

9-11 Remembrance..



Jawn, pronounced \ˈjɑːn, is the Philadelphia all-purpose noun. It can refer to a single thing, or a collection or class of things, or a situation, or a person.

The day started innocently and beautifully enough for many of us, especially in the Northeast and Mid-Atlantic. It's hard for some of us to remember what life was like before September 11th, 2001, now etched in our memories as simply "9/11." In the days leading up to 9/11, President Bush hosted a leadership forum on the importance of reading programs for children. A pipe bomb greeted children walking to school for a third straight day in North Belfast, Northern Ireland. A meatloaf sandwich with a side of fries cost you \$6.95 in Manhattan. Muslim-Christian violence rocked Nigeria. The Yankees beat the Red Sox. Someone threw a strawberry cake into the face of Sweden's King Carl Gustaf. Fires raged in Montana. Serena Williams and Lindsay Davenport duked it out at the U.S. Open.

On September 10th, 2001, at 8:41 P.M., approximately 12 hours prior to flying American Airlines Flight 11 into the North Tower of the World Trade Center, Mohamed Atta and Abdulaziz al-Omari took cash out of an ATM in South Portland, Maine.

"Nobody move. Everything will be ok. If you try to make any moves, you will endanger yourselves and the plane. Just stay quiet."

- Mohamed Atta, to the passengers on American Airlines Flight 11

Nothing could have prepared the nation, the world, for what would happen soon thereafter. Everybody who was alive to remember it has a 9/11 story. They were at work; they were at school. They were at the bus stop with the kids, the grocery store, helping an elderly parent, or simply watching the morning news. Nothing could prepare a human being watching two planes crash into the North and South Towers of the World Trade Center, a third plane crash into the Pentagon, and a fourth plane crash into a field in Pennsylvania. No combat experience in the military or personal tragedy allows one to mentally prepare for war in a place of peace. The workplace, the streets leading to it, and the ones we walk around it are not meant to be a warzone.

KC: *There's smoke really bad.*

911: *Sit tight and we'll get to you as soon as we can.*

KC: *I know you've got a lot in the building but we're up on the top. Smoke rises too. Come on, I can barely breathe now – can't see. It's really bad, it's black, it's arid. We're young men, not ready to die.*

911: *Hello?*

KC: *Hello... there's three of us, two broken windows... Oh God! Oh...*

"KC" is Kevin Cosgrove, a father of three, who was on the phone with a 911-dispatcher when the South Tower of the World Trade Center collapsed. Metaphorically, it was a moment in our nation's history where every American collectively collapsed. Shocked. Scared. One must have wondered if we were yet, as Americans, able to process anger or sadness yet, knowing that this surreal vision we see as onlookers on New York City streets or television watchers in the Rockies is all too real.

"I just wanted to let you know I love you and I'm stuck in this building in New York.

"There's lots of smoke and I just wanted you to know that I love you always."

Melissa Harrington Hughes was in New York City for one day to work. From San Francisco, Melissa flew into New York City for business at the World Trade Center. When Melissa realized she was trapped in one of the World Trade Center Towers, a cruel act of happenstance, she attempted to call her husband, Sean Hughes. Sean was still in bed. Sean never heard from Melissa again. Her voice likely stuck with him forever.

The death count from 9/11 continues to rise 20 years later as bodies continue to be identified. The best estimate now is this; 2,753 dead at the World Trade Center, 184 at the Pentagon, 40 aboard United Flight 93.

Nearly 3,000 voices silenced forever, like Melissa's.

And still, today, first responders who tirelessly and bravely responded to the attacks and who dug through debris and rubble to find survivors continue to get sick and die from toxins the beleaguered buildings produced into the air that day.

"I'm up to [Floor] 55. We're going to have to hoof it. B stairway walls have been compromised on 73 and 74.

"The walls are breached so be careful.

"We've got two isolated pockets of fire. 78th floor, numerous 10-45 code ones (civilian fatalities)."

Fire Chief Orio Palmer could be heard over the radio speaking with his brothers and sisters with the New York City Fire Department. Chief Palmer described a scene of a building about to collapse. Breached walls. Compromised stairwells. Fire. And yet, Chef Palmer, like many of his colleagues. Kept going. Kept walking up. Up. Up. Exhausted, and yet, exalted. Their bravery must have been contagious, as 412 New York City emergency workers died that day.

Up they went, towards the fire, towards light.

"Jules, this is Brian. Listen, I'm on an airplane that's been hijacked.

"If things don't go well, and it's not looking good, I just want you to know that I absolutely love you.

"I want you to do good, go have good times - same to my parents and everybody.

"I just totally love you... and I'll see you when you get there.

"Bye babe. I hope I call you."

Brian David Sweeney called his wife one final time on September 11th. Hopeful, yet resigned to the fact that his situation was tenuous and would likely lead to this being his last phone call, and yet, there was no distress. There was aspiration for his wife, Jules, to continue living her life without him. There was desire for his parents to do the same. To live. To love. Until the end, Brian unselfishly said his good-byes, gave his final wishes, and then waited in both agonizing silence and deafening screams as he came to terms with his fate, his thoughts his only familiar companion at the end of his journey.

And yet, to Brian, it wasn't about Brian. It was about Jules, and his parents, and everybody. As we, as a nation, watched funeral after funeral on television over the coming weeks, we had our chance to honor them. But for them, at the end, it was about us living and continuing.

"Are you guys ready? Let's roll."

A battle cry for a nation was uttered on a plane destined for Washington D.C. just prior to it crashing in a field in Shanksville, Pennsylvania. To Todd Beamer, it was less of a battle cry and more a declaration of war upon the hijackers of United Flight 93, and while we have adopted "Let's Roll!" with an exclamation point, Todd Beamer simply left us with a period at the end of his statement. This is how it was going to go down. This is how this was going to end. By then, the crew and passengers knew that something was amiss in America and, collectively, Todd Beamer, Jeremy Glick, and Mark Bingham were not going to be the fourth plane to strike at America that day. Now, the memories of their heroism lie memorialized in a field in Pennsylvania, instead of at the White House or the Capital Building.

9/11, simply put, changed everything. It changed the course of history. It changed the direction of countries. It changed emergency management and public safety wholly and completely. It was a trigger point for many to either find employment in, invent, redefine, or criticize emergency management and public safety.

Most important of all, it changed us, as people. Our innocence wasn't just shattered, it was lost. As a nation, we united and mourned and rebuilt. We hugged, and loved, and hoped that the pictures of the missing unknowingly memorialized on paper strewn across New York City canvasses would walk through the front door one day. But they didn't, and then we entered a phase that is, perhaps, the most important and most tragic when dealing with loss. After the shock, the sadness, the anger, and the response, there is only one thing left to do.

Accept.

Acceptance of a new reality. A less crowded dinner table. One less parent, one less partner. Nameplates left on the lockers of New York City first responders. A body buried and returned to earth.

20 years later, many of us have accepted the reality and consequences of 9/11. Others continue their journey. Again, this September 11th, lets cry, hug, remember, and memorialize together like we did in 2001, and take to heart the stories of bravery, the final good-byes, and the importance of never taking one single day on this beautiful planet for granted.

Portions of this week's Jawn used the following sources:

<https://closeronline.co.uk/real-life/news/remembering-911-final-messages-sent-victims-twin-towers-attack/>

<https://nymag.com/news/9-11/10th-anniversary/lets-roll/>

<https://www.theatlantic.com/photo/2011/09/911-the-week-before/100142/>

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