kind, beautiful, incredible. This is all about them now, in my mind, since I tell you right now, there will be no survivors.

SCENE 17: shaking with their tears

FATHER BOB DEMING

My son - I don't know if I told you this or not - died of cancer when he was twenty-three.

NARRATOR

Father Bob Deming, chaplain.

FATHER BOB DEMING

He lived in New York City and one Christmas, he'd given me one of those bronze - they have Statues of Liberty and Empire State Buildings - well, they also have the Trade Towers. And I've treasured that since he died. And when I heard this had happened, I was really very... I was quite distressed and, "What can I do? What can I do?" Then I found out that St. Paul's Chapel was gonna open a center to assist in the recovery and it just hit me - I've got to do this! So I spoke to my congregation in Connecticut. And they gave me permission to go and a thousand dollars to cover expenses. My first night, one of the nuns at St. Paul's said, "The chaplain at the morgue is exhausted and his replacement didn't show up. Can any of you go over there?" None of the other priests were jumping at the opportunity so I said, "I'll go." Basically what I did was say the Lord's Prayer with the firemen. Then in the second room, they open up the body bag, the medical examiner looks in, takes a picture.

(MORE)

FATHER BOB DEMING (CONT'D)

And if it's somebody the firemen knew, they would frequently ask for another prayer. It was very... very, very emotional. I've had experience with grieving in my ministry but I was not prepared for the emotional breakdown of all these men who formed these honor guards. They were literally shaking with their tears. It's a bittersweet thing for a fireman when they identify a body. They can go to the family and say, "We found your loved one." That brings a great deal of comfort. But it also brings an end. Now they know beyond all reasonable doubt that the person is dead. The one word they don't like to hear is "closure." That is a hated word. You don't "close" a book on a loved one's life. And frequently the news media would ask, "Will finding the body bring you to closure?" And most people would just walk away. The reporters didn't seem to understand that was just the wrong word because even with my son being dead for five years now, it's never gone to "closure." I have learned to laugh again, live again, think of the humorous moments. But I wouldn't say that it's like a book being closed and put on a shelf. The correct word is "healing." Healing can begin when a body is found. The mystery has been solved in a sense. I know I'm jumping around - but when I was by the gate at St. Paul's shaking hands with firemen and policemen and workers as they came in, one construction worker said, "Father, you don't want to shake my hand. It's dirty." So I knelt down on the ground and rubbed my hand in the dirt and said, "Is my hand now dirty enough to shake yours?" And he almost started to cry. And then I showed him where he could wash his hands and eat and rest and what have you.

SCENE 18: a year to the day

SUSAN FLIS

When they find one of the firemen, if they can identify his company, then guys from his Engine, Ladder, whatever - they go. And that just seemed cruel to me. So I asked a few of them, "Wouldn't it be easier for a stranger...?" And they're like, "No, it's our job. We do it. We take care of them." They don't care what shape they're in, it's their brother. And they put them in the bag and carry them down between two rows of firemen. And each one salutes as the bag goes by. It's just, I dunno... one of the most beautiful things I've ever seen - the looks on their faces and just, the respect.

FF DON CASEY

When they found John Tierney's body, his mother was home alone. She opened up the door, looked at us and said, "They found John." "Yeah, they found 'im." So we told her about all the different processions and prayers that were given to his body, how all the guys saluted. She broke down a little. We looked through all the photo albums and she told us that his body was recovered a year to the day he got hired. A year to the day. So we gave her the flag that covered his body and we left.

SCENE 19: there was cnn there

BOLIVAR ARELLANO

In my gallery, I show a lot of photos by twenty-three photographers, even pictures that were not publish in the papers or show on TV. One day, this lady come and stare at one picture and start cry. So I said, "That's sad, the picture you're watching." It was a jumper - in middle flight with his arms out. And she say, "It look like my husband." I say, "I'm so sorry, Lady. I'm sorry what happened to your husband." And she hug me and says thank you. She knew her husband's dead from the World Trade Center but she didn't know how he die. And that help her to know. The next day, she brings the family. And everybody's crying. So I give some pictures I blow up to the family. I focus the best I can on those pictures. And the family was grateful. Then The New York Times asking me for that pictures and they publish in the front page. Sometime I see her again. She just stands outside the gallery and wait. Or think. But she never come in.

FATHER BOB DEMING

They actually published pictures of people jumping out of the building. There was this one picture of a man, trousers and a white shirt, falling upside down. I was furious. I mean, it was bad enough for people to know people jumped to avoid burning. But ugh - to publish big pictures of that, I just feel it's a terrible invasion of the last moments of somebody's life.

BOLIVAR ARELLANO

We are sorry but we have to do our job. And especially the people have the right to see. And also the people have the right not to see it so they don't have to buy the papers. If by accident, they buy the paper and they see something, just change the page. Is very simple. It's like a radio station use dirty words... change! There's a thousand radio stations in the country. The same thing with TV - you don't like, well, change. Thank God we live in United States. We can see whatever we want.

PAUL ADAMS

A couple weeks later, in the paper, there's a picture of me puttin' the burn patient on the stretcher.

NARRATOR

Paul Adams, FDNY EMT.

PAUL ADAMS

There's the back of me and all of Moose. So the patient's sister calls up. Her family wants to meet us. So we go to the hospital. And the patient's on a respirator in a coma. So I go there every Sunday. I miss one 'cause I have strep throat.

(MORE)

PAUL ADAMS (CONT'D)

And when I go the next Sunday, she's sittin' up - no respirator. She's like, "Hey, Paul, how ya doing? What's going on? I heard you were sick." And y'know, my jaw just hit the floor. I couldn't believe it! She was asking me how I was feeling? About three weeks later, she got discharged from the hospital. They made a big press thing out've it - a media event. I was expecting maybe two or three photographers. But there was CNN there, all the local news people, y'know - all the people I see on TV. They wheeled 'er out and grabbed me, all wantin' to do an interview. It was nice but I was sweatin' bullets - couldn't hardly hold the mike, so much sweat.

SCENE 20: acts are heroic

PROBATIONARY FF JASON CASCOE

That "hero" word's been thrown around so much lately. I dunno - obviously the 343 guys were - the guys that died. That's the definition of a hero right there. And the guys that made it out too. But a lot of the media portrays these guys as being on a suicide mission - running to their death. I don't think it was like that. Those guys walked into that building thinking they were going to fight a really bad high-rise fire - obviously it was a pretty crazy fire - but I think they thought they'd walk out again. It kinda caught everybody off-guard.

BOLIVAR ARELLANO

Since I was ten years old, my heroes are the Fire Department. All my little life! Because I saw them save people in a fire in a small town. And I said, "I am a strong man. I am a nasty guy." Every time I shoot pictures in South America, I think, "Maybe this is the last day." But them! They are the only ones that go to war without weapons. They have only their hands and water.

MITCHELL PERITZ

Ironworkers weren't the first into the buildings risking their lives so their sacrifice is overlooked. People don't recognize that the recovery of the bodies - and the potential recovery of lives - couldn't have happened without these guys. They inhale the same air and have to deal with heat from the iron more than anybody else. If that's not heroic, what is? Just the fact that somebody dies? Acts are heroic, not necessarily the people. But because the ironworkers are not in uniform, representing the first line of law and order, the ironworkers are not bestowed with heroic qualities. I'm not saying we should take anything away from the cops and firemen, all I'm saying is that ironworkers need to be added to that list. They're going to be sick in five, ten years too.

SCENE 21: last to know

TONY ESOLA

At first, they said the air is fine, don't worry about it. Then they said we gotta wear respirators. Now they tell us we have to decontaminate when we leave the site because of hepatitis, all that kind of organic... you know, human remains. We've been walking around in that stuff for weeks now. So we're always the last to know.

PAUL ADAMS

I was diagnosed with severe lung problems. I had to find out on my own because the Fire Department didn't give us proper testing. All the Department was doing was givin' us chest X-rays. They should have been givin' us CT-scans with contrast. That's the only way it shows up. So now I tell everybody on the job to get one. And sure enough, guys are comin' up positive with it.

BOLIVAR ARELLANO

I went to the doctor. He say, "There's nothing we can do. This is not one person. It's thousands of people. If we had something to treat, it would be in the beginning - the first two hours, three hours, five hours. But not now. Everything's already in your system.

TONY ESOLA

I've got burns all over me. You have stuff flying back at you and I wear all protective gear and everything, but some still manages to sneak in there. It really hurts. At the end of the day, my shirt'll have holes all in it. My coveralls are totally trashed and they were only a week old. My boots were brand new. I ordered them before September 11th and they came in the day I first started. I thought, "Ah perfect, I have new boots to start." Totally trashed. They were a hundred-forty bucks. So I called the boot company and explained where I was working and that they were only two weeks old, "Can you replace them?" "No problem. Send them in when you're done." I was thinking maybe I want to keep them, but then I thought about traipsing in human remains. So I'm gonna send them in.

MITCHELL PERITZ

They call it "lung cough" - wonderful diagnosis. Now thousands of firefighters have it. Students who were there for school that day are breaking out in rashes and headaches. One of the other body workers, after a long stint, started spitting up blood. These people have inhaled particles so high above EPA norms that their susceptibility to disease, over time, is gonna be highly accelerated.

SUSAN FLIS

The EPA had the air quality meters attached to poles - maybe ten, twelve feet up in the air - so you had to climb up to read them. And these two EPA guys come up - they were the ones dressed in full protective suits the whole time but kept saying to us, "No, you guys don't need it," whenever we asked them why we only had masks. Anyway, they don't see me. So the one guy climbs up there, reads his meter and yells down to the other guy, "Yep it's a 9.6 or something. And the guy with the clipboard says, "Okay. Then I'm supposed to write a 3.2 down. Ha ha." And they both laugh. But there's this big discrepancy in the numbers. So I walk around to where they're standing. And they get this, "Oh shit," look on their faces. Later I catch up with one of 'em at the tent and say, "What's up with that?" I just keep pressing him, y'know, my "I'm not stupid. I was in the military. I know how the government works" type of thing. And then he sheepishly says, "If you guys really knew what the air was like, you wouldn't be here." I just looked him in the eye and said, "Yeah we would."

SCENE 22: god bless

DR. JIM SNYDER

There was this Starbucks so near the Towers, its windows had been blown out, ash had been literally blown into the store - powder all over the tables and chairs. When I first peeked in, I saw a bunch of firemen and policemen and MTA workers having coffee. There were cakes and pastries laid out. And behind the bar, the espresso bar, was this police sergeant. So I go in. I just wanna grab a cup of coffee but the cop yells out, "Cappuccino?" I think, "Well this is a little awkward," You know - I'm in the middle of a tragedy and I'm about to order a cappuccino. In a bombed-out Starbucks. Very surreal. So I say, "Well if that's no problem." And he whips up this unbelievable cappuccino! I say, "You should work here." And he says, "This is my passion!" and he pulls down his sweater and - now this is a police sergeant - he has a gold chain on and dangling from the gold chain are three gold coffee beans. So I say, "This man knows and loves his coffee!" At first, I had trouble with this whole scenario. I thought, you know, is this right? Should they be doing this? But by the time I left, I thought, "Absolutely!" Because here are people risking their lives, doing things beyond what we had ever thought we'd need to do. We're in New York City and yet we're in a war zone, smoke and debris and buildings falling and thousands of people dead and here's this one little nugget area where you can get a cappuccino made by a police officer. And I thought, "God Bless. This is beautiful thing."

SCENE 23: good-bye

MITCHELL PERITZ

You go there to work for four hours and the next thing you know, it's twenty-four hours. And when you hit around hour thirty, it's kind of like, "Alright. I'm getting kind of tired." Then there'd be a rush of people and your adrenaline would go, "Okay - here I am!" And you get to hour forty, it's like, "Oh man. I'm really fucking tired."

SUSAN FLIS

You walk into this place and you think that you're on a movie set. You really feel... it's like being in shock. I've been in medical shock and it's similar to that. You can be down there for twelve, fourteen, sixteen hours but you don't realize it because your mind is telling you it's fake, it's not really real.

MERLIN DURHMAN

I was absolutely livid 'cause the dog would not quit working. My trainer taught me that you don't want to overload their noses. It's just like you and me - if you smell something crappy long enough, you just don't notice. But every time I tried to get Kermit off of the pile, he would go right back up and search some more. So he worked eight days straight on the pile without a break. That's three times what the average patrol dog does in its whole life in just one week.

TONY ESOLA

It's not like a normal workday, where you take your coffee break and this and that and so forth. No. This was just straight rush work. We'd work from the beginning of my shift, straight through, no break or nothing, working with the firefighters, just desperately trying to... It's pure adrenaline you're on.

SUSAN FLIS

There's no time down here. There's no such thing as time. And that's something I couldn't understand at first... why these firemen couldn't leave, or didn't leave. But I learned you just don't realize it - you go to stand up, but you're so exhausted, you can't.

MERLIN DURHMAN

Eventually Kermit became physiologically incapable of doing any more. So it was like, "I'm either gonna ruin this dog and kill him - literally physically kill him - or I'm gonna swallow my pride and go home." So I went to the pile to say goodbye to everybody but I'd put the booties back on the damn dog! I thought, "You are such an asshole. Here you are - car's packed, you're ready to go home - and you're coming back to work." And I had to pick the dog up and carry him back to my car because he was so exhausted, he couldn't walk.

MITCHELL PERITZ

I call it "attachment syndrome." Some people actually believed that if they weren't there, things would fall apart, their work was so important. The work was important, but no one individual was. So people had a hard time leaving. This was their way of contending with their own sense of futility. We all want to have meaningful lives. So now all of a sudden, you're needed.

MERLIN DURHMAN

When you're involved in something where you're recognized and then all of a sudden, you have to go back to the real world where you're just Joe Blow Average, there's almost an addictive need to maintain that level of importance. It's very difficult to leave.

MITCHELL PERITZ

Leaving was the most difficult time of all. I was fried. I knew I had to go. So I'm walking out with this heavy table and I looked at these guys and I just wanted to weep so badly for them. I can feel the tears welling up. So I'm just breathing saying, "Wait till you get home." It was like taking a last look at - I don't know at what - I just felt like a kid leaving home for the very first time. You don't want to go but you know you have to say good-bye.

Scene 24: airplane

FF DON CASEY

I dreamed an aircraft hit the Empire State Building as we pulled up and the people were jumpin' off the building. And this one guy's actin' like an airplane, like he's glidin' in the air. I was runnin' away from him because he was tryin' to hit me but he kinda maneuvered his body so he was still flyin' towards me. He was wearin' a business suit and I saw his face the whole way down. I remember him hittin' the ground and the blood splatterin' all over me. I hardly ever remember my dreams.

SUSAN FLIS

On a big piece of construction paper at Union Square, a child had drawn a picture of two Towers burning and an airplane in the sky. There's a sun shining, but with a very sad face, and the following words are printed in crayon, "Turn around and go back to the airport and let those people out. A nice lady is waiting for you at the airport and she will give you a kiss."

Scene 25: window in time

NATALIE ROUNDTREE

What is normal anymore? I don't think things are ever going to be the same. Never.

(MORE)

NATALIE ROUNDTREE (CONT'D)

I can't get back to worrying about like, I haven't gotten a manicure, all the little stuff, like you don't like the way you look or you're getting older. By going to the Javits Center, it really brought me back to reality of how you have to savor every waking moment. What are we doing? Where are we today as a people? Do we get it yet? Natalie Roundtree, volunteer at Javits Center.

SUSAN FLIS

They were all so gracious. When I brought fog lights to the one little fire station, they were concerned about me because I looked like hell. I said, "I'm just not aging gracefully. I'm fine." But I wasn't. The next day, I couldn't get out of my truck I was so sick - the dehydration and breathing in all that smoke and the bottom of my feet burned. I lost the pair of boots I was wearing because the rubble was so hot. I came home and was hospitalized for pneumonia. Anyway, I'm gonna bring down apples, because they would ask, "Where are you from?" And I'd say, "I'm from upstate New York!" Susan Flis, Licensed Practical Nurse and volunteer at World Trade Center.

FATHER BOB DEMING

I talked to a rescue worker who wanted to know how God had let this happen. And the simplest answer is - this isn't God's doing. Sometimes people deliberately and maliciously make wrong decisions. And the consequences hurt a lot of people. If God intervened, he'd be intervening everywhere all the time. I don't want to be a puppet on a string. I want to be free to respond, not only to God, but to my fellow human beings. Father Bob Deming, Chaplain for the 9/11 recovery workers.

OFFICER HERNANDEZ

People who left for work that morning, they weren't thinking that this particular day was their day to jus', y'know, go away. Now more than ever, I believe that when it's your time to go, it's your time to go. There's not really much you can do about it. Maybe I could have saved more people but it didn't happen. I don't wanna watch any news. There's nothing else to see. Nothing else to see. I never want to forget this happened. I just wanna forget the images I have in my head. Officer Hernandez, NYPD.

FF LOU TRAZINO

That next Saturday, I finally took my daughter to ride her bike without training wheels. You gotta picture it - that abandoned South Street Seaport - there's NOBODY there - just this big plume of smoke still rising in the distance. And meanwhile, she did it! She was riding like she'd ridden all her life. I'll always remember that Saturday - the grief in the plume of smoke, knowing my friends had died in there - and the joy of my daughter learning to ride her bike. And I'll never forget the beauty of that September 11th day.

(MORE)

FF LOU TRAZINO (CONT'D)

You know, I always try to say even the cloudy or rainy days are beautiful, just so the kids get the right impression that when you're alive, it's always nice. But that day in New York, everybody commented it was just such a beautiful, beautiful day. Lou Trazino, FDNY firefighter and father.

PROBATIONARY FF JASON CASCONI

On the way down, one of the guys was like, "Kid, this is your first day on the job? Do you realize how absolutely unbelievable that is? For the rest of your life in the Fire Department, your first day will be the worst day of your career." I remember that ride down, seeing that huge smoke coming up and the guys on the bus were all kind of frantic and excited. It's hard to describe but throughout the entire thing - from the event to the aftermath to the grieving - no two people react the same, you know? It's like, one guy will be perfectly calm and the other guy will be losing his mind. Jason Cascone, Probationary Firefighter at Ladder 9.

CARY SHEIH

I later learned I'd been spared the sight of people jumping from the higher floors. I'm grateful to be alive and able to share this life-changing experience. And I'm so grateful for the courage of the firemen and policemen who gave up their lives to help us down the burning Tower. Cary Sheih, 72nd floor of the North Tower.

PAUL ADAMS

To this day, noise still bothers me. Any loud sound, I jump. A lot of people are like, "Why'd ya keep going back in?" I dunno - I just went into a different mode. The third time, this Chief tried to stop me. I said, "Fuck off!" And just threw the ambulance into drive. And the Chief - I looked back at him in the mirror - he's writing down the vehicle number. I didn't care... it wasn't my ambulance. Paul Adams, FDNY EMT during 9/11.

MERLIN DURHMAN

What haunts me to this day is remembering the sound of the PASS alarm. A PASS alarm is something every firefighter wears. And if that firefighter stops moving - after twenty seconds, it goes off, making a hideous shrieking noise, which enables your partner to find you - even over the roar of a fire in the pitch black - and get you out. And that first day, every now and then, I'd hear one in the rubble. Merlin Durhman, K9 Handler at the World Trade Center recovery.

RO SHEFFE

Our building is 352 yards away from the Towers. The Towers are 456 yards tall. If either of them had fallen sideways, we would not be here to share this story. I have no wish for photos of this catastrophe; enough have been taken.

(MORE)

RO SHEFFE (CONT'D)

But I do wish we had a photo of our small improvised refugee vehicle and its stoic passenger, Mister Hudson. Ro Sheffe, Lower Manhattan resident.

GARRETT FISHER

That night, when I finally made it home, I removed the contents of my pocket to find my little World Trade Center security pass. The feeling and sight of that card in my hand was so profoundly lonely and frightening, I just fell down on my bed and cried for two hours. I will never ever ever be the same again. Garrett Fisher, South Tower 69th floor.

LILLIAN

It was wonderful, just wonderful. With the situation and how the people just...

TERRENCE

... unity. Unify.

LILLIAN

Unity in the way they flowed. It appears every time I walk by there, bring tears to my eyes.

TERRENCE

It wasn't like - you black, you white, you this, you that. Everybody unify and pulling together. Helped each other. A couple of those working people have come back in this alley and says, "Soon as my company is back on their feet, we're gonna come back here and give you guys a little something for helping us out that day." Good thing too 'cause when we come back here, a lot of our stuff was missing. They looted us pretty good - got all our blankets and clothes and stuff. We're still trying to clean up.

THOMAS

They wouldn't let us back in the alley. They had the National Guards in the next day and the police closed off the area. But after about a week, they swept. I swept too. I had my brooms over there and I helped clean up the best I could. After that, it sunk in. What happened was a great tragedy, an attack on America. More people died than in Pearl Harbor. And then naturally, we were listening to the radio, the President and the newspaper. And after that, little by little, life got back to normal.

TERRENCE

Terrence...

LILLIAN

Lillian...

THOMAS

And Thomas - homeless before and after September 11th, 2001.

BOLIVAR ARELLANO

After I survive the second collapse, I drove my car to the paper. And they say, "My God, look!" Because I had head to toes, everything was dust. So they sent me to the hospital. And the hospital, they treat me like a king. They treat me like I was Donald Trump. But the newspaper, they lost one roll of film - good pictures I took of a fireman being rescued by another fireman. The film was lost but those people - they survive. I have not change since World Trade Center. I am the same, just sadder. Bolivar Arellano, New York Post press photographer during 9/11.

MITCHELL PERITZ

This is a country that thrives on the concept of being the most powerful and invulnerable. Who would dare hurt us? Who'd interfere with our daily life of consumption? So suddenly everyone's running around in their FDNY and NYPD baseball caps. And all the entrepreneurs pop up on every corner around Ground Zero selling their photographs and little flags and emblems and spangled scarves. And here are all these people with their cameras. We've turned this horrific event into a tourist attraction. Leave it to us to turn anything sacred into a commodity. Why? Because we don't want to contend with it on an emotional level. People say, "But I want to pay my respects." Okay. But do you take a camera to the graveyard? Do you sell merchandise at a mortuary? Mitchell Peritz, chiropractor and body worker, World Trade Center site, 2001.

KAREN SLADE

Ian is dressing up as a devil for Halloween with flames up his pants. And he keeps drawing the Towers on fire with the devil lighting them. Because the only thing that he can make sense of is that something very bad made something very good go away. Karen Slade, former resident of Lower Manhattan.

MICHELLE WYLDE WILLIAMS

While volunteering downtown, I continued to work at the restaurant. I kept to myself, which was for the best considering people were saying things like, "How come you guys were closed on Tuesday and Wednesday?" or "How come you guys are so slow tonight?" To which I would've liked to have answered, "Well, Sir, there's less people alive tonight." I couldn't stay at that job. While I can't say I enjoyed volunteering, I'd never felt more useful in my entire life. Michelle Wylde Williams, World Trade volunteer in 2001.

DR. JIM SNYDER

I drive into New York every day and have to pull into this mass of cars and no one ever wants to let you in. But all of a sudden, September 12th, cars are stopping hundreds of yards back to wave me in. Sure enough, now we're back to honking and screaming. Those guys ran in to save people they didn't even know - who could've been the lady at the checkout counter who pissed you off for being too slow.

(MORE)

DR. JIM SNYDER (CONT'D)

The people you hate anonymously are the same people you give your life for in a tragedy. I think a lot about the kindness that was extended right after the incident. It's like Christmas, you know? You wish it could last all year but it doesn't. Doctor Jim Snyder, child psychiatrist and World Trade Center recovery worker.

TONY ESOLA

I love the heights. I love heights. The higher the better. I don't mind hanging out on top of a beam like, I'll take lunch up there. The steel beams on the Trade Center - it's a hollow square, like that... hollow in the middle. The funny thing is, I've found so many cans - old beer and soda cans - of when they first built it with rolled pop-tops. Not a scratch on them! Everything in that building is totally pulverized, but these old cans are coming out like new. Guess as they drank them, they put them down the access, which is hollow. So when you're cutting a beam, a can rolls out and you're like, "Oh - a Pepsi can from the sixties." So I have four or five cans so far. I have one beer can that - instead of using a can opener to open it, they used a spud wrench. And a spud wrench is something we use. It has a wrench on one end - it's long - and it has a point on the other end. You know, some ironworker from back in the sixties opened the can - and that ironworker was putting the building up - and here I am, an ironworker taking it down, which is kind of like, "Wow." Just seems like a window in time - the beer can, with the hole in it, from the spud wrench. Back then you could drink on the job. Tony Esola, Ironworker Local 483, World Trade recovery site, 2001.

FF DON CASEY

On the way down in the truck, John Tierney, the Proby, was sittin' on my lap. I told him not to go near the building. I said, "There'll be a lot of things for you to do down in the street." But he wound up grabbin' a mask and headin' in. He just wanted to be with the team. The last I saw of him was on the 13th floor. BJ's like, "Ahh, don't blame yourself for this. There was nothing you could do about it." But I dunno - all the guys from the Engine are gone too. We got our ticket after them, 14 seconds after nine o'clock. We saved the ticket too 'cause the Lieutenant says, "Somebody should call the Union about this!" It's like, total bullshit that they held it up till nine o'clock just to save some overtime money. But little did we know, it was a good thing we got held up. 'Cause if we hadn't, I wouldn't be here. I wouldn't. FDNY Firefighter Donald Casey, Ladder Company 9.

SCENE 26: universal blood

MOM

(leaving voice-mail)

Hi sweetheart, it's your Mom. So glad to hear about all the people you're meeting and their stories.

(MORE)

MOM (CONT'D)

I love that one email you forwarded to me about the bridge and the doorman. But do get some sleep. Everything will still be here when you wake up, I promise. Okay, darling. Bye-bye.

NARRATOR

An email sent on the night of September 11th...

ELIZABETH GILBERT

It's the middle of the night here in New York - a city which doesn't sleep even under the best of circumstances and which certainly is lying awake tonight.

NARRATOR

Elizabeth Gilbert - author, world traveler and New Yorker.

ELIZABETH GILBERT

The city's quiet now except for the sirens. But the city's still here. We're horrified, stunned and shaken - but still here. I've been thinking about this joke I heard just after the 1993 World Trade Center bombing, "These terrorists tried to blow up the Towers to send a shockwave through New York. Hell, that's no way to shock New Yorkers. We expect stuff like that to happen. If you really wanna shock us, finish up all the construction on the Queensboro Bridge. That'll shock us for real!" Even in the midst of tragedy, New Yorkers still insist on being New Yorkers - an endless crowd of busy, bossy, thoroughly engaged, sarcastic but somehow holy wisecrackers. I met a doorman tonight who'd been guarding his building since 7am. He was bleary-eyed and weary and no one was coming in to take his post, but he refused to abandon his building. "Seventy-six apartments and I'm not letting down my guard. I don't care if I have to go after someone with a baseball bat, nobody's messing with my building!" I felt safer somehow knowing that this one piece of New York was in his hands. A man on his cell phone, walking down the street, gave those around him the first smile of the day with, "Last week my wife was trying to kill me. Now the terrorists are trying to get me." He seemed equally unthreatened by both. And here's the oddly most comforting assurance that business continues as usual in New York. I locked up my bike for an hour this evening and someone stole my back tire. See? Even the pettiest little thieves among us, insist on persevering in the face of tragedy. I went to give blood today at Bellevue Hospital only to find a line of people four-deep wrapped around the block. There were medical personnel everywhere. A young doctor told me, "We've been here all day but they just aren't finding survivors down there. Everybody's gone." The cloud that covers the southern tip of my city? That's where all the people are. The countless thousands of them. Their lives and their souls and their dreams are hovering above us in a cloud of dust. Something unthinkable has happened here to our humanity, but all I saw on the streets today was calm, compassion, perseverance and resolve.

(MORE)

ELIZABETH GILBERT (CONT'D)

What I remember most from September 11th is this moment. Someone from the hospital came out and made a loud request for anyone with O-Positive or O-Negative blood to please step forward. "We need your blood," said the nurse, "We need you!" One at a time, they pushed forward - a young black man, a professional-looking Asian woman, an old man in a yarmulke, some Hispanic students, a city bus driver. With reverence, we all parted to let them pass. They seemed for that moment to be the most important people in New York City. They shared nothing in common with one another except the same blood. A blood that can save any life because it does not discriminate. A universal blood. What runs through their veins is our best and only hope. God bless them. Please pray for peace.

END OF PLAY