

Editorial Observer/GAIL COLLINS

New York Notes: 8 Million Survivors, in Need of Affection

Manhattan is awash in donated clothes, donated food, donated blood, donated manpower. "Here's a way you can help us," said Rudolph Giuliani to the nation yesterday, trying to divert further shipments. "Come to New York, go to a play. ... Spend some money."

But in a way, we can't get enough of it. If we can't use the help, or the stuff, we need the connection. We are, to tell the truth, a little worried that after the initial shock is over, the rest of America is going to begin to look upon the aftermath of the terrorist attack as New York's problem. Already, some Midwestern legislators have been heard grumbling that Oklahoma City never got \$20 billion for its recovery, and World Trade Center jokes appear to be making the rounds in some conservative circles. When the Rev. Jerry Falwell said that the abortion rights lobby, feminists, homosexuals and "all of them who have tried to secularize America" had to accept some of the responsibility for the World Trade Center attack, the underlying message was that New York had it coming. God had killed 5,000 men, women

and children, firefighters, middle managers, security guards, sous-chefs and secretaries in order to express his wrath at the American Civil Liberties Union.

It is not possible for you to tell us enough times that what happened to us happened to the whole country.

The tourists keep heading to Wall Street, trying to get a look at the crash scene. If it weren't for security reasons, we'd want to accommodate them. The TV pictures are both gruesome and amazing, but we have seen too many movies over the years, and after a while, the apocalyptic rubble begins to look like special effects. "You can't imagine what it's like unless you walk there," said Hillary Clinton.

Senator Clinton was visiting the armory where relatives of the missing come to file reports and post pictures. None of the hospitals have any unidentified patients, and there have been no new survivors found at the site for days. But everyone is committed to the heartbreaking assumption that these loved ones might be located. Within the six-story pile of rubble at the crash site, you can

See a show,
take a picture,
give a concert.

see tiny points of light, where rescue workers are skittering through the shaky tunnels, looking for someone who's still alive. The people who put up the posters are very specific, perhaps envisioning their friend or family member wandering around unidentified for want of an extra detail. One of the photos, of a new bride, notes that she will be "wearing a wedding ring." Another has been edited, to make it clear that a man's height is 5-8, not 5-10.

The tourists are taking pictures of the posters, and of the memorials at firehouses and parks and apartment buildings. We think that's a good thing too. The photos go back to Omaha and Salt Lake City and Seattle and pull the people who look at them into our pain.

There's a very big memorial around the arch at Washington

Square Park, and over the weekend people stopped to read the sentiments that had been scribbled on big pieces of canvas, to look at the photos of the missing, to leave piles of flowers. Then they move on to walk their dogs or play Frisbee or checkers. We are living in two layers now, attaching our normal New York lives to our new existence as survivors of a terrorist attack.

On Saturday, two women who said they were nieces of Ezra Aviles, a 41-year-old senior manager who worked at the Trade Center, were in the park with their children, holding up his picture. It had "Please come home" written on it. All of a sudden, a band appeared, marching down Fifth Avenue into the park playing "God Bless America." After the World Trade Center fell, students from Oakwood

College in Huntsville, Ala., threw some shovels and garbage bags and their instruments into a bus and headed north, looking to help. "We traveled about 24 hours to get here," explained Dr. Gregory Mims, one of the chaperones. He said the students were members of the National Association to Prevent Starvation and

that they had been sleeping in a church basement in the Bronx.

The band members, mainly African-American teenagers, assembled next to a fountain behind a tall thin young man holding up a flag. They struck up "Amazing Grace." Ezra Aviles's niece threw her arms around the boy with the flag and began sobbing. By the time the spiritual ended, the flag bearer looked sweaty and faint with emotion. He stepped back while another student grabbed the weeping woman. The Manhattanites in the crowd began crying and embracing the other relatives. People with cellphones called their families. "I love you, kid," a bald man yelled into the receiver. Meanwhile, a minister from the National Association to Prevent Starvation was getting it all on film.

The band took off, leaving the regular parkgoers to continue comforting the Aviles family. The bald man volunteered to show the students how to get to the West Side. When last seen they were marching through Greenwich Village, still playing.

We did not, as it turned out, need their shovels. But the music helped.

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DAILY NEWS, MONDAY, SEPTEMBER 17, 2001



LIFE GOES ON Mayor Giuliani escorts Diane Gorumba from St. James Lutheran Church, Brooklyn, yesterday. Her firefighter brother died in fire late last month. ANDREW SAKULICH DAILY NEWS

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