

NEWSDAY, THURSDAY, OCTOBER 25, 2001

Bad Memories Brought Back With a Boom

By Ray Sánchez
STAFF WRITER

For jittery New Yorkers, yesterday's scaffolding collapse in the Gramercy Park district brought thoughts of the worst.

"It sounded like a big bomb," said John Youn, 48, who manages a deli on the same block of the collapse. "All the dust and smoke came inside my store."

Police and fire rescue crews called up from Ground Zero raced uptown to hunt for the 16 people missing in the courtyard behind 215 Park Ave. S.

The streets were clogged with rescue vehicles as onlookers gawked from behind police lines. Mayor Rudolph Giuliani, Fire Commissioner Thomas Von Essen and TV news crews descended on Park Avenue South.

"I thought of Sept. 11th," Youn said. "I thought it was another attack."

Dr. Harry Avini, a cardiologist, said he was sitting in his office on the 19th floor of 215 Park Ave. S. when he heard a thunderous roar about 4:15 p.m.

"It was a huge noise like something was being ripped off the side of the building," Avini said. "The whole building shook."

Avini said his back was toward the window.

"I thought I heard something pass by the window," he said. "I know there was a scaffold in the back of the building. Right away, I knew the scaffold fell."

Avini said he and others in the 20-story building immediately headed for the stairways.

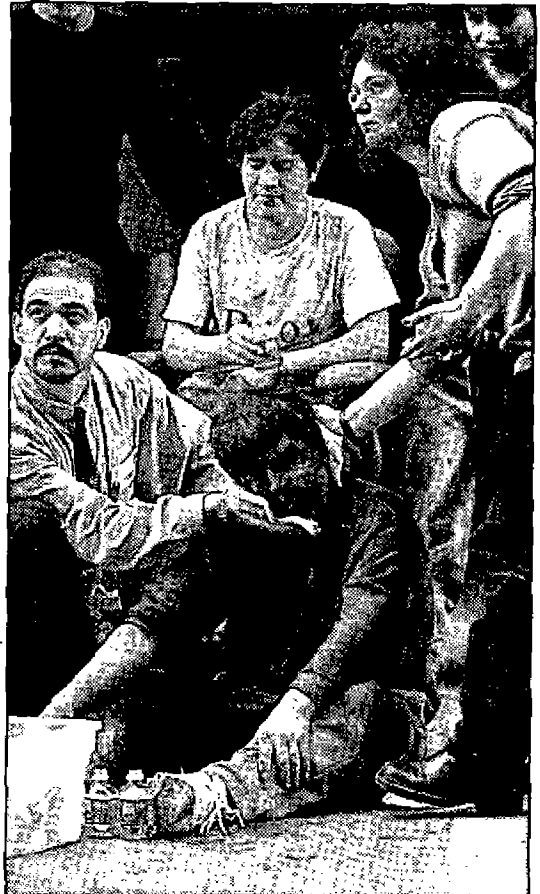
"Smoke and dust were coming in the hallways," he said. "People were rushing to get down. But it was calm. No panic."

From the street, Avini said, he could see that the building's brick facade had crumbled to the ground.

"Everybody was wondering what was going on," said a makeup artist named Loraine, who lives across the street and declined to give her last name. "There was a little bit of panic but, still, people were just standing around waiting for the building to fall."

"Honestly," she added, "I wasn't that scared. I think people in New York are kind of amazing."

As she was leaving her building,



Newsday Photo / Jiro One

A man injured in the scaffold collapse receives assistance yesterday on Park Avenue South.

Loraine said, a police officer asked to examine her makeup case.

"He saw that I'm not an armed terrorist, and he let me go," she said. "Then I walked down the street and there was Mayor Giuliani. I thought, 'Oh my God, this poor guy. Doesn't he get any sleep?'"

Staff writer Bryan Virasami contributed to this story.

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