NYC 9/11 Public Portal Document

DAILY NEWS, WEDNESDAY, SEPTEMBER 26, 2001

We don't cry as often, but the anger grows

By CATHY BROWN



MARCOS OKSENHENDLER DAILY NEWS

My husband doesn't think he's a hero. Peter says he does what they pay him to do, something he loves doing. But on the evening of Sept. 11, a little before midnight, he did something quite extraordinary. He came home.

Peter has been a New York City firefighter for 12 years. Before he went to work that fateful Tuesday, he wrestled with our 2-year-old son, B.B., just as he always does. He kissed us goodbye, and we shared a group hug. It never occurred to me that Peter might not come home that night.

I know his job is dangerous, but I also know he is good at it. So were the more than 300 firefighters who are still missing.

Firefighters around the world call themselves brothers. If they are brothers, then fire wives like me are sisters. All day, the fire wives of Engine Co. 239 in Brooklyn kept in touch through a frantic round robin whenever one of the guys contacted us. I can't imagine the pain of my sisters who never received calls like that, those who are still waiting.

When I heard Peter's key in the door late that night, I flew downstairs. I don't remember my feet touching the steps. I was in his arms, and we were hugging and crying and he whispered, "You don't know how lucky I am."

He came through almost unscathed, with scratched corneas. The emergency room doctor said that's like scraped knees — they will heal.

As Peter walked back to the firehouse from New York Methodist Hospital that night, a well-meaning civilian said, "Good job." But a good job is when you put out the fire and nobody gets hurt. This was not a good job. This was unthinkable.

The next morning, I awoke to find Peter standing in B.B.'s room, holding him, rocking him with his eyes closed. There were tears all day, over French toast, in the park.

Farrell's Bar in Park Slope, Brooklyn, has been serving as a meeting place for the grieving. Wally, Mickey, Buffalo and Duffer are fine; Frank, Steve and Vinnie (a captain in the Fire Department who tended bar there for decades) are missing in action. It is crowded, but oddly quiet. Two of Vinnie's brothers are there, both lieutenants.

Each day, we cry a little less. We get a little angrier. Engine 239 has gone back to the World Trade Center site several times. There have been too many funerals, but with the state-of-emergency schedule, Peter has been working 24 hours on, 24 hours off and couldn't attend the first few.

Finally, Peter had a chance to pay his respects to Firefighter Eric Allen's family, whom he had never met. At the end of the Mass at Our Lady of Angels, the priest announced that the firefighters were to muster outside. When they stood to leave the church, the entire congregation rose to their feet and applauded.

But please don't call my husband a hero. You see, we are among the lucky ones.

Brown is a book and magazine writer who lives with her family in Brooklyn.

CITY_21MC100_011830098

NYC-WTC_000412708