

It was a clear blue sky without a cloud in sight. The day was Tuesday Sept 11, 2001 I had just finished working a midnight and went to court early that morning tired as a dog. As I finished up at court at around 8:15 am I started my journey home a 90-mile drive. Halfway home I turned my Kenny Chesney CD off and put on the radio oh my God I couldn't believe what I just heard a plane crashed into one of the towers of the world trade center, the first thing that crossed my mind was it was deliberate. Within five minutes or so they announced that a second plane crashed into the other tower I was only miles from my home so I rushed into the house to find my wife just waking up walking down our hallway I asked her if she saw the "TV and she replied no. I then told her what had happened and the disbelief and fear in her eyes told it all. Now it's the Pentagon what's going on here we are under terrorist attack. As the news reports were all claiming terrorism I watched the twins I grew up with burning on TV I couldn't help but think I have to get there to help. The next problem was explaining to my wife that I had to go. I knew she wouldn't understand, but a cops mind works differently then ordinary people. When I started collecting my clothes she asked me what I was doing. I explained to her that I have to return to work. She went hysterical at this time your not leaving this house, but I had to not cause it was my job but because it was my heart & soul I had to go I couldn't live with myself.

As I started leaving the house my wife was begging & pleading for me to stay home but I just got into my car after a long hug and kiss not knowing if I would ever return. As I drove down my long driveway I can see my 7 1/2 months pregnant wife on her knees with her hands on her face crying don't leave. This was the hardest decision of my life to keep driving. When I reached the highway it was unexplainable as if people knew to leave the left lane open for police, firemen and other emergency workers to get to the city. I made it to the Bronx at record speed for a good 1/4 of my drive I just stared at the burning towers that blue sky I mentioned was now black. It now was in my memory forever such as a lot of things I won't talk about in this speech like the smell of the burning building from miles away. When I arrived in the Bronx traffic was at a stand still everyone was fleeing the city for their lives and here I was racing to get there. Finally I arrived at work they told us to suit up which means to put our uniforms on in case of being lost in the rubble it would be easier to ID our bodies with our shields and name plates. As myself and numerous other officers boarded a city bus to be transported to the disaster site everyone voiced their opinion some I can't repeat, others I don't want to or care to repeat. Well here I am at ground zero people in a dazed state still walking around like the world had ended. They put us on a traffic post one block from the towers, but we refused to stand there and headed right for the towers. The site was like nothing I've ever seen before. The dust so thick you couldn't read your partners shield standing next to you, your eyes burning itching and the smell oh the smell. We started looking for survivors or even bodies, but the soot was so thick you couldn't tell if you were standing on a piece of steel or a human arm the dead silence was eerie and the dust looked as if it was snowing. A partner of mine Chello and I entered part of the towers, which was still standing. This was where the NJ Path train came into we were yelling for anyone to hear us but we never got a reply. A beam 80 feet in length at least one foot in thickness was across the entrance to the train stairs. Inside this oddly quite building your mind could still hear the screams of horror, but in real life all there was the creaking of the steel

framed building. We decided to get out before it was too late and as we went back outside the rest of the building 7 collapsed which was right next door.

Are there any survivors how many people, cops, firefighters, EMS people were in there? Is there any of them trapped to where we could help them these were questions in my mind. As I stared a large piece of steel, which was once, the two towers that I grew up with when I looked out my back door.

As we started to search all you could find was pieces, and pieces and pieces of what was once a human and everything was covered with a gray dust. You would find burnt teddy bears, a set of keys with a father and his two children on them, purses, cars which were just 2 feet in height. This was something I was not prepared to see. The hurt and sorrow and tears didn't come for weeks. Then myself and Chello came across a hole which led down into the rubble, so we climbed down into it put our fear and lives aside to hopefully help one person, as we got down 2 stories what seemed like eternity we came across a pool of water as the light from the flashlight shined on it the color was blood red at this we turned around. After being down at ground zero for some 20 hours over 40 hours without sleep I headed back to the base covered from head to toe in dust and gray mud my feet soaking wet and my eyes and skin itching and burning. Day after horrible day I went back down surviving on 2 hours of sleep a day for a 3 week period away from home away from wife and unborn child. The only difference between being at ground zero and at war was at least at war your expecting to see and deal with horror, no one I knew was mentally prepared to see what we came across.

One day as we dug through the rubble I came across a shoe with a foot in it at last a body someone's family was finally going to get closure I dug fast with my bare hands and found out that's all it was a foot nothing more. All you would find is a chunk of flesh, bag it tag it and send it to the morgue, a bunch of hair with an ear was this a part of someone I knew? I don't know but I lost 3 fellow officers that I had worked with one time or another and it was hard.

A week later all you could smell was decaying flesh from blocks and blocks away over 2,500 people perished and I don't believe half of that many were recovered. People just torn to shreds and vaporized into dust what a way to go.

Till this day I could see and hear the mass confusion from the first day to the eerie silence that came after. My nights will never be the same or my life. Everyone praises the dead, as heroes as they should but there are more living suffering than dead. The dead their deaths were quick and painless and mine has just begun. I can't breath, my throat is constantly sore, I'm always coughing, and headaches, and sleepless nights, nightmares, anxiety and visions haunt me everyday. And I'm all alone except for my dearest loved ones. No one cares on the job they tell me I'm fine go back to work, but truthfully I haven't felt this bad in my life. I have mercury in my system and God knows what else and this is short term what will happen 5 to 10 years from now! No one knows I don't even know if the almighty knows I put my life in a situation that 98% of other people wouldn't and what thanks do I get now that I'm sick.

Yeah strangers thanked me even now they thank me but do they really care? I can't pay my bills and work doesn't want to acknowledge that I'm sick, depressed, and disgusted. I feel sorry and sympathize for those families that lost their loved ones but I feel worse for those members of the service and their families that are going through what myself and family is going through.

They remember the dead but don't want to acknowledge the sick who are living I'm not the only one out there, there are many suffering with similar if not the same symptoms as myself. This City doesn't care about any of their employees it's sad not to mention that 99% of America doesn't even know we are sick.

At least lets not forget the dead and their families but most important lets remember the people who are now suffering physically and mentally. Also I feel a lot of people concentrate on the WTC well how about all the poor souls and family members from the Pentagon.

I just wish for once the City would open their eyes and help the living and stop getting political feed back from the dead. Get more personal not political how can this make us money? That's all the City cares about.

Thank you for all your support and if you ever meet a New York City Cop, Firefighter, or EMS, just tell them thanks. Because that's all they will ever get.

Yours truly,

James Zadroga
New York City Detective