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THE CITY MOURNS

THE WORLD TRADE CENTER TRAGEDY UNITED THE CITY, BUT IT HAS DIVIDED US, TOO—INTO THOSE WHO'VE LOST FAMILY AND FRIENDS, AND THOSE WHO ONLY WATCHED.

THE CIRCLES OF LOSS

BY JENNIFER SENIOR

LAST MONDAY, ALAN JAFFE, THE MANAGING PARTNER of Proskauer Rose, gave a speech to the partners of his law firm, which he later circulated to the entire office. He quoted extensively from the *Times* and spoke rousingly of how the firm had a moral obligation to carry on in the wake of the September 11 devastation. Then he got down to brass tacks.

"For four days, we have been virtually paralyzed in shock and grief over Tuesday's events," he said in the message, sent by e-mail. "It was appropriate *then—not now, not in the workplace.* We must get back to the practice of law and to our business. We must do this with sensitivity and compassion to each other, to our employees, and to our clients, but we must, nevertheless, get back to work."

The counselor makes a good case. But there is another: Arguably, the week of September 11 wasn't about grief nearly as much as it was about disbelief, fear, outrage, and denial. Arguably, this city's grieving has only just begun. And it's already *like nothing we've ever seen: idiosyncratic, improvisational, sentimental* in ways that would have embarrassed us just a few weeks ago.

IT'S RIGHT THERE IN THE FLIERS PLASTERED ALL OVER TOWN, FROM subway stations to signposts. By the second week, many of them no longer had telephone numbers or contact names on them—as hope evaporated, they became overtly memorial, simply there to praise and distinguish the dead. The word *missing* has *morphed from a description of the victim to a description of the mourners,* an awful double entendre.

And the scattering of services the first few days has yielded to a rush—even absent any remains. "The families want to know if

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we do funerals without bodies—that's the first question they ask," says Father Ron Rozniak of Our Lady of Mount Carmel Church in Ridgewood, New Jersey, whose parish has lost ten members, all without a trace. "And we do, we always have, not just for this. Then they want to know: What about a grave? A tombstone? A place to go to mourn? Some people are planning to get a plot with a relative so there'll be a place for them to go. We've said to them that if an identifiable body part is uncovered later on, we can do another funeral liturgy or a graveside service. Something."

Mass death has the curious effect of both magnifying a person's importance and trivializing it. These funerals and memorials, traditionally intimate rituals, have become epic events, as public as the deaths of the victims themselves. Last Tuesday, 1,300 people descended on the Church of the Resurrection in Larchmont for the memorial of Frank McGuinn, a managing director at Cantor Fitzgerald; it took nine priests to administer Communion. On Wednesday, 1,700 people crammed into St. Ignatius of Loyola on Park Avenue for Joseph and Daniel Shea, brothers who worked at Cantor Fitzgerald; the family needed six condolence books.

On Thursday, Christine Bennett had a funeral for her fiancé, Danny Rosetti, who



Flag bearer: Tiffany Massagli at the funeral of Port Authority police officer Dominick Pezzulo, September 19.

"EVERYWHERE THEY TURN, THEY SEE ANOTHER FAMILY WHO'S LOST SOMEONE. IT'S VERY OPPRESSIVE."

perished while installing office furniture for AON on the 105th floor of Tower Two. She felt like half the town of Bloomfield, New Jersey, showed up. "Our escort—there had to be at least ten police cars out in front with their sirens going," she says. "A councilwoman was there, a person from the United Way was there, four people from the Red Cross were there, one from Oklahoma. Honestly, there were so many they all just started blending together. The town even made up a resolution and framed it and presented it to us. It's long. I haven't read it. But it's signed by the mayor and they're forwarding it to our senators and the governor and the state legislators and the New Jersey municipalities."

These massive outpourings are, of course, stunning tributes to the dead. But they are also forums for collective grieving; they have become a means for people to work through the events of September 11, even if they were not directly affected.

Ed Fox, director of John J. Fox Funeral Home in Larchmont—his town lost at least three—wonders whether these giant ceremonies tend to drown out the needs of the people closest to the deceased. Some families, he says, took to putting up signs on their front doors last week—firm but polite notes thanking their neighbors for stopping by but further explaining: "We're not receiving people today."

"The families appreciate all the support," says Fox. "But they've had to limit contact with people. So much support can become counterproductive."

AT THE MOMENT, WE SEEM VERY MUCH A united city. But invisibly, inevitably, we are subdividing, and we will be doing more of it in the coming months. The obvious schism will be between those who've lost someone and those who haven't. As early as 24 hours after the attack, I could see the city mutely splitting in this way. A couple of college kids came whizzing down the center of Third Avenue on their skateboards, reveling in their freedom now that cars had been banned from lower Manhattan. They sped right by a woman and her son, both wearing pictures of a man pinned to their T-shirts. They were numbly making their way north toward the Armory, clutching dental records and more photos.

Other, more subtle schisms are developing, too: between those who lost dear friends and those who lost acquaintances; between those who lost acquaintances and those who lost no one at all.

In fact, grieving has a whole new geography. People who live downtown are convinced they're living in a different city from that of people who live uptown, for instance, because so many of them saw the whole thing—the planes, the collapses, the men and women jumping headfirst—and they saw it from their windows or their streets or their roofs, unmediated by television. South of 14th Street, the reminders are also everywhere. The sidewalks are loaded with more debris; people seem to have fewer qualms about plastering apartment buildings with fliers of the missing—on NYU dorms, on the walls of St. Vincent's, on great walls of cardboard in Union Square. My neighbor has one of those fliers taped to her door. It's a picture of her fiancé.

But propinquity has also given some people an opening for self-righteousness. Exiting the subway recently, a friend of mine heard one woman greet another with the following: "I'm so glad to see someone from downtown." She then

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pointed to a presumed uptowner. "All she cares about is getting her cappuccino."

Certain communities and neighborhoods were also hit harder than others. Pelham, in Westchester, lost nine people; Chappaqua, home to the Clintons, lost one. Britain lost more people than Long Island, if Tony Blair's estimates are right. Summit, the New Jersey town that's home to the former chairman of Citibank, the current head of Morgan Stanley, and one of the state's two senators, John Corzine, lost either ten or twelve people—Walter D. Long, its mayor, still isn't sure.

"Personally, I'm still in shock," he says. "I'm down. You know, I cry a lot." Abruptly, he starts to do so. "My wife says crying's healthy. I hate to cry." And then he's spilling over. "I've never told another man I loved him in my life. But with all my friends at a wedding this weekend, you just put your arms around whomever, and you say you love them. Everybody is—are we angry? Yes. We're angry."



Gathering of grief: The Armory on 26th Street, September 14.

Staten Island—which perhaps has never felt so much like an island, with both the solidarity and isolation it implies—was thunderously, disproportionately hit. One out of every five missing firefighters is from Staten Island, though the borough makes up just 6 percent of the city's population. And a lot of traders live there, because Wall Street sits just across the water.

"You could knock on every door and you'd find someone who knows someone in the Trade Center or who was on a truck," says Ron Barranco, a paramedic. "I know 30 guys, 15 from my community. We're involved with Knights of Columbus and one girl, 27, is missing. Frank Esposito did all the taping work on my house when we painted—we'd see him at all the parades with the kids. You hear things, but one day you open the paper and your face drops: 'That was the Frank Esposito that died?' "

He's sitting on the back porch of a fellow paramedic for the Fire Department, whose family has recently been hosting frequent barbecues in their Westerly home. "I did two wakes and a Mass yesterday," he continues. "I've got another wake tomorrow. If you can't associate a face with a name, you still go."

The whole island feels the strain. "My wife, she's home-bound," says Guy Molinari, the borough president. "She reached the point last week where she couldn't watch the news, so I went to Blockbuster's. The place was mobbed. I looked around, and everybody was sobbing. They all wanted to get away from it. It was mental overload."

Molinari attended seven wakes in three days last week. He has two women in his office who do nothing but coordinate his attendance. "For some people," he continues, "it's slightly easier knowing the burden has impacted the entire community, and that their loss is not an individual loss—there are so many people giving support. But the downside is, every place they turn, they see another family who's lost someone. It becomes very oppressive."

Strange: Relative to it size, Manhattan feels like it had the fewest casualties of all.

AMERICANS HAVE NO FRAME OF REFERENCE for coping with mass, sudden deaths, at least not in recent history. In 1918, the flu epidemic killed thousands, and before that, so did all manner of infectious diseases. But today, mass deaths seem to happen elsewhere—from war or natural disasters, like earthquakes and mud slides and typhoons.

Kirk Humphreys, the mayor of Oklahoma City, may be one of the few politicians who can speak to this issue. His words are both encouraging and chilling. On the one hand, he says, Oklahoma City developed a much crisper, more powerful sense of itself after the bombing. "We feel a lot better today about ourselves as a city than we did before," he says. "I think we found our character, our optimism, our caring. That hardship brought that out."

But he also warns of the enormous psychic toll the attack will have on New York's public officials. In fact, Humphreys ventures that one of the reasons he's in office is because of Timothy McVeigh. "Our mayor didn't want to run again," he says. "He might not have wanted to anyway. But I think . . ." he drifts off, hesitating, realizing that now is not the time to depress New York morale. "I think it took something out of him."

He hesitates again, struggling to find the right balance between realism and encouragement. "You're going to see some burnout," he finally says. "Mayor Giuliani, everyone's admiring him at this time. But he's reaching down into some reservoirs he's spent a lifetime building. It'll take a long time to replenish that."

As citizens, he says, we should also brace ourselves. "This is bad to say," he adds. "But I think you're going to see more divorce, more attempted suicides, more substance abuse. You're going to see people really, really, really struggling with what they're seeing."

Joanne Lynn is a hospice and long-term-care physician who's also head of Americans for Better Care of the Dying, a Washington, D.C.–based nonprofit. She has spent her whole life thinking about death and loss. "One of the tasks one has to face, when bereaved, is to construct a life worth living," she says. "And it seems the culture has to do that now, too. Not just the individuals who lost people in the World Trade Center. I'm talking about as a *culture*, we have to decide what our understanding is of very fundamental questions. Working with bereaved people has taught me that we have more options than we think. The kinds of choices we make are very important. What we decide to do now, while things are unsettled, will chart the course for some time to come." ■

Additional reporting by Emily Gitter, Abby Tegnelia, and Jada Yuan.

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