

Recollections & Reflections of 9/11/01



Shown above: 2020 Tribute.

[NATIONAL SEPTEMBER 11 MEMORIAL & MUSEUM; WWW.911MEMORIAL.ORG]

Cover photo: *Tribute in Light* is a commemorative public art installation first presented six months after 9/11 and then every year thereafter, from dusk to dawn, on the night of September 11. [CREATIVE COMMONS, WIKIMEDIA]



The Community Plaza in front of the National September 11 Memorial & Museum (more frequently known simply, as the 9/11 Memorial) at Ground Zero.

[NATIONAL SEPTEMBER 11 MEMORIAL & MUSEUM; WWW.911MEMORIAL.ORG]

Memorial photograph wall of people killed on display at the World Trade Center Memorial and Museum in New York City, built on the site of the terrorist attack that brought down the World Trade Center's Twin Towers on 9/11/2001.

[LIBRARY OF CONGRESS, HIGHSMITH, CAROL M., PHOTOGRAPHER]



September 11, 2001 – A Recollection of a Tragic Day in my Hometown

KENNETH S. KORR, MD, FACC



New York City fire fighter and another man covering his eyes on street in front of burning buildings following the Sept. 11th terrorist attack on the World Trade Center. [LIBRARY OF CONGRESS]



New York City fire fighters amid debris at the World Trade Center. [LIBRARY OF CONGRESS]



Two men assisting and walking with an injured woman down a street littered with paper and ashes, following the attack.

[LIBRARY OF CONGRESS, PHOTOGRAPHER DON HALASY]

IT WAS A TYPICAL HECTIC MONDAY IN THE Cardiac Catheterization Laboratory at The Miriam Hospital – a packed schedule with the usual number of electives plus half a dozen urgent add-on cases from the weekend. We were well along into the first case, a double-vessel stent in an elderly woman admitted with unstable angina, when a nurse came in saying there was a fire or something going on at The World Trade Center in Manhattan. Finishing that case, I joined several staff members in the break room, huddled around the TV, watching scenes of smoke billowing from the upper floor of one of the Twin Towers against the crystal-clear blue of the New York City skyline. It was still early, around 9:30 a.m., and it wasn't fully clear yet what was happening. And we had a busy schedule to get through, so it was on to the next case.

All day, between cases, I returned to the TV in the break room to watch as the events unfolded. Now both towers were ablaze and the Pentagon had been

hit. Something was going on in a field in Pennsylvania. It seemed that we were under some sort of attack, but by whom and what other targets were out there? There was the usual array of TV commentators speculating on events but nothing from the President or any other government officials.

I grew up in NYC and my wife and I had many extended family members scattered throughout the boroughs. And I can recall watching as the Twin Towers were erected over several years, driving with my Dad, back and forth from work in lower Manhattan. I went through a mental checklist of who might be where, my brother-in-law, my cousins, close friends. It was surreal, as the day moved along from case to case and we worked our way through the schedule.

Between cases it was back to that TV in the break room to catch up on unfolding events. Extended family were checking in now and we (in Rhode Island) were the designated rendezvous point in case

NYC had to be evacuated. By the end of the afternoon the situation was becoming tragically clearer. We had been attacked by terrorists who had hijacked planes and flown them into the Twin Towers and the Pentagon. A third plane possibly designated for the White House had gone down in a field in Pennsylvania, thwarted by a heroic and self-sacrificing group of passengers who attacked the hijackers.

Looking back, it all seems emotionally overwhelming, but at the time we just carried on from one patient to the next until all the cases were finished. Now, 20 years later, as we emerge from a year-long pandemic, I can still readily recall the events of that day and our subsequent resilience as a nation in time of crisis. ❖

Author

Kenneth S. Korr, MD, FACC, is Associate Professor of Medicine Emeritus at the Alpert Medical School of Brown University and Associate Editor of the *Rhode Island Medical Journal*.

9/11: Remembering the Fallen 20 Years Later

MARY KORR
RIMJ MANAGING EDITOR

I REMEMBER THE SHOCK THAT SWEEPED ACROSS the country and the world on that Monday morning. In my house in Barrington, at about 9:30 a.m., the phone rang. “Did you see what happened? Planes crashed into The World Trade Center!” my friend Miriam exclaimed, knowing my husband and I were from the City.

I turned on the news and gasped...the Twin Towers, smoke blackening the blue September sky. I hoped my brother was not in the City. Later, I found out he was on his way to Kennedy Airport. The driver had the radio on and it was all over the news. No one knew what was happening. My brother called the airline – all flights were cancelled.



Mailboxes and the walls of buildings in the area were filled with messages from the families and friends of the missing post-9/11, searching for any information on their loved ones. [LIBRARY OF CONGRESS]

as the North Tower collapsed at 10:28 a.m. She was among the 658 employees of Cantor Fitzgerald who were victims of the al Qaeda terrorist attacks that day. Joan and her husband, my

The phone rang again. “*Maria, que pasa, que pasa, que pasa? Que horrible! Quantas kilometros de Nueva York a Rhode Island!*” It was Francisco de Linares, a psychiatrist in Malaga, Spain. His daughter was doing a year abroad, living with us and attending Barrington High School with our son. “*Ana esta bien, somos mas de tres cientos kilometros de Nueva York. Estamos bien in Rhode Island,*” I said, watching the devastation unfold on the TV. At 9:59 a.m. the South Tower collapsed.

The phone rang again. It was my son calling from Barrington High School. “What happened? Is anyone we know in there? Is the family OK?” I told him I was checking. “Tell Ana to call her dad. He’s frantic. He said he’s coming here to bring her home. I told him not to get on a plane. It may not be over.”

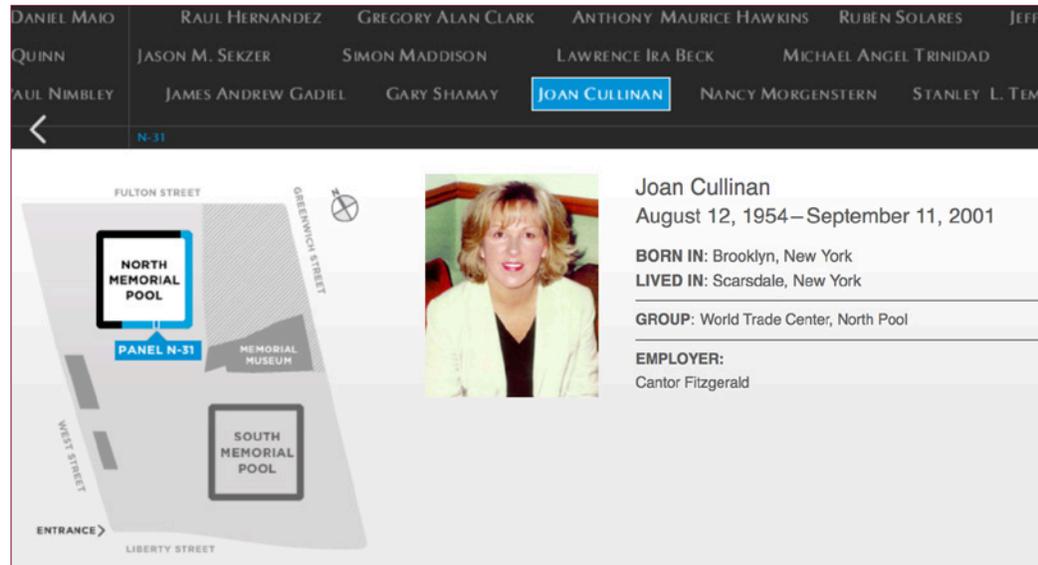
The phone rang again. My sister told me our cousin’s wife Joan worked in the North Tower, on one of the top floors. I stared at the TV

cousin Tom, a psychologist practicing in New York, had filed papers a few days before to adopt a child from China. At her funeral, which my brother attended, Tom said Joan had also decided to change careers and had sent out applications to graduate schools to pursue a career in clinical social work. “Maybe, one of these days, we’ll get an acceptance letter,” he told the mourners.

My husband and I felt compelled to visit the site – to see what was still unbelievable, surreal. We drove down a few weeks later, and walked past the cordoned-off areas, workers and dogs still sifting through the millions of tons of debris, smoke still rising, embers hissing. I stopped in front of a nearby church. Names of the missing were posted on the announcement board, with photos, contact numbers...forever missing. Soon, we were covered in ash and coughing. A war zone.

This year, Joan’s name, along with the 2,595 people inside and near the towers who were killed, and the 157 people who were aboard the flights who perished that day in the terrorist attacks, will be read at the 20th anniversary commemorations to be held at the 9/11 Memorial and Museum, located at Ground Zero. The custom began with the first anniversary of the attacks, in 2002, but was cancelled last year due to the pandemic. Six moments of silence will mark the times when each of the Towers was struck, when each fell, and the times corresponding to the attack at the Pentagon, and the crash of the United Airlines hijacked plane in Pennsylvania.

And for all those lost and the responders who, to this day, suffer from the effects of the toxins, the sky will light up once again, as the twin beams of the *Tribute in Light* illuminate the City skyline above Ground Zero – as bright and blue as that late summer day 20 years ago. ❖



The 9/11 Memorial & Museum has a searchable database to find the location of the names on the Memorial wall of those who perished. [NAMES.911.MEMORIAL.ORG]