NYC 9/11 Public Portal Document

NEWSDAY, THURSDAY, SEPTEMBER 27, 2001

Heartbreak

. . . on a piece of paper

The Grim Reality: Death Certificates

By Roni Rabin
STAFF WRITER

Clutching passports, manila envelopes stuffed with pay stubs and an occasional teddy bear, relatives of missing World Trade Center workers trudged to Pier 94 yesterday to begin the grim bureaucratic process of applying for death certificates.

Many said they still can't believe their relatives are dead. But others also don't believe they are alive.

"The cat sits by the door still waiting for him to come in and I say, 'Look, he's not coming back, get used to it!' " said Jessica Murrow, whose husband, Steve Adams, 51, worked at the restaurant Windows On The World. Then, with invincible humor, she quipped, "He probably just wants some food."

Despite the symbolism imbued in a death certificate, Murrow, like many others, said it was just another piece of paperwork -- a piece that happens to be essential to filing claims for survivors' benefits and life insurance. Families whose last names begin with A through G were asked to file yesterday.

"The good news is: If he's not dead, he's not dead," Murrow said. "What's the difference? If he shows up tomorrow, if I get a phone call that he's alive — he's alive! . . . I'll tear the death certificate into a million pieces."

A Family's Search For a Missing Firefighter, Part 2

Yesterday was the first day families could apply for death certificates, in an expedited process city and state officials said would take weeks instead of the three years it often takes to obtain a certificate for a missing person.

The operation was, by all descriptions, efficient and well-coordinated, with Red Cross workers greeting family members at the door, escorting them to the appropriate section inside and providing people with bottled water. One volunteer brought his dog Annie to cheer family members. "Everyone is very aware of being as kind as possible," Murrow said.

As of 7 p.m., 296 applications had been filed with help from 50 volunteer attorneys who guided family members through fill-in-the-blank affidavits. In those documents, they were required to describe when they last heard from the missing person, why they believed the person was in the Twin Towers on Sept. 11, and what efforts had been made to locate the person.

"It was very difficult," said attorney Jill Rafaloff. "I welled up a couple of times."

Other family members felt a need to view the site of the devastation, and 50 were escorted by police.

But for some family members who converged on the pier yesterday, it was too difficult and still too early to file for a death certificate.

"I haven't given up, not yet," said Brenda Goody of Brooklyn, whose husband Harry, who worked on the 86th floor of Tower Two, is missing. "He's such a strong-willed character. I feel that we're going to see each other."

But bills are due, and rent needs to be paid. Sonia Bermudez Morron of Jackson Heights is three months pregnant. She applied for a death certificate yesterday for her husband Jorge Morron, because, she said, she wanted to complete all the paperwork as soon as possible — she has a high-risk pregnancy, and is under doctors' orders to go home and rest.

She took along a marriage certificate that has never even been folded — it was only issued in April.

"We were in the honeymoon yet," said Morron. "We were not planning to be parents . . . My pregnancy is God's answer. This is my treasure."

CITY_21MC100_011830279

NYC-WTC_000412862