The Literature of 9/11

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Introduction:

I believe that literature is one of the greatest resources we have for the study of history. I am also aware of the limitations and potential mistakes we can make when we use literature as our only source or as the major source in any study. We must be aware of the genres of literature, the creative forces behind the pieces we are examining, and the liberties that are taken when writing about history. We must be aware of the amount of fiction in whatever piece we review. An especially useful genre of literature for the study of history is called narrative non-fiction or creative non-fiction. These stories are written about true events, and seek factual accuracy, but are told in such a way as to be more than just reporting or memoir, to be woven with creative elements that bring the stories to life in the imagination of the reader. I believe that I have written one of these such stories.

I have vague recollections of sitting in gas lines during the 1979 oil crisis when I was only ten years old. I remember seeing pictures of the eruption of Mt. St. Helens. I remember Sally Ride becoming the first woman astronaut in 1983. I know there was a war in Kuwait, but at the time, I don’t remember understanding it or feeling any personal effect on me. As I got older and began to really understand that the things that are happening on the news, around the world, in politics, elections and wars, are history happening, I began to pay more attention. The World Trade Center was bombed in 1993, and the Federal Building in Oklahoma City was bombed in 1995. Although those two events were upsetting at the time, they still didn’t have a close, personal effect on my life.
September 11, 2001, on the other hand, is etched in my memory in a very different way. I was listening to the radio, in my office in Fairfax City, Virginia when I heard the announcer break into the song that was playing and report that a plane had crashed into one of the towers of the World Trade Center. I rushed into my co-worker’s office and asked her to put on the television. We then stood and watched the live footage as the second plane hit. We were shocked and afraid. We watched the news and listened as our local radio station told us that a plane was headed towards the Nation’s Capital. People were being evacuated from the Old Executive Office Building downtown, The White House and the Capital Building. And then a plane hit the Pentagon. America was under attack and we were thirty minutes from D.C. We had coworkers at the District of Columbia courthouse, just blocks away from the Capital. We had a coworker who was in at the county courthouse for Arlington county, located just minutes from the Pentagon. We tried to call them. To tell them to rush home. But the phones wouldn’t work. None of the phones worked. Land lines and cell lines were all jammed up. Eventually we all went home. We were all nervous to be on the roads, but we also couldn’t wait to get home.

October of that year, just a few weeks after the tragedy, I travelled to New York City with a young co-worker and one of her friends. I had a friend who lived in the city and who, up until Christmas of the previous year, worked in the World Trade Center. He had been interviewing for several jobs in the financial district and could have been nearby that day. Thankfully, he wasn’t. He had agreed to play tour guide for the day and show us around the city.

For my project I have written an account of that story. The story of going to New York City as a tourist, with the intention of viewing Ground Zero, while the wound was still fresh.

Going on this trip, I became a “tragedy tourist”. This terms refers to ordinary people who go to visit scenes of tragedy, devastation, war, or natural disaster, to photograph them and learn
about the events that took place there. Paul Hansford writes that the definition of a tragedy
tourist is “one who searches out memorials of a destination’s worst disaster and visits them to
pay respects and learn more about what took place.” (Hansford) While Hansford talks about
people visiting memorials and museums, and indeed he mentioned the National September 11
Memorial and Museum in his article, I have expanded his definition to include those who go to
these places before a memorial has been built and to include those that are called to visit, those
who, in fact make a pilgrimage.

Many works of non-fiction, fiction, poetry, essays, expose and theory about 9/11 and the
aftermath have been written during the last thirteen years. Common themes found in these works
are religion, politics, heroism, and conspiracy. There were many non-fiction responses written
about the events of 9/11 by writers, many New Yorkers themselves. In fact, the first edition of
The New Yorker magazine to be published after the attacks, on September 24, 2001, included
several writer’s responses in a special Talk of the Town section. In the ten year anniversary
dition, writers again responded in Talk of the Town. The New York Times Sunday magazine of
September 16 was entirely filled with immediate reaction from a wide variety of local and
national writers. It seems only natural that writers respond to events of this magnitude. They help
to make sense of events both for themselves and their readers with their essays.
Interdisciplinary Rationale:

This project combines both a creative portion and an investigative portion. The interdisciplinary degree that I have developed is entitled, American Studies: History and Literature. This degree is enhanced by a history minor, which has a decidedly American focus.

At the turn of this century, terrorists did something that hadn’t happened on American soil since the Japanese bombed Pearl Harbor in 1941: they were able to take us by surprise and cause great pain and suffering. This is a historical moment that will be forever remembered not only by those of us who witnessed it first hand, but by future generations, who will learn about it in school and will visit the memorials installed in New York City, at the Pentagon and in Pennsylvania.

Because I have studied American Literature as part of my overall degree program, I decided to look at the literature that was produced in reaction to this historical event.

For this project I am using sources and ideas from several different disciplinary perspectives, as will be evidenced in my literature review. I have conducted a review of many different types of literature that have been produced that fall into the “9/11 literature” sub-genre of literature. This sub-genre actually encompasses many types of literature including: fiction, non-fiction, eye witness accounts, journalism, expose, essay, poetry, and narrative or creative non-fiction. In order to be fully engaged with my topic I am also doing some research into the historical events of the terrorist attacks of 9/11. History not only chronicles facts, dates, times, and places, but involves putting these historical events into context. I have also done some writing of my own and therefore have employed the discipline of creative writing and the guidelines of creative non-fiction. I have employed literary criticism, psychology, sociology, and
anthropology in my research. I have read many articles from these different perspectives and disciplines that have increased my overall understanding of the topics of the terrorist attacks and the literature of 9/11.

The literature of 9/11 was created by the many authors to both document the events from a historical perspective, creating a record of the events and putting them into the larger context of the sociological, political and economic status of both the United States and the world at large; and to make sense of them on both personal and interpersonal levels. When an event of this magnitude occurs there is an impulse in us to document it so that we can remember it correctly. Journalists are usually the first among writers to begin this documentation. We value their objective viewpoints and accuracy. In the case of 9/11, many fiction writers were asked to react almost immediately with expose and essay in magazines and newspapers. This reactionary writing on a journalistic level is a great source for both historians and scholars in other disciplines, such as sociology and anthropology.

My own story is of my reaction to the terrorist events, framed within a pilgrimage like trip to New York City. It will be part of a wealth of non-fiction sources for future history, sociology, and literature researchers.

If I were to have approached this project on solely a historical research premise, I could have done a paper on the representation of the events of 9/11 in literature. However, this would have been a much more restrictive project. I would have read many of the same pieces of literature. However, I would have only been looking at how the events themselves were portrayed and would have missed the opportunity to look at the themes present in the literature, such as love, redemption, religion, and inter-personal struggle. I would have looked at stories like David Antrobus’ “Dissolute Kinship” and only focused on the descriptions of the challenges
he had entering the city due to the fact that many bridges and tunnels were either guarded or closed completely. I would have only taken note of the dates of his emails and descriptions of the makeshift and almost immediate appearance of memorials throughout the city. Instead, I was able to view his piece through the lens of literary analysis and to appreciate the wider story of his personal struggle throughout his journey.

If I were to have approached this project only from a literary perspective I would have focused more on the quality and merit of the literature as literature and would perhaps not have been so interested in the historical accuracy and the writers and therefore their characters reactions to the actual historical events. I would have looked at “A Day at the Beach” by Helen Schulman as a novel that was primarily interested in the breakdown and then resolution of the marriage of the two main characters, and focused on the nuances of her language and the ways in which she lets the reader assume much about her characters. I would have only been critical of the long and sometimes annoying descriptive clauses and not looked at how accurately she may have portrayed the actual historical events of 9/11 and 9/12/2001.

In order to perform this literature study I have used both of my major disciplinary fields, literature and history. Below is a Venn diagram that shows how these two disciplines intersect in the study of the literature of 9/11. I have purposefully not included the creative portion of my project in this diagram because I believe that work is informed by my prior studies in history, literature and creative writing, and also by my own personal experience and personality. As illustrated below, the study of history and literature both lead to understanding and reflection. They also require reflection and the understanding of cause and effect and impact. Pathos is a quality in something that makes people feel pity or sadness. The literature of 9/11 certainly has the power to do that, as well as reading about and reflecting on the historical event. Ethos of the
writer, his credibility is also important to consider when studying historical documents but not as much when studying works of fiction. After all fiction is “made up”. However, when reviewing non-fiction, including creative non-fiction (also known as narrative non-fiction) ethos or the credibility of the author can be a factor. You need to be able to believe that the work is indeed non-fiction.

Because the phrase or designation, “Literature of 9/11” encompasses so many works of literature it would be a daunting task indeed for one researcher to catalog and critique all of those works. I have only skimmed the surface of the vast ocean of words that have been written about and in reaction to those terrible events. I have done a cursory overview and as will be better explained in the forthcoming section below entitled Analysis, I have tried to focus my research by delving deeper into the non-fiction that was written by people who were not eye witnesses, survivors, and victims, but by those who felt a call to visit and pay respects and then to reflect on those events in word.

Below is a Venn diagram illustrating how the disciplines of Literature Study and American History combine to become an inter-disciplinary view point with which to study the literature of 9/11.
Methodology:

Lee Gutkind, the editor and creator of the journal, *Creative Nonfiction*, refers to the three essential stages of preparing to write a work of creative nonfiction as the “Three R’s”. They are Research, Real World Exploration and Review. (Gutkind) Research includes review of materials that include works that are already written, previous collections of information regarding your subject, materials from archives, letters, book, diaries, transcripts, meeting minutes and more. Once this research is done, some Real World Exploration helps to verify the information you’ve collected and can lead to new perspectives and information. This process involves interviewing witnesses and bystanders or visiting the sites where the events took place. Photos can be compared to real world locations and could lead to additional clues or ideas by placing the photo in the real world environment and then looking just outside the frame of the photo.

In writing my story, I have had to employ research. While I have very distinct memories, I can’t possibly remember the whole day. My journal from 2001 was unfortunately not that helpful. However, reading it reminded me of just how much I was moved by the attacks. I wasn’t able to put my feelings into words at that time. My entry on September 10th is a typical entry about mundane happenings in my personal life. The next entry is from October 5th. I do not mention having made plans to go to New York City. The following quotation is from that day.

“I feel like I should address the September 11th tragedies but I just don’t have the words right now. I will say it changed the world.”

October 5th was a Friday so it is very possible that I went to NYC the next day. The next entry is not until October 25th, 2001 and simply says, “New York, New York.” I can only guess that the actual date that we went to New York was either the 6th or the 13th of October. I am
certain it was a Saturday. I have no emails or letters to reference and there is no other notation on my calendar or elsewhere.

For “real world exploration” I have had email and instant messenger conversations with Joseph, my friend whom we visited while there. I was able to contact Diana via email, however she and I are both out of contact with Lauren, her friend who came with us that day. Diana reminded me about the woman in the stairwell who tried to sell us a chandelier. As soon as she mentioned it, I was able to recall her immediately. Diana was particularly struck by the ash that seemed to be everywhere in the financial district. I remember she wondered if there was any asbestos or other harmful chemicals in it and if it was dangerous for us to be there.

For review, I’ve shared the story with those who were with me and make sure that I haven’t misrepresented them. I’ve fact checked everything before considering my story complete. Joseph has given his approval on several drafts. I have minimized the roles played by Diana and Lauren because it is difficult to reach them. (Diana is a new mother and I have no contact information for Lauren.)

In writing my research paper, I will employ the same methods of information gathering, research, and response that I’ve used in my history and literature classes throughout my school career.

Below I offer a literature review of just a drop in the ocean of words that have been written about the events of September 11, 2001. From journalism, eye witness accounts and oral histories, to government documents and conspiracy theories, to short stories, and novels, there has been an incredible amount of work produced by authors and editors trying to represent the tragedies and make sense of them in at least some small way.
On Amazon.com, one of the more popular commerce site, one can do a search for books using key words. This search will bring up any book that has the search ones in the title or in the description provided by the publisher. When you put in the search phrase “9/11”, 780,226 are listed, “September 11” returns 121,209 books, “terrorist attacks on American soil” returns 873 books and “ground zero” brings up 32,424 books. Of course there may be duplicates in the results, different editions of the same book, perhaps hardcover and paperback versions. And in the case of “ground zero” some books that were listed were about nuclear test sites in the desert or the epicenter of some other detonation, earthquake or disaster. Those same search words come back with similarly surprising results at Barnes & Noble’s online store. Respectively, 4118, 3321, 384, and 216. That is the number of books that one bookseller currently has available in their catalogs. Even the Library of Congress has yet to put together a comprehensive catalog of all books dealing with this subject. With all this material available one cannot even begin to scratch the surface.
Analysis:

While writing my story about the day that I went on a pilgrimage to New York City to view the destruction of the World Trade Center, I encountered many memories, many reflective moods, and many moments of emotion. I wrote this story because I felt I had held it inside for too long. Although the story itself may not explore my emotions deeply or at times even directly, it does tell the reader what I wanted to tell them about that day. As Lee Gutkind writes, “In any good nonfiction work there is, first and foremost, a message: What the writer has to say or show about the person, place or situation he or she is documenting or relating.” (Gutkind, The Creative Nonfiction Approach) I think that it is clear in my narrative that I wanted to show my reader that I was conflicted about going there. I was drawn there by some need that I couldn’t explain, but once I was there I felt bad because I was performing the role of tragedy tourist. I was going to look at the site of tragedy, death, and loss. I felt like my being there wasn’t respectful, but at the same time, I felt that I was paying my respects to those that were murdered there.

I rewrote the story a number of times, adding to it, revising, removing words, changing tenses, trying to make sure that it was as accurate as possible, but still readable. I was in contact with Diana and Joseph. I was unable to contact Lauren and for that reason, her name doesn’t appear in the story. I mention a picture that Joseph took of the three of us girls, smiling and looking like typical tourists in the city on a sunny afternoon. I wasn’t able to use it as a visual for the same reason.

The sheer volume of works of literature about 9/11 is extremely daunting. I wasn’t able to find many stories like mine that weren’t of a more journalistic approach. I mention in my literature review a book by David Antrobus called Dissolute Kinship, A 9/11 Road Trip. This is
the closest story that I found that is of the same genre. Antrobus was already on a planned trip into New York City when the tragedies took place. He describes his experiences getting into the city and then exploring it and witnessing the mourning city from an outsider’s perspective. It is a very moving piece and I think it is poetically written.

The definition of “Literature of 9/11” has expanded in my mind over the course of this research. My original definition includes the following stipulations:

- The events of 9/11 have already occurred.
- They are a major catalyst in the plot line.
- They occur within the dominant story line.
- The events have some effect on the characters well-being or mental state.

I will now clarify this definition to read, the work was written on or after September 11, 2001. They do not have to be a major catalyst or even occur in the dominant story line. However, the events of 9/11 do have to have had some effect on the characters or the society in which they live. I have read many book reviews and articles that show that 9/11 literature can be indirect and can in some cases never even mention the terrorist attacks at all. A case in point is the novel, “A Gate at the Stairs”, which takes place in a post 9/11 world and deals with discrimination and the war in the Middle East but never directly talks about the attacks or how any of the characters reacted to them. There is only a brief mention on page 5, setting the time frame of the story. “From our perspective that semester- the events of September – we did not yet call them 9/11 – seemed both near and far.” As the story develops, the main character dates a person of questionable identity and misses some clues that should have made her suspicious, he abruptly
leaves to avoid suspicions of unnamed authorities, perhaps because he is somehow related to terrorism. Her younger brother joins the military and dies in Afghanistan.

Other 9/11 stories that do not involve the terrorist attacks directly but deal with the post 9/11 world should also be considered 9/11 literature. Stories about the effects of the changed world and the implications for other countries and cultures should be considered also. Other plots and perspectives that should be considered include, being Muslim in a post 9/11 United States, the effect of the “War on Terror” on our soldiers here and abroad, Counter Terrorism, and perhaps even books about foreign policy.

Most of the analysis in the first decade after 9/11 focused on how authors were dealing with the immediate trauma of the events, and focused on a few major works, such as Don DeLillo’s *Falling Man*, Frederic Beigbeder’s *Windows on the World*, and Jonathan Safran Foer’s *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close*. As more and more literature is created that deals with the aftermath and the continuing wars abroad literary analysis will also expand.

In an article in the book section of *USA Today* in 2007, Bob Minzesheimer (Minzesheimer) quotes Nan Graham as saying that fiction “comes later as people ask, ‘How has it changed the way we think and act and remember?’” In 2007, there were only about 30 novels that were inspired by or dealt with the terrorist attacks. In 2014, there are over 100. (A precise number wasn’t found in any of my sources. However, a search in the Books in Print database returned 121 fiction titles available in the United States, with keyword September 11 in the subject search.)
Literature Review:

Section One – Historical Reference

The terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001 have been documented in many reliable sources. From news reports generated that day to articles in newspapers and magazines in the days and weeks following and into the next year, one can certainly find information about that day and the tragic events that occurred. Documentaries have been produced and official government publications have been made available.

The 9/11 Commission Report was prepared at the request of President George W. Bush and Congress and has been made available to the public. This work has been both criticized and praised. It spent time on many best seller lists. However, the amount of criticism and cynicism which it has garnered seems to outweigh the praise. Many people are suspicious of the findings and conclusions in the report.

What We Saw, published by CBS News, is a collection of actual news coverage transcripts, articles, and essays from reporters and writers that contributed to publications such as the New York Times and The Wall Street Journal, among others. (CBS News) This book also includes a DVD with almost two hours of news coverage and commentary from CBS News. The book includes a time line of day, from the minute the first plane hit the World Trade Center tower to the time President Bush was notified and then to his last televised address to the nation that day at 8:30 that night. There are many moving stories in this little book and one cannot help
but to feel a deep sadness reviewing this book. In one particular article, reprinted from *The New Republic*, David Grann, reports on his experience at an emergency center set up by one of the employers that lost more than half of their employees that fateful day. Grann notes that Canter Fitzgerald, a bond trading firm, had been on floors 101 to 106 of the North Tower and lost 700 of 1000 employees.

His article begins, “On the fourth day I went to get a sense of the devastation.” He visits the emergency center and describes the scene; tables with information packets, missing person’s forms, DNA donor forms, and the many pictures tacked up to the walls by the family and friends that were there seeking information.

“A grief counselor who had sat down beside told me that most people in the room still didn't want to talk to him -that most believed, even after four days, that they would find their loved ones.” “No one is prepared for tragedy,” he said later, "but these are people who are not normally struck by it.” (112)

The news of that day can be found in nearly any U.S. national newspaper archives. Articles began to appear quickly that explored the lives of the victims, the survivor stories, and the stories of the rescue workers, firemen, and police that were still working so hard at the site. As early as the next day, people were gathering outside the police barriers and staring down the streets to view the rubble and try to process what had happened in their beloved city. Many of those people were there searching for loved ones, hoping to hear news of survivors being found. As time passed though those crowds began to include other people, visitors from farther out of the city, people who may not have known anyone who worked in lower Manhattan, let alone in the WTC. Somehow, this site of such a major tragedy was becoming a bit of a tourist attraction.
Many reporters reacted to this and interviewed the people who came to visit what had become known as Ground Zero.

An article in the New York Times on September 18th by Dean E Murphy titled “Many Come to Bear Witness at Ground Zero” documents the mixed emotions of those tourists that made the World Trade Center part of their visits in the week after the attack. (Murphy) From people that were already in the city as tourists to those who came from locations within driving distance, or within public transportation range, all of those interviewed for the piece had more than one response for their being there, from bearing witness and confirming the “realness” of the event to paying respects to the fallen, to documenting history with their own camera and memory, people were drawn by the tragedy and felt they needed to be there.

A particularly striking article was found in Sarasota magazine, in a regular column called At Large and written by Robert Plunket. In this entry, “Ground Zero, New York’s newest tourist attraction quickly becomes much, much more.” Plunket describes being sent to New York on a business trip and making a point of going to see the wreckage. Having been there myself I immediately agreed with his descriptions. “The first thing you notice is the smell.” “The next thing you notice is the dust.” (Plunket) Those two things were apparent even at the distance of several blocks away. Plunket also notes that the mood remained “touristy”, the crowds, although subdued, all had cameras and were headed towards a destination on their sightseeing trips. Once they got closer and once the author got closer, reality hit.

Debbie Lisle writes in an article for Journal for Cultural Research that tourists to the Ground Zero viewing platform were given “an opportunity to confirm the “reality” of the events of 11 September.” (5) (Lisle) Indeed, my own story is about a need to confirm that this really happened. I felt a need to go to New York, for many reasons, but one certainly was to see the
destruction with my own eyes. Lisle’s article also explores how the site of the WTC disaster became a “normalized circuit of tourist consumption.” (9) The tourists would continue to come to the site and although many came with mixed emotions and varied motivations, there were still crowds of people that had to be addressed. While the people who lived nearby, or the victim’s families, or survivors felt this was inappropriate or not, people were still coming to the site and it became a site where crowd control and a viewing area were needed. It is with mixed emotion and ethical dilemma that any site of tragedy becomes a public memorial or park or tourist attraction.

G. Jeffrey MacDonald wrote in the Christian Science Monitor, “Ever since the World Trade Center collapsed Sept. 11 and the search for bodies began, ground zero has commanded the reverence of a shrine at the end of a pilgrimage.” He writes that many are having a hard time finding the balance between that reverence and the presence of clicking cameras, video cameras, and street vendors. Many are concerned that they aren’t being reverent enough. Yet some who lived through the horror first hand and some who are there visiting expressed a different sentiment. “The worst thing would be if no one cared.” (MacDonald)

Another author who went on his own pilgrimage to Ground Zero, is Thomas Conran. He is a professor of Counseling and Family Therapy at Saint Louis University and was attending a conference in New York City on October 12, 2001. He writes about it in an article for the Journal of Systemic Therapies. In his words, “I felt I needed to honor the dead, to visit the grave of our sisters and brothers.” As a therapist he had listened to patient’s personal tragedies and traumas and helped them to find new and healthy responses so that they may move past them. In order to appreciate the trauma of others he felt a need to go to the Trade Center. He recounts his encounters of shrines and with posters that mocked Osama Bin Laden and supported revenge and retribution. He says that he “began to try to consider the tragedies that created the world in which
it made sense for the terrorists to cause such destruction to these families.” There are places on this earth where it is difficult for a child to achieve adulthood, where there is fighting all the time, and where families are torn apart by wars fought in the name of the name of religion but rooted in greed and jealousy. (Conran)
Section Two: Literary Analysis

An article by A.J. Aronstein, posted to the website, The Millions, claims that “If you want to read the Greatest Work of 9/11 Literature, the consensus is: keep waiting. It will be a long time before someone writes it.” (Aronstein) He posted this article in 2011. He contends that we are still too close to the event for someone to have written the one great piece of literature that will capture the tragedy and aftermath completely. After all some of the books that we deem to be masterpieces that have dealt with similar subjects took years to be completed and offered to the public. He uses the example of Catch-22, which was written 20 years after Pearl Harbor. He says that perhaps we should stop trying to figure out who has written the best book so far and start a genuine conversation about what constitutes the Literature of 9/11. He says a more useful conversation might be about why “we turn to literature in the aftermath of a traumatic event.” And “why this particular historical moment produced such a rapid and rapidly evolving body of literature.”

Martin Randall writes in his book, 9/11 and the Literature of Terror, that first responses to the attacks tended to be eyewitness accounts, tales from survivors and journalists. (Randall) These accounts provided commentators with data to formulate an account of what had happened. He states, “…these accounts, mixing journalism with memoir and written with a self-consciously ‘historical’ register, far from being objective, were actually contributing to, if not, to some degree, helping to shape, the hegemonic discourses of tragedy and memorializing.” (2) (Randall) The early responses were respectful and mournful. As time passes, the literature becomes more exploratory and political.
As time passes and we move farther away from the actual events of 9/11 fewer non-fiction narratives are being produced. Many of the more recent pieces deal with the aftermath of the terrorist attacks, the creation of a Homeland Security and the invasions and wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, the so-called “War on Terror” and the effects that these changes in our society have had not only on military personal but those serving here at home with loved ones deployed. There have been non-fiction narrative stories from both soldiers and civilians describing how changed returning soldiers are and the struggles they face re-assimilating.

Soon after the attacks, New Yorkers and tourists were encouraged by the mayor and the city to return to Broadway and “The Great White Way.” Mayor Giuliani encouraged everyone to be brave and return to normalcy. That meant getting back out into the city and the theater, and the return of iconic New York City institutions like Saturday Night Live and The David Letterman Show. Live entertainment is a large part of the experience of New York. While there were already many plays in production that returned to the stage, it wouldn’t be long before playwrights would write about the tragedy. By 2011 there would be a minimum of 50 plays dealing with the subject and the aftermath. Many of these plays have been one or two acts and small productions. The plays that are most commonly mentioned in articles found online and in magazines are “The Shoemaker” by Susan Charlotte, “The Guys” by Anne Nelson, “Recent Tragic Events” by Craig Wright, and “Land of the Dead” and “The Mercy Seat” by Neil Labute. In Chapter Six of 9/11 and the Literature of Terror, Martin Randall reviews “The Mercy Seat” and “The Guys” and comes to the conclusion that “while one looks at selfishness and individualism and the other celebrates selflessness and heroism in the light of the 9/11 attacks” (99) “they both utilize male/female relationships in order to explore the immediate aftermath of 9/11” (119) (Randall) While, his analysis goes beyond this, this theme and the utilization of the
male/female, sometimes marriage, sometimes gender/power relationships is a topic that comes up again and again, in not only Randall’s work but in a majority of the analysis of this literature.
Section Three: Literature

In order to get a feel for the literature of 9/11 and the themes present therein first hand I have read many works of fiction and nonfiction. I have also read many reviews of some of the more popular works of fiction. Here is an annotated list of those works and my notations about them.

“Creative” Non Fiction and Memoir:

Dissolute Kinship, A 9/11 Road Trip – David Antrobus (Antrobus)

This is what can happen when a personal story of trauma meets the collective horror of an apocalyptic, true-life event: in this case, 9/11. No doubt many people who intended visiting NYC at that time must have circled September 11, 2001 on their calendars (it’s just a random date, after all), but how many of them had a) been diagnosed with PTSD that same year, b) planned to drive from the Pacific Coast of Canada all the way across the continent, and c) were willing to do it alone? This fairly brief (approximately 6,000 words) account of one man's solo journey is exquisitely personal yet undeniably universal in its haunting first-hand observations of the monumental changes wrought by the terrorist attacks. An acute loneliness is transformed into something which, if not outright beautiful, can surely pass as inspirational. (Amazon.com)

There is a road to everywhere but where you came from. – Bryan Charles

A writer moves to NYC from the Midwest in 1998. In this memoir he documents his personal journey, including working as a writer for Morgan Stanley and being in the towers on 9/11. He documents his evacuation from the WTC and his nightmares and survivors guilt.

Between Heaven and Ground Zero – Leslie Haskin (Haskin)

This is the memoir of a woman who worked on the 36th floor of the North Tower of the World Trade Center. She describes her morning that began very much like any other morning, commuting to work and arriving with thousands of people, commuters, tourists, employees, and business people. She describes in great detail her reaction to the moment of impact of the plane. Standing in her office, speaking to her assistant when the impact happens, they have no idea what had just happened many floors above them, but the effect even that many floors down is like an earthquake or a bomb going off. She describes windows being shattered by the sudden rush of pressure and desks and papers being drawn out of the windows in the rush of air. Ms. Haskin documents her escape from the tower in gripping detail and reading these pages was very difficult. I can only imagine whether I would have had the strength to escape. The sights, sounds and smells that she and other survivors were inundated with as they made their way down stairwells and through the collapsing building would have been so traumatizing. In fact Ms.
Haskin now lives with PTSD and this book was part of her healing process. She struggles throughout to make a connection to her faith in God. The resolve and bravery that she exhibits is remarkable. At many points in her narrative I feared for her safety and wanted to yell at her to keep moving. She has completely changed her life, from high power business woman to founder of a ministry assisting homeless victims of domestic abuse.

**Pilgrimage: Looking At Ground Zero** Kevin Bubriski (Bubriski)

Photographs of the crowds around the WTC sight. I purchased this volume from Amazon hoping that it would add to my understanding of why people were making pilgrimage type trips to Ground Zero. Instead it is a book of photographs taken by Bubriski during his five trips to the World Trade Center from his home in Vermont. He says in his forward, “I felt the need to witness and understand the impact of the New York City tragedy through my camera.” His photos are of people from various walks of life, viewing the rubble and experiencing their grief in public. There is no explanation as to who these people are, whether they live there, are the family or friends of those who perished, or if they too, made the trip toward lower Manhattan as a type of pilgrimage.

**Pilgrimage to Ground Zero** Janell Rhiannon-Chavez

September 11th, 2001 began as a quiet morning. We all woke up, drank our coffee, read our papers, and dropped our children off at school. We went to work. It was an ordinary day that would end with the most extraordinary events. Our lives would never be the same. In fact, for many, their lives were irrevocably changed in ways that only a few of us can imagine. Ground Zero became a destination that people from across the United States and around the world were compelled to visit. All stand silent before the empty space. And that is when you realize you were not just visiting, but were in fact a pilgrim coming to a holy place. (Amazon.com)

Book contains photos of the WTC site. Another book that comes up right away a search on Amazon. I wasn’t able to view a copy of this book.

The two books above and the many internet searches that I did in conjunction with this project have made me realize how many different ways we have to document history now and how many individuals are able to do so as technology becomes more and more user friendly and readily available. From professional photographers, amateur photographers, cell phone photographers and videographers to the availability of sharing websites like YouTube, our world is getting both bigger and smaller at the same time.
building shake when the towers fell. The students stayed in their classrooms during the attacks but were evacuated shortly after the south tower collapse. The schools theaters and gyms become a triage center. Over 3,200 members of the school, students and staff are evacuated. For many days they do not attend school and then on September 20th they resume classes on a split schedule, sharing a facility with another high school in Brooklyn. The play is created by the students interviewing each other and the staff and teachers of the school and culling those interviews into representative monologues. The play is performed in February of 2002. As with many plays, reading the monologues is much less rewarding and informative than watching the actors perform it. These monologues are written like free form poetry and although the rhythm and nuances of gestures and tone of voice may have filled in the gaps on stage, I felt they were difficult to follow on the page. That said, one can take away from this volume that overarching feeling of pain and confusion that many of these people felt on that day and the frustrations of their situation, later on when they were displaced from their school.

Many other plays have been written about this subject, and one could do a research paper on that topic alone. The theater is a large part of New York City culture, and therefore could yield papers from several disciplines.

**Blog Posts**

Canadian writer, David Hood published on his blog, “Writing Creative Nonfiction”, a personal essay about 9/11 on the 11th anniversary in 2012. He was working in New York at the time and saw the planes hit the towers. In his shorty essay he quotes Christopher Hitchens, “religion is the root of much evil” and says that the terrorist attacks of 9/11 illuminate this truth. Perhaps this is true but perhaps it was more than that.

Kimberly Gav writes a blog called “The Gav Menagerie” about her life and family. On September 11, 2009 she posted a story that was originally written Oct. 24th of 2001 about a visit to New York City. She lived in Weehawken for several years and had enjoyed the view of the NYC skyline from her view across the Hudson River. She recounts going to the park in Weehawken and seeing a pool of wax, leftover from a candlelight vigil, and the notes, ribbons, and photographs on the rail overlooking the river. She talks about going to dinner with her friend. “My friend told me her “September 11” story and I told her mine. We all have one now – where we were and what we were doing when we first heard about the attacks.” This blog post is similar to my story in that we are people who were not directly affected by the attacks, but had a connection to the city and therefore we were still effected.
**Magazine Articles and Essays**

*The New Yorker Magazine, “The Talk of the Town” September 24, 2001*

“In the wake of last week’s terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon, New Yorker staff writers and contributors reflect on the tragedy and its consequences. This week’s Talk of the Town is devoted entirely to the incident, and includes contributions from John Updike, Jonathan Franzen, Denis Johnson, Roger Angell, Aharon Appelfeld, Rebecca Mead, Susan Sontag, Amitav Ghosh, and Donald Antrim.”

These nine short essays vary in subject from the first-hand account of Amitav Ghosh, taking care of the children of Nicole and Frank Di Martini on the night of September 11th, while their mother waited for word of her husband to the worry of Donald Antrim, who was out of the city and was desperately trying to reach friends and colleagues from Vienna, to the musings of reporter, Denis Johnson, who talks about those citizens of the trouble spots of the world: “Imagine the people who have already seen years like these turn into decades—imagine their brief lifetimes made up only of days like these we've just seen in New York.”

**The Guardian**

An online magazine and news outlet. This magazine has many pages devoted to 9/11.

[http://www.theguardian.com/world/september11](http://www.theguardian.com/world/september11)

Ten years after the attacks on New York and Washington, we look at how 9/11 has shaped imaginations. The Guardian's short fiction project, 9/11 stories, brings together writers from all over the world to examine what has changed and what has not over the course of the last decade. (copied from the web page)

Some of the stories in this collection do not seem to be “9/11 literature” but they do reflect a change in the world post 9/11. Many are about intrigue and race, discrimination, and the effects of war and terrorism on the mental state of victims, soldiers and their families.
Fiction

A Day at the Beach – Helen Schulman (Schulman)

This novel is about a choreographer, his ballet dancer wife and muse and their 4 year old son. The entire novel takes place on Sept 11th and 12th of 2001. The novel vacillates between Gerhard Falktopf and wife, Suzannah's point of view.

The novel opens with the two at home in their loft. We learn that Gerhard has been replaced as principal in his own ballet company and has been on the phone incessantly with his lawyer, Shingshang, trying desperately to hold onto his intellectual property and perhaps get the company back. His wife Suzannah is showering and bathing their 4 year old with her when the first plane hits. Almost immediately after the second plane hit Gerhard decides that they are leaving the city. He tells his wife to pack and rushes to the bank for cash. There he finds a young French woman with her baby and decides to take them with him. She is afraid for her husband. They had been staying at the hotel at the WTC and he had gone out for breakfast right before it all happened. Suzannah and her nanny, Celine, the boy Nikolai and the French woman and her baby and all driven by Gerhard out to Long Island and the safety of The Hamptons. Once there G and S go their own ways, encountering old friends and in Susannah’s case, a man who was her neighbor during her childhood, who had secretly watched her dance in her living room. Martine, the French woman and her baby are Gerhard’s focus when Suzannah believes she and N should have been. She is jealous. It all culminates with a gathering of people at the cottage where G and S and the rest are staying.

While the novel has a good plot and interesting characters, it feels like the descriptions are too much and it slows the book down. I found myself skipping to the end of the many very long sentences and long descriptions. It felt like filler. The author was trying too hard.

I was glad that Martine’s husband was found and that Gerhard did have a change of heart about his son, whom we discover is probably autistic, but it felt contrite. I was also glad to see G and S reunite on the beach in the morning and Gerhard be aware of his new found strength and promise, but it also seemed predictable. Which is odd considering the author left the end of the novel pretty open ended. Their marriage could be saved or Gerhard could just be believing that it would all be better that one day and things would revert back to the way that they had been prior to the attacks. We, as readers, are able to predict that the lawyer Shingshang does not get evacuated from his breakfast meeting at Windows on the World in time. In fact, the characters also believe he is probably dead. Again, this isn’t actually stated.

Where this novel fails is length. It probably could have been a short story. Again, a lot of the description seemed unnecessary and bulky.
A Gate at the Stairs by Lorrie Moore (Moore)

This is a book about growing up and “coming of age” in a post 9/11 world. However, the terrorist attacks are not dealt with head on. Early in the book we find out that “the events of September” have occurred and have been acknowledged in the main character’s college town, but it doesn’t seem to be a major plot device. It isn’t until page 76 that there is any mention of plane hijacking or terrorism and then it is an innocent thought of the main character and could have easily been a thought by another character in another book, before 9/11/01, embarking on their first plane ride, “The plane was small, only a fifty-seater, hardly a hijacking target, and from my window seat the gray pieces of the wing seemed fitted together both randomly and intricately, like the plumage of a goose.” It’s not until page 140 that another sentence appears to remind us. Tassie the main character is talking about a perfume called Arabian Princess and not wanting to reveal the name of it. “In the current world situation it seemed unwise to advertise this, in case I was mistaken for the mascot of Osama bin Laden…”

Elizabeth S Anker does a remarkable job of reviewing this book and others in her article, Allegories of Falling and the 9/11 Novel. The main character of this novel learns much about life in this “coming of age” story. (Anker)The novels contends with racial profiling, discrimination and loss. Tassie works for Sarah and Edward, a professional couple who are trying to adopt a biracial baby. They seem to want this to define them as people who do not see racial boundaries and stereotypes, but it does the opposite and makes them seem hypocritical. They start a support group for other families with minority children, during which Tassie ends up babysitting a group of children. The children do not see each other as other colors or races, but only as children, while downstairs the parents talk about how to deal with the prejudices their children face. It all seems rather ironic. The novel also deals with Tassie becoming involved with another student at her school who claims to be from Brazil but actually may be from somewhere else and may actually be a part of a terrorist organization. Tassie seems to overlook the evidence that he is hiding his true identity from her. She also has to deal with the loss of her brother, who joins the military and is killed in Afghanistan.

Collections and Anthologies

September 11,2001 American Writers Respond, edited by William Heyen (Heyen)

This volume is a collection of short intensive pieces from over 100 American writers, ranging from poetry, memoir, letters, and essay to brief fictions that are direct responses to a call for literary response from the editor. It was published by the Etruscan press in 2002. In the preface William Heyen questions, “But who has any right at such a time to say anything at all? What person who was not there or did not lose a family member or friend has a right to talk personally? I doubt that there will be a contributor to this book who has not asked himself or herself this question.” Perhaps that is why it took me so long to write my own story. I could have posted it to my blog or even written in my journal. But somehow I felt it wasn’t my right to say anything. But now I just want to get the memory out on paper.
9/11 8:48 am, documenting America’s greatest tragedy, edited by BlueEar.com: Global Writing Worth Reading with the faculty and students of the New York University Department of Journalism (New York University and Department of Journalism and Mass Communication)

A collection of eyewitness accounts, on-the-ground reporting, personal essays, oral history, and narrative non-fiction, emails and letters. The collection is presented in three parts, September 11, Aftermath and Angles of Vision. The first is mostly eyewitness accounts and the last is mostly personal essays reflecting on the events of September 11 and the “War on Terror” around the world, from the varied viewpoints of dozens of writers. This collection is moving, insightful, and though provoking.
Conclusions and Recommendations:

As I was working on this project and doing internet searches using various key words, such as Ground Zero, September 11 terrorist attacks, and literature of 9/11, I found so much information available that it was hard to stay focused on the subject of my paper. The events of September 11, 2001 can and have studied by various disciplines. From religious studies to media studies, from anthropology to travel and tourism, from ethnography and sociology to political studies, there are many lenses through which this subject can be viewed and studied. WorldCat, an online catalog of library holdings around the world, illustrates just how much material is available. When searching for the phrase “September 11”, 1,684,110 items are listed. This includes media such as DVDs and Audio Recordings, along with books, e-books, audio books, journals, magazines and newspapers.

This illustrates my conclusion precisely. I found that the sub-genre of “9/11 literature” was much, much bigger than I had originally anticipated. It can be broken down into categories. The obvious delineations of course are fiction and non-fiction. Beyond that we can break down fiction into novels, short stories, plays, and screen plays. Non-fiction can be broken down into journalism, eye witness accounts, oral history, personal essay, political essay, expose, critical essay, conspiracy theory, narrative non-fiction, and documentary. The non-fiction about 9/11 comes in myriad forms. There is so much non-fiction dealing with the terrorist attacks that it would take years to catalog it all.

This abundance of material is my foremost limitation in my completion of this project. There is just not enough time in one short semester to wade through all the titles to find the pieces that I would have liked to read. Because I wasn’t able to find a database that would make this task less daunting I spent a lot of my time searching for the right pieces to read.
I have discovered other potential project ideas related to the media and literature of 9/11. Other research ideas would include the response in music, with over 100 songs written about the attacks and aftermath. County music especially contributed many songs, some of which “crossed over” to the pop billboard charts. Bruce Springsteen’s album, The Rising, focused on his reflections of 9/11. It won a Grammy Award in 2003.

Another interesting paper subject would have been research into how journalism has changed since 9/11 and whether that change could be connected to those events.

Another subject could have been about the spontaneous shrines and street level memorials that suddenly appeared throughout the city, from the candles left at the sites of vigils to the yellow ribbons tied on fences to the mementos and signs that were placed along the barrier fences. These public displays of memorial and mourning would be an interesting subject for students of many disciplines.

A study could be done of the representations of the tragedy and the terrorists in media such as graffiti and graphic novels. The ways in which a researcher could approach this subject are myriad.

In order to do a more concise and complete review of 9/11 literature it would be necessary to hone in on one aspect, perhaps one particular allegory or one type of literature. One could look solely at poetry or solely at plays. To do a research paper that would be adding something to the scholarship already available it would be best to avoid those books that are popular titles with reviewers, such as Don DeLillo’s Falling Man (DeLillo) and Jonathan Safran Foer’s Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close (Foer) and perhaps look at some of the newer
novels and stories that are being created. I say this because most of the literary analysis that I
found concentrated on the same handful of books.

The story that I produced for my creative project is one of a million different stories that
have been told. I can only hope that my descriptions of my experience have been conveyed in a
way that future readers will be able to understand what it felt like to be a tourist returning to a
city they loved while it began to heal from such a horrific event.
Works Cited


Additional Resources


New York University, and Department of Journalism and Mass Communication. 09/11 8:48 AM:


October 2001

A Road Trip to New York City

S Thornton
It smelled like shit and hot sugared donuts, like whiskey and spent ashtrays, stale and overflowing, like burning rubber, and the sickeningly sweet smell of infant vomit. It was thick with ash and the smells of burst pipes and carpet burning. But what made it awful, that kind of awful that made you cover your mouth and hope you could hold your breath until you got away from it, was knowing that there were people in that smell. And fear. You were breathing someone's frantic last moments, their panic and their fear, and their aching longing for the ones they loved and the unfinished lives they were trying to save by running harder and leaping down stairs and out of windows and over bodies of others who had already lost. You were breathing those people and it was terrifying. And although you wanted to get away, you wanted to get closer. The streets were closed and the area was draped in yellow tape and only the emergency vehicles were coming and going from the area. Ground Zero. But something inside wanted to get closer. To see it nearer. You could see the sheared building tops, the raw metal reaching into the sky, the smoke that still billowed days later, and you knew it wasn't a pretty place. If it smelled like that why would you want to get closer and see the smell? Why? It was terrifying.

I wasn't alone on that unseasonably warm October day. All around me were people with different degrees of shock and sorrow on their faces. Some were like me, tourists brought to the city out of some morbid curiosity or need to confirm this really happened. I was conflicted by my emotions: shame and grief and thankfulness. You could look around and see that some of the people had been there every day, arriving in the mornings like they were reporting for work and leaving in the evening when still no word had come. They were exhausted and you could see it on their faces, in the way their shoulders stooped. And yet, they worked the crowds with pictures. “Have you seen this person?” They had been to every hospital, and every shelter, every underpass, hoping to find their loved ones, lost but still alive. They hoped that maybe they just had amnesia and that they had left the buildings and then couldn't remember who they were and who they belonged to, but that somehow they would make it home.
Others, you could see, knew that was a dream. It had been too long already. They looked at the rubble and although they still wanted to maintain a glimmer of hope that someone would be found alive inside, they knew that they just wanted their loved one to be found. Identifiable. So that they could take them home. So they could have closure and a proper funeral. As the hole grew deeper and more rubble was trucked away or floated away by barge, that chance was fading too. And so, they stood among the strangers, and commiserated silently. They knew that one day soon, there would be no more smoldering rubble to pull apart by crane or shovel. That one day soon, there would be only a hole where all those people had disappeared. And they would have to go home and find a way to heal. There was a daunting task ahead of them and they were already so exhausted.

I realize as I’m writing this that I had never looked into people’s faces on the street before. All the times that I had visited New York City before I had been with friends, or I was looking into shop windows, or keeping an eye out for a subway
station, a landmark or an address, street sign or destination. I’d walked along those sidewalks with millions of other people and passed them with little recognition. I didn’t notice if they were happy or sad, or indifferent. They were just another face in the crowd; a seemingly endless, moving crowd. But on this day that changed. I was empathetic to the pain around me and saw the sadness and bewilderment on people’s faces. The shock was evident on most of the faces around me. I looked into people’s eyes and I saw them look into mine. Everyone was searching. I still do it. I still look around me and look at people and wonder about them. But now, years later, it is easier to smile.

It was October 6th or maybe the 13th, 2001, when I made my pilgrimage to Ground Zero. I drove to New York City from Fairfax, Virginia with my coworker, Diana and a friend of hers. I was going to check on a friend of mine who lived in the city. I was worried about what this had done to him emotionally and mentally. Joseph is an alcoholic and suffers from manic depressive (bipolar) disorder. When I told Diana that I was going she asked if she and her friend could join me and of course I’d agreed. I don’t know if it was the chance to go to the city or if she, like me, felt a need to go. I knew I’d have to go and view the remains of the World Trade Center. I felt a connection to the city and needed to confirm with my own eyes that this terrible thing had happened. I needed to see it in order to believe that something like this could really happen, in real life.

It has been over a decade since the terrorist attacks of September 11th, 2001, but I can still remember how I felt; upset, confused, shocked, stricken with grief for so many people that I didn’t even know, and scared, really scared. If I think about it long enough, and that is really only seconds, think about the emotions of that day and the weeks after, my eyes fill with tears and my throat hurts from holding back the feelings. I was in my office in Fairfax, Virginia when the first plane hit. I heard it on the radio.
And then my coworkers and I saw the second plane hit on TV. Over and over again, we saw it. The activity at the Pentagon and the chaos of no phone service and our proximity to D.C. was frightening. However, somehow New York City and that plane that crashed in Pennsylvania seemed more tragic. After all the Pentagon is the military, the people that worked there were all somehow related to war and terror. On 9/11 we didn’t know what had struck the Pentagon. We heard on the radio that it was a missile, not a plane. Imagine how confusing it was to feel all those emotions and somehow think that one target was more worthy of my grief than another. I didn’t know there might have been civilians killed in the Pentagon. I’m ashamed to admit that I had those feelings, of inequity of lives.

Having grown up in Connecticut, I’d had numerous occasions to visit New York. I’d been there more than once on school field trips. We had gone in the winter to see the Rockettes in the Christmas Spectacular at Radio City Music Hall. During other trips, we had gone to visit all the tourist attractions: the Empire State Building, the many museums, Ellis Island, Liberty Island and the great lady: our Statue of Liberty, Central Park, Rockefeller Center, and the World Trade Center. I remember on one trip we had lunched at Windows on the World, 107 floors above the city and sophisticated beyond anything that we, as high school students had experienced until then. We stood by those windows and looked out on the city and the harbor and I remember feeling like I was flying; we were so far up and we could see so much. I remember taking pictures of the twin towers from the top of the Empire State Building and thinking how very tall and impressive they were and then standing in the courtyard below them and looking up and feeling dizzy by their height. From the Empire State to Windows on the World was like a leap into the clouds. The Empire State Building with its observation deck and spire stood out among the other buildings when looking it at from the towers, but somehow it seemed smaller than the view had been in the other direction. Perhaps this was because the towers had been twins, standing together. Or maybe it was because of something else, the towers were newer, shinier, more modern, business like. The
Empire State Building is nostalgic to me. It is a symbol of romance. “Meet me at the top of the Empire State Building” says a suave Cary Grant to Deborah Kerr in “An Affair to Remember”, a line that replays in my head whenever I think of New York City. As an adult I’ve made many trips to New York with friends. I’ve been to the Macy’s Thanksgiving Day Parade, and I’ve celebrated New Year’s Eve with the literally millions of people who live there. The coffee mug on my desk at work has the iconic “I Love New York” with a big red heart instead of the word love. The connection is there without a doubt.

I remember the day of our visit was especially warm for the beginning of October. We had been experiencing a very late fall that year. During the drive up the skies were overcast. As we drove up the highway we took note of all the American flags hanging on just about every overpass. There were sheets painted with patriotic slogans and yellow ribbons too. Many of the cars we passed had flags in their windows. It was like suddenly everyone wanted to proclaim their love of their country. It was like the Fourth of July in small town U.S.A, with a flag in every yard and on every light pole. As we neared the city I felt a quiet descend on us. Our friendly banter and singing along to the radio, seemed to be more subdued. At the George Washington Bridge we paused to take pictures of the giant flag hung from the entrance to the bridge. I bet that was the largest American Flag any of us had ever seen. Once we got onto the bridge it was hard not to look over to the skyline of the city. It looked odd. The place where the Towers had once stood was just a gaping hole.
Joseph was staying in a tiny apartment on the Upper West Side, somewhere in the 80s. I’ve never been very confident about driving in the city. I usually just drove through on my way home to Connecticut on Interstate 95. If I was visiting the city, I would usually arrive by bus or train, to eliminate the stress of city driving. Since 2001, I’ve visited the city several times by car and I’ve gotten pretty good at finding my way around with a minimum of stress. This trip, however, I was ready to just find his neighborhood and park the car for the day. I should note here that one thing I noticed right away was the lack of traffic, the almost surreal quiet, and the lack of honking car horns. It seemed as if everyone was still holding their breath.

Once we found a place to park it only took a few minutes to find Joseph’s address. The apartment he was staying in is owned by a friend of his. It was a basement level apartment. Really only an efficiency. There was barely enough room for the four of us to stand in the main room. The girls and I decided to wait on the sidewalk while Joseph gathered his camera and got ready to come be our tour guide. As we were standing there a disheveled looking woman came up the stair well from the
basement level of the next building. She had been looking around the trash cans for something. We tried to ignore her but she greeted us and so we said hello. She commented on how pretty and young we looked. We thanked her and hoped she would walk away. She didn’t. We all exchanged glances when we realized that she was probably homeless. She didn’t ask for any money but she did try to sell us a chandelier. She must have thought we were moving into the neighborhood or something. We told her politely we had no use for one. I believe she was either mentally challenged or was using drugs. When Joseph came up his stairs she seemed to recognize him and got out of there rather quickly. He told us that she is a “crack head” and has been chased away by the neighbors when they have found her picking through their trash cans. She seemed harmless but she had made us feel rather uncomfortable. This wouldn’t be the first time one or all of us was uncomfortable that day.

The sky had cleared by then and the sun shone brightly on the city. We decided to head downtown first and then do some shopping and sightseeing. The girls wanted to go to H&M. We didn’t have one in Virginia in 2001. We also wanted to check out Greenwich Village and maybe Canal Street. Walking towards the subway was the first time I actually had a moment to look at Joseph closely. He was fidgety. I hoped this wasn’t going to upset him too much. He told me later that he was happy to bring people down there, that it helped him to deal with it, he was thankful to visit the place and tell stories about the people he knew that had died there. Joseph himself had been working in the South Tower, training with Morgan Stanley Dean Witter only a year earlier. He had been laid off in December of 2000. I know that he wondered why he had been so lucky. As someone who had attempted suicide before he had a unique sense of survivor’s guilt.

Once on the subway, we were in close proximity to one another and I noticed the odor of alcohol on him. I couldn’t tell if he had been drinking that day or it was leftover from the night before. I realized he was manic. He would self-medicate with alcohol when he was manic. I think it calmed him down, or he thought it did. He found
us seats and stood in front of us. He jokingly said he would protect us from the subway riders around us. I could see the girls cringe. They weren’t so sure about him. I had warned them when they had asked to come and so I didn’t feel too bad about the situation. I knew he would be on his best possible behavior, even if that was a bit awkward.

We got off the subway and walked over to Washington Market Park. From this vantage point we could see down Greenwich Street to the World Trade Center site. We were about six or seven blocks from World Trade Center 7, which was one of the buildings that had collapsed in the late afternoon of 9/11/2001. It had been damaged by debris falling from the towers and a fire inside had been burning out of control. This building had been evacuated and fire fighters had to abandon it too. From our position at the corner of Greenwich and Reade all we could see was just a large pile of debris, cranes, and smoke. When the breeze changed direction, it brought the smell up the street and I’ll never forget how awful it was to smell that. The street was closed from that point on so we all just stood there and looked down the empty roadway, empty except for the policeman who guarded it and the news vans and utility trucks parked along the side.
We left Tribeca and decided to go down to Battery Park. We walked up to the corner of Greenwich Street at Rector Street. We were still several blocks away, but on this side we felt much closer. There was a dust that seemed to be on everything. It was the same dust that had covered survivors as they ran from the buildings that day. The same dust that had rumbled down the streets in a giant, moving cloud. The same dust that we had seen on television. It was what was left of thousands of pounds of concrete and other building materials that had been pulverized when the two giants had fallen. We dared not think of what else it was.

The day was now much clearer and the sun shone with a bright intensity, not unlike that fateful day a few weeks ago. We took a few more photos of the rubble. I felt bad taking pictures and don’t have many but the ones I do have really do convey the sadness of the city at that time.

At 96 Greenwich Street there used to be a lounge called the Pussycat Lounge. I’ve never been there. The name evoked a certain kind of place. A place I wouldn’t have gone into, unless on a dare, or with a group of rowdy friends. The marquee from that place is in a couple of my pictures. It is ironic because I’ve since heard that these
terrorists had been such fundamentalists but at least one of them had been to similar clubs in the weeks before the attacks. They were patronizing strip bars and then murdered innocent Americans because America is the kind of country that has strip clubs and other “Western” freedoms.

We walked around the financial district for a little while, the four of us quiet, sad, and each processing things in our own way. We occasionally commented on the awful smell, the dust that was just everywhere, the windows that had been shattered from the concussions of noise a couple of blocks away. Diana asked me if I thought there was asbestos or other things in the air that we shouldn’t be breathing. I had no idea. Some people in the crowds were wearing paper surgical masks, but I didn’t know if it was necessary. We weren’t going to be there for that long so I tried to quiet her fear by saying just that.
I stopped and bought some post cards of the towers. I remember thinking that I had better get them then, because maybe they would stop making them. The vendor that I bought them from was an older man, possibly a veteran, as many of them are. He had a card table set up on the side walk with his postcards, NYPD and NYFD hats and mugs, and little replicas of the Statue of Liberty. He didn’t call out to us or “hawk” his wares, he just sat behind his table, looking sad. I wonder if he was embarrassed to be there, so close to the site of such tragedy, trying to make his living off the tourists that were his customers. I wonder if he was conflicted, like I was, just about being there.
We weren’t able to get too close to St. Paul’s Chapel, but we caught glimpses of it. The graveyard and monuments surrounding it were still covered in the ash that was everywhere. People had hung banners, posters, and t-shirts on the fence. It had become another makeshift memorial. I had been to that chapel on a previous trip and was relieved to see it still standing. As we left the immediate area, in search of happier emotions, someone handed me a pamphlet, which I took without even looking at it. I still have it. It was from the First Baptist Church on West 79th Street. It is called (remembrance) September 11, 2001 and has a picture of the rubble and a lone fire fighter with a device in his hand that I assume to be some kind of device for searching for survivors. The words “fallen but not forgotten” are on the cover. On the back cover it says, a gift to you from www.911Recovery.com. I never looked at that website. I just put the pamphlet aside with my postcards for another day.

We moved on from Ground Zero and resumed our day with lunch and some shopping. At one point the three of us posed for a picture. Joseph sent it to me later. We are all smiling into the camera. As though we were just enjoying a sunny day in the city.
Joseph would tell me in later conversations about nights that he had been manic and he’d gone to the World Trade Center Plaza, with brown bag in hand and sat on the hard benches there and talked to the people who worked in the buildings. He knew people that worked in sub shops, people that worked maintenance, some traders that worked long hours and like himself, just didn’t like to go home to an empty cramped apartment. He didn’t know many last names, but he knew that many of them had been victims of the attacks, because he either never saw them again or because another acquaintance had confirmed their demise. It made him very sad to know that people that had been so kind to him had been murdered so senselessly.

Joseph also told me what it had been like in the city that night. September 11, 2001, the whole city had been shaken and was closed off from the rest of the world. The bridges, tunnels, public transportation, deliveries of food and supplies; everything had been stopped. Time had warped, or so it seemed to him. As nighttime fell, Joseph said he didn’t want to be alone. He usually either went to a neighborhood bar or to the plaza. He liked the plaza better because even in the middle of the night and into the early morning hours there were people there. He was never alone. And he liked that he could be outside, where he could avoid the claustrophobia that sometimes overtook him. He went to the neighborhood bar. It was packed. No one there wanted to be alone that night. He said it was eerie. The place was packed but you could hear a pin drop. No one wanted to talk about what happened. They just didn’t want to be alone with their thoughts.

He told me it was three days before deliveries were allowed in. All the bodegas were empty. The bars ran out of alcohol. It was as if New York City was running out of everything. I’m sure that this was a bit of an exaggeration. In a city of that size, I’m sure there was food available. But then again, what do I know? I wasn’t there. I’m glad I wasn’t there.
We wandered up to Canal Street to look for bargains. It was uncharacteristically quiet there. Normally Canal Street was filled with a busy, jovial crowd of bargain shoppers and tourists. Now it was subdued. We ended up strolling around the neighborhoods of Little Italy and NoLita before ending up in the Bowery and getting back on the subway. It seemed like everywhere we looked there were posters of the missing or little memorials. We saw a fence covered in yellow ribbons.

Everywhere the city was expressing sadness. We got back on the subway and made our way back to the upper west side. We left Joseph and I had a feeling that he’d pour himself a vodka before we even pulled away from the curb. He had been on his best behavior and I knew he was going to be okay with this. Just like the city he loved, he would make it through this too. I’d keep in touch.

As the girls and I began the long road trip back home, we were contemplative and quiet. We had experienced many emotions that day. I myself had struggled with disbelief, shock, sadness, grief, thankfulness, guilt, relief, and resignation. I tried to imagine what it would have been like to be in the city that day or to know someone who was in the towers that morning. I tried to imagine being a family member of one of the emergency workers, cops, or firefighters that had died in the line of duty. With
misty eyes, I drove us out of the city, back towards Virginia. As we crossed the George Washington Bridge into New Jersey I noticed that we all looked back at the city skyline.