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BATTERY PARK CITY

The Displaced Begin to Make Their Way Back Home

By SUSAN SAULNY

The path back to Battery Park City began at Pier 40 and snaked along the Hudson River, a single-file line of the displaced and rain-drenched trudging home.

Some carried nothing but identification and keys. Others seemed to have their worlds on their shoulders: pillows, dry cleaning, pets' toys, and bags of clothes in overstuffed shopping bags and backpacks.

Most left in a hurry, but the return was at a snail's pace. It had been more than a week since many of the people who lived in Battery Park City, the 92-acre complex closest to the twin towers of the World Trade Center, were able to enter their own homes. The area was under lockdown because officials feared the buildings might not be stable. There was also concern about looting.

Yesterday, multiple police checkpoints and a required stop near Houston Street at Pier 40 — so the police could meet, screen and escort small groups of residents farther downtown — made the trip a complicated one.

But hardly anyone complained.

"How ridiculous would it be to whine at a time like this?" said John Lieberman, an investment analyst who walked 30 minutes in the rain from Pier 40 to get to his apartment near Liberty Street and South End Avenue. "I feel lucky. I have nothing to complain about."

Monika Caha, a chef who has lived in Battery Park City for more than 15 years, said: "Most people think of the area as a place for business and don't realize that there were thousands of people who've been living down here. For the last week we have basically been homeless and invisible."

And in pain.

Some said the sense of kinship with the fallen towers went beyond the feeling that they were a mighty symbol of New York's ambition and prowess. The colossal twin structures had taken on a sense of intimacy. They were to Ms. Caha what a favorite cafe or neighborhood bar is to someone in another part of town.

"You get attached," she said. "I walked through the World Trade Center two or three times a day, went to the Gap and bought my chocolate truffles there, went to the movies there," she said. "If I think about it, I could just cry."

Mr. Lieberman said the World Trade Center was the backdrop of his life, as familiar as his own front door.

"It meant I was home," he said. "It was my something to come out every day and look at. I used to live in Seattle, and I could see Mount Rainier with its top sticking into the clouds. It was my Mount Rainier.

"I don't know what it's going to be like now. A lot of people had friends and neighbors die. Clearly, it's going to be a different neighborhood, and we have to be prepared for that."

Mr. Lieberman has no intention of moving, but Ms. Caha is going home to Vienna.

Her voice shaky, she said, "I just can't go back there. I'm not moving back there."

Jeffrey Reddick, a screenwriter, is going back, but he is nervous. "My building is the tallest one coming off the water," he said. "That worries me a bit, but I'm also stubborn enough that I'm not going to let some terrorist scare me out of my home."

Mr. Reddick was able to move back in yesterday, but Ms. Caha was allowed to enter her apartment for only 20 minutes to gather a few things.

Knowing she is leaving town, she knew it might have been her last time in her old home.

"It's very odd what you take," she said. "I took a little cactus — I'm sure I could buy it for a dollar someplace, but I love it. And I took my photographs. I want my memories. They can't take my memories."

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