Out of the Chaos, Voices

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November 1, 2001 By Staff

I have horrible news -- two planes crashed into the World Trade Center! One crashed into one tower, and then 18 minutes later, a second crashed into the other tower. It is a horrible scene...

-- George Carter, e-mail to the aidsact *listserv at 9:42 a.m. on Tuesday, Sept. 11*

I remember hearing a *Whooomph!* sound. I heard someone say that it was denitely a bomb, and then everyone started running toward the river, and eventually we hit the West Side Highway. We were almost in SoHo when the first tower went. We were a little further uptown when the second tower fell. There was a woman who was quite hysterical. She sort of fainted in the middle of the street, and was pointing and screaming. I told someone to go and smack her. There was another woman near me who collapsed on a bench and burst into tears. I rubbed her shoulders, wondering if it was appropriate in this situation. She said that there was nowhere in the city where she felt safe.

-- Randy Noak, an HIVer who worked at Merrill Lynch, across the street from the WTC

I went to St. Vincent's at noon on Tuesday and saw the long line of eager blood donors and knew I could not be one -- nor could any gay man, positive or negative.

-- Greg Lugliani, HIVer, writer

As I watched people deal with the aftermath, I realized that I have been dealing with my own personal massacre for a decade. I lost so many and have been so deeply buried in grief that it became a second skin. The difference is that now it is the whole country coming together in grief -- *acceptable* grief.

-- River Huston, HIVer, poet

I've heard from five different gay male friends for whom this horror has kicked up feelings from the early '80s. Some are poz and some are neg. A few are totally freaked. The feelings of the world changing in one instant, of doom immeasurable, of fear mixed with rage, is familiar.

-- Eric Rofes, author/activist

I have been sensing emotional echoes of the worst days of the AIDS crisis. The randomness and violence of the attacks -- though external -- echoes the randomness and violence of HIV infection.

The mass of New Yorkers vanishing in their prime. Unable to process the reality of an environment of such devastating loss, we wander the world in search of people who are “missing.” It goes on...

-- David Drake, playwright, actor

When skyscrapers collapse and bury thousands, then we watch, we remember, we mourn. Does it follow that now is not the time to remember so many other acts of brutality? I have a duty to remember the bipartisan politicians who wouldn’t set foot near the AIDS Quilt even when it was on their doorsteps, and I mourn the thousands who die daily of AIDS in places without camera crews.

-- Scott Tucker, HIVer, author/activist

For those of us who’ve lived through the devastation of AIDS, there’s nothing new about the “life can never be the same” attitude. We already know about life on the edge and about the importance of cherishing the freedoms we have with a vengeance. Like the attacks, AIDS changed the rules, and seemed inordinately evil, but the survivors emerged more tightly organized and bonded than ever before.

-- Michael Musto, writer

The idea that we have lost our innocence is incredibly arrogant. I hold my own government directly responsible for the death of each and every one of my friends who died of AIDS, and so to me America is far from an innocent victim. If the U.S. government can kill its own citizens with such callous disregard, what hypocrisy it takes for President Bush to trumpet his jingoistic bullshit about America being attacked because it’s a democracy! Osama bin Laden’s organization probably runs on more democratic principles than the United fucking States of America.

-- Patrick Califia, writer

I felt patriotism for the first time in my life -- a sorrowful kind of pride. The pride I felt as a gay or Mexican or a survivor in a community besieged by AIDS had been *despite* America. Being HIV positive has meant living with an extraordinary uncertainty about my future. Being an American now means the same thing. I didn’t think it possible to appreciate life and the people I love more acutely than I’d learned through AIDS. Now I know that it is.

-- Tony Valenzuela, HIVer, writer/activist

No one can say when or if terrorists will strike next. The uncertainty gnaws at us. The uncertain fate of thousands of Americans lost in the rubble of the twin towers and the Pentagon haunted their families and friends for days on end. When one of the possible outcomes is death, uncertainty sucks. It’s with great sadness that I say, “Welcome to my world, America.”

-- Joe Dee, HIVer, reporter

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