NYC 9/11 Public Portal Document

NEW YORK POST, SATURDAY, OCTOBER 20, 2001

GIVING THE FINGER TO BIOTERRORISTS

Post editorial staffer tells of spore horror

Johanna Huden is an Editorial Page assistant at The Post. Yesterday she was the fourth New Yorker to be diagnosed as having been infected with anthrax. This is her story:

WHEN you work for a newspaper, you're close to the story — but not too close.

This morning, I *am* the story — part of it, anyway.

I'm a victim of germ warfare. *Anthrax* antibodies are in my blood.

Thanks, Osama.

Because of you, I was on the Fox News ticker; a mob of reporters were down on Sixth Avenue, waiting, and the mayor had a press conference — about *me*! (Among other things.)

Did Osama bin Laden do this — or cause it to be done? Is he watching the international reports? Is he proud of himself?

Nearly five weeks ago, I noticed an itchy, red bug-bite-like bump on the last joint of my right middle finger. I was at a wedding, with my boyfriend, out in Bellport, Long Island.

I was tired — we were working long hours the two weeks following the tragedy on Sept. 11.

That weekend, the bump got red and swollen; finally it broke open, releasing some fluid. But I just put a Band-Aid and some Neosporin on it — and forgot about it.

Later, when I removed the Band-Aid after a long day at work, an ulcer had formed that was jet black and dry in the middle.

Soon the finger had swollen severely, with the black area spreading down around the sides.

I went to a walk-in clinic that Saturday — and when I removed the Band-Aid, the doctor looked shocked: "This is a very, very serious infection. If you waited any longer, you'd be in the hospital getting IV antibiotics."

He gave me a prescription for 1500 mgs of Augmentin, a very strong antibiotic.

But by the following evening, my finger was worse. I couldn't bend it, and by this time, it had started to throb.

I finally showed my finger to my boyfriend, Joe Cunningham, another Post reporter. He insisted I go to the emergency room right away.

I went to the Beth Israel emergency room. Doctors poked at my finger and seemed very puzzled. Fed up with the wait — and knowing I was on a strong medicine — I left.

I felt achy and feverish, and could hardly sleep that night. In the morning, I showed my finger to my boss, Bob McManus, and watched as his eyes bugged out: "You have to go to the hospital. Now."

At the NYU emergency room, my finger caught the interest of several doctors — emergency specialists, internists and plastic surgeons. The decision was made to cut the infected area away.

So in front of several friendly and helpful plastic-surgery students — and without Novocain — the plastic surgeon sliced the hideous, black lesion off.

My whole hand was wrapped in gauze with the affected finger — the third finger on the right hand — sticking straight up.

"Is that for Osama?" asked a police officer.

We laughed.

Little did he know.

Or me, for that matter.

But it was no laughing matter.

The next night, I had to change the bandage myself, and I was brought to my knees with nausea at the sight of the wound.

I returned to work the following Monday. I felt OK, but I was tired and achy, and I soon developed a sore throat.

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NEW YORK POST, SATURDAY, OCTOBER 20, 2001



UNDAUNTED: Editorial Page assistant Johanna Huden, at work in The Post's offices yesterday, noticed a "bug bite" on her right middle finger nearly five weeks ago. But a recent blood test found that the lesion had been an anthrax infection.
N.Y. Post: Michael Nercia

On Friday, I was at my desk when the reports were broadcast about the NBC case. A physician came on the air, describing the symptoms:

Red lesion.

Black, necrotic skin.

Oh, no.

I went to the Internet and looked up cutaneous anthrax. My heart sank.

"Bob! Bob!" I murmured. My boss read over my shoulder. "That's exactly what you have."

Soon I was at Mount Sinai.

For some reason, I just thought I had it.

I don't open a lot of letters to the editor — but your finger doesn't turn black for no reason!

I had a chest X-ray and a nasal swab and a biopsy was taken directly from my wound. My doctor put me on Cipro, just in case, and I was sent home to await tests results.

The following morning at 9:30, the phone rang: My doctor told me not to panic, but that she needed to see me at Mount Sinai.

Right away.

> ***"I'm a victim of germ warfare. Anthrax antibodies are in my blood. Thanks, Osama."***
>
> JOHANNA HUDEN

When I got there, she was sitting with a city Health Department doctor, who also has an affiliation with the Centers for Disease Control.

Quietly, they told me they thought I had it.

Anthrax.

But more tests were needed.

The next week, I slept a lot. And waited.

Soon they said that the preliminary tests were negative. But the guy from the CDC said that since I'd been on antibiotics for so long, he had guessed the biopsy would be negative. Then they needed more blood: The original samples had been compromised.

Then I waited some more. My worst fear was that there would be no diagnosis — that I would be left wondering forever.

But then, Thursday night, the call came.

Yes, I had had anthrax.

How surreal.

I had watched the World Trade Center come down from my Lower East Side roof.

And now I was the victim of a terrorist act.

Not the same thing.

Yet, to me, very scary.

But I'm on Cipro. My finger is healing.

I'll be OK. Am I quitting my job?

Am I leaving town?

Absolutely not.

I've been kicking butt in this town for 7 years — trying to make it as a journalist in the biggest and best city in the world.

And I will.

Too bad, Osama.

You loser.

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