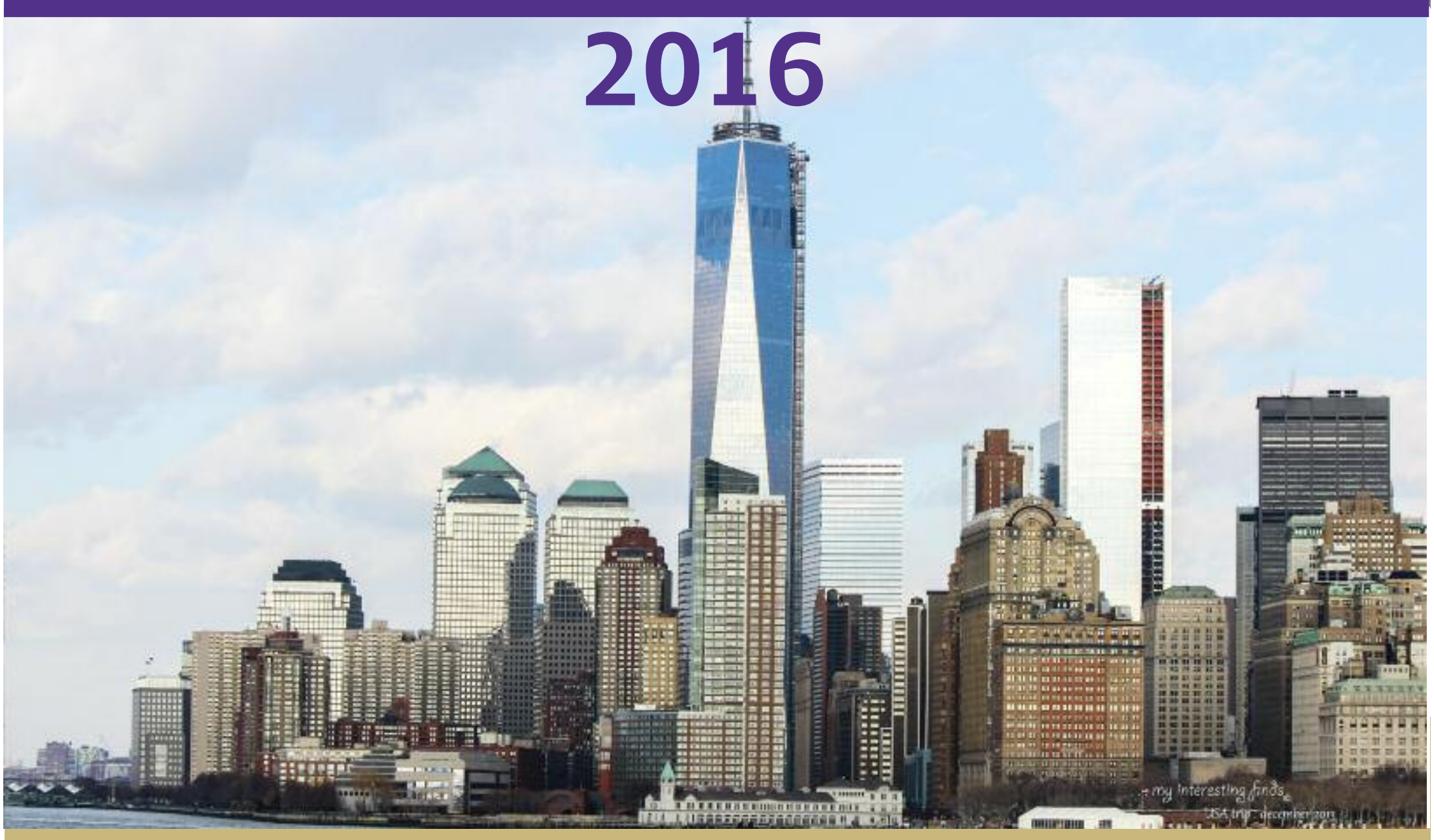
SEPTEMBER 10, 2016

9/11: 15 Years Later



The National Herald presents its special edition dedicated to September 11, 2001.

The National Herald

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A tribute in lights to the World Trade Center's fallen Twin Towers. Another important way to never forget is to respect the power and influence of language.

Were the 9/11 Hijacker-Pilots "Undocumented Workers?"

By Constantinos E. Scaros

Fifteen years have come and gone since millions of people around the world, most poignantly Americans, were glued to their television screens, watching in horror and disbelief the spectacle of the World Trade Center's mighty Twin Towers crumble to the ground like a house of cards.

Foreign-born hijacker-pilots were involved in the attacks on both Towers, first on the North one and a few minutes later, on its South twin, the latter attack dismissing any doubts that perhaps the first crash had been an accident; clearly, we were under attack.

But in judging from today's nomenclature regarding foreign-born individuals physically present in the United States, the jihadist co-conspirators might very well be called "undocumented workers," "unauthorized entrants" or just plain old "immigrants."

And there is a very good reason for that: language has a great deal of power and influence.

Lumping all persons physically present in the United States but born elsewhere into the category of "immigrants" makes it easy to counter the claims of those who are opposed to illegal entry and stay in the United States. "Neighborhoods containing large clusters of immigrants are statistically lower in crime than the national average" is the favorite statistic spewed by advocates of open borders, and by anyone else who thinks that a call to enforce existing federal immigration laws is a racist and a nativist.

IMMIGRATION 101

Before examining this further, it is important to note that there are actual legal definitions of one's immigration status, that run afoul of the preferred terminology of the politically correct police. Here are the essentials:

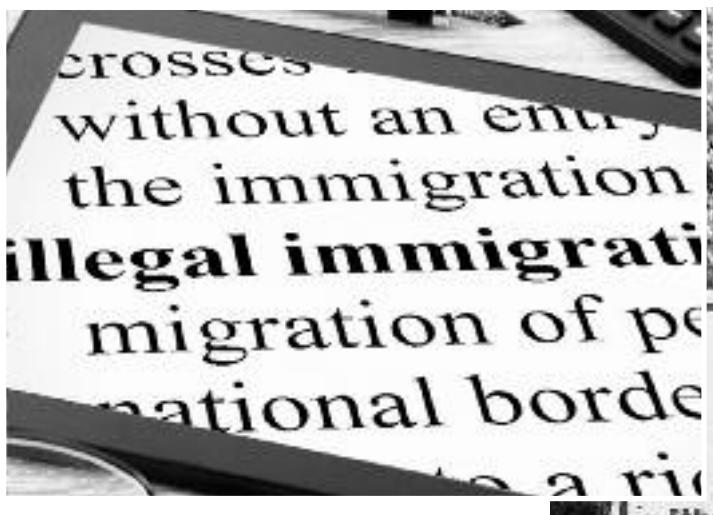
Every single person physically present in the United States at this moment – from those born here 90 years ago who never set foot outside the country, to those currently situated at an international airport who just flew in from Belgium and are waiting to change airplanes to Canada – are either citizens or aliens. American citizens fall into two categories: natural-born and naturalized. The former includes anyone physically born on U.S. soil, with additional exceptions, such as those born on a U.S. military base overseas, or born abroad to at least one American citizen parent. The latter comprises anyone who has gone through the formal immigration process to become a citizen.

As for aliens, there are also two types, the categories of which are self-explanatory: legal and illegal. Those who are here legally are either nonimmigrants (for example, exchange students, guest workers, or your aunt Stavroula who came to the U.S. from Greece just for your wedding), or immigrants.

Nonimmigrants are here temporarily, whether short-term (on a 10-day sightseeing jaunt) or long-term (on a five-year contract to play basketball in the NBA). Immigrants are here permanently (as long as they don't violate the terms of their status). Officially, they are known as Legal Permanent Residents (LPRs), but colloquially they are deemed holders of a "green card," because the Alien Registration Card (ARC) that identifies them – and which, incidentally, they have been required to carry on them at all times for decades, according to federal law (so much for the "show me your papers" state laws that so many rail against) – used to be green in color.

LPRs may, after a certain period of time, opt to become U.S. citizens. Until such time, they remain aliens.

So, which type of persons in the United States are "immigrants?" Those who became LPRs, including those who have subsequently gone on to become naturalized U.S. citizens. That's it – no one else.



GREEK IMMIGRANTS

Turning for a moment to the Greek-American immigration experience in the United States, we can see how the statistic of lower-crime ethnic neighborhoods applies. Immigrant groups tend to band together. They are inclined to work hard, appreciative of their new host country giving them the chance for a better way of life. They are often bonded by church and by social/cultural/historical events – in the case of the Greeks, prime examples are the annual celebration of Greek Independence, often in the form of a parade, or Oxi Day on October 28.

I would be remiss not to mention that in the case of the Greeks in particular, it also involves community newspapers, most obviously the Ethnikos Kyrix-National Herald, which in April celebrated its 101st anniversary. It is the oldest foreign language publication of any kind still in existence in the United States, and a testament to the solidarity of the Greek-American community and its adherence to its cultural, historical, and religious heritage.

Those Greeks you see filling the seats of coffee shops throughout Astoria, sipping hot coffee from a demitasse or a frappe through a straw, smoking cigarettes where permitted (and often where not permitted), playing backgammon, and loudly solving the problems of the world mostly in their native Greek but at times interspersed with American jargon spoken with a thick, Greek accent, are most often LPRs or naturalized citizens, and therefore are immigrants. Most work hard and play hard. They pay their taxes, help their neighbors, raise their children to respect and cherish the American way of life (but also their Hellenic roots). They are a shining example, for the most part, of the benefit of immigrants to our beloved American nation.

ALIENS

Some people have a problem with the word "alien." Perhaps in today's hypersensitive world, calling a non-citizen, non-LPR by the correct legal term, alien, might result in a "microaggression" – you know, the type that causes Ivy League institutions to spend millions on creating "safe spaces" for microaggression victims to retreat to when attacked with legally and factually correct information. But, I digress…

But aliens, by overwhelming numbers, also make positive contributions to American society. They include distinguished professors, research scientists, physicians, engineers, athletes, actors, directors, writers, you name it. Most importantly, they include people who are basically good and kind human beings.

The good and kind ones are often here illegally. Their only crime is having snuck across the border from Mexico or Canada, jumped ship while temporarily docking at a major port, or overstaying past the deadline set by the conditions of a temporary visa.

For example, if your cousin Panos came to the United States on a student visa to enroll at the Michigan State University and decided to drop out after a semester and go to work off the books in construction, he is now an illegal alien – but that doesn't mean he's still not the same sweet, kind, compassionate, magnanimous Panos you have always known and loved.

Nonetheless, there is, unfortunately, a disturbingly large number of criminal aliens living among us right now. Aliens whose crimes extend beyond merely staying here illegally. Murderers, rapists, armed robbers, are among them. Worst of all, persons who as you read this are plotting another 9/11.

OXY-MORONS

It is, therefore, irresponsible to attribute false statuses to the varying types of non-native-born Americans.

"Illegal immigrants" is the most common fallacy, used not only by the politically correct left, but even by ardent law and order advocate Donald Trump. There is no such thing as an illegal immigrant, simply because, by definition, an immigrant is someone who has gone through the formal immigration process to become a LPR (and perhaps a citizen later on). For the same reason, there is no such thing as an "undocumented immigrant."

Turning next to your Yiayia Marikoula, who came for a 90-day visit in 1998, at the age of 75, and never went back, it would be difficult to imagine her, at the ripe old age of 93, being an "undocumented worker." Even more difficult, the 9/11 hijaker-pilots, unless of course we count terrorist acts as "work."

NEVER FORGET

What does all of this have to do with the fifteenth anniversary of 9/11? It is a stark reminder that, while anything bad can happen anyplace, anytime, the odds of a terrorist attack happening on U.S. soil dramatically decrease when there is a national concerted effort focused on properly vetting those who enter the United States – whether to live here forever or simply to change flights.

Words alone won't stop the next bomb from detonating, but the national consciousness can be raised if we stop referring to the potential detonators as "undocumented workers."

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A Father-Daughter Story of 9/11

By Stephanie Nikolopoulos

TNH ARCHIVES

"I'll wait right here," my mother said, turning the key to the ignition off as she pulled into a parking spot along the Hudson River. I was newly back on the East Coast, so after my father went off to work in Manhattan my mother had driven me over to the New Jersey office where my job interview was to be held. "Good luck! I'll be praying for you!"

Smoothing out my robin's egg suede blazer, as I got out of the car, I smiled back at my mother. The sun shone brightly in the blue sky, glinting off the buildings of the Manhattan skyline across the river. I had the typical interview jitters, but I felt positive. Maybe today would be the day I embarked on my career.

I'd managed to avoid the eventual reality that I'd have to find a job after graduating from Scripps College in California by going backpacking in Europe. After a summer spent running mock races with friends in Olympia and making crowns from the branches of the olive trees outside my family's summer home in the Peloponnese, I'd returned with my family to my childhood home in Northern New Jersey. With a degree in English, I knew I wanted to work with words. Needing to start somewhere, I'd answered an ad from a company seeking a candidate to proofread airline menus.

Inside the office building, I attempted a convincingly confident handshake to the woman conducting the interview. She sat me down in an empty room for a proofreading test of food terminology, giving me a dictionary and a style guide and telling me she'd be back shortly. The list of ingredients was like none I'd ever seen on an airline menu. I didn't know what julienne carrots were, let alone if they carried a proper name like Eggs Benedict. Julian Carrots? I'd heard of tarragon, but since my mother was a bigger fan of takeout than cookbooks, I didn't know whether it had two "r"s or one, or if it should be spelled like Oregon with an "e" before the "g." I was sure at this rate I'd misspell "pasta."

As I stared at the list, I heard the hurried steps of high heels. Was my time up already? I glanced toward the open door and saw a woman in a skirt and blouse walk by. I opened the dictionary to look up a spelling and heard more footsteps. From down the hall, I could hear muffled conversations between men and women. I willed myself to concentrate. I needed this job. My father had moved to this country and worked hard his whole life to give me a good education, and now it was time to make my parents proud. I transposed an "e" and an "l" in a word and continued pushing through the list. I could do this!

Phones began ringing. More people walked quickly through the halls. While I had expected the working world to be fast-paced, this environment felt intense. Someone turned on a television. The news broadcasted in Spanish, which I thought was an odd choice since the office had not seemed primarily Latino, but I didn't have time to think about it. I need to focus on correcting "blue" to "bleu."

The woman who'd administered the proofreading test appeared in the room, informing me it was time for the interview portion. The woman was polite and professional, but she seemed distracted. The interview was short – not a good sign. I exited the building, hoping I hadn't bombed the proofreading test. If I'd done well enough, maybe I still had a shot at the job.

As I slid into the passenger seat of the car, my mother asked, "Did you hear?"

"Hear what?"

"A plane hit the World Trade Center." She explained how one of the maintenance men from the office had come out and told her about what he'd seen from the building's roof. "He said he could see smoke across the river."

That explained the harried atmosphere in the office.

As we drove home, the suburbs looked too perfect. The leaves on the trees hadn't started changing their colors yet and were a bright green. The sky was clear. Even the road was clear. No one was driving but us.

When we got home, my mother tried to call my father.

No answer.

My father, a sea captain, was working in Midtown, across from Saint Patrick's Cathedral, in the Olympic Tower—"built by the great Aristotle Onassis," he said. My mother and I turned on the television to try to find out what had happened and learned a second plane had hit the other tower of the World Trade Center. This was not an accident! As the events of the September 11 terrorist attacks unfolded, we were able to connect with my sister, who was at college in Massachusetts, and pick up my brother, who was in the high school, a few minutes away from our house, but we couldn't get through to my father. All the phone lines in New York were down or tied up. Why

wasn't he calling us to tell us he was okay? He wasn't near Lower Manhattan, but who knew what would happen next? When my mother finally got through to him, he was working as if nothing had happened and brushed off our concerns. It was only later in the day, when everyone else in the office had realized the enormity of the situation, that his office closed.

All bridges and tunnels leading out of Manhattan were shut down. Bomb threats were being called in across the country. If people wanted to get back to New Jersey, they'd have to do it on foot. My mother and I drove to Fort Lee, a ten-minute drive from our house, to pick up my father on the other side of the George Washington Bridge. Frantic families huddled together on the sidewalks, trying to find their loved ones. Among the multitude, we ran into the parents of my sister's high-school classmate. They were an Indian-American couple, my mother was Swedish-American, I was an American of Swedish and Greek descent, and we weaved through a sea of people of all races and religions. We were all American. If terrorists were attacking America, we were all being attacked.

From New Jersey, we watched men in suits and women in high heels coming over the bridge like rats scurrying through a subway tunnel. At last, my father emerged! He looked worn and disheveled but showed no signs of fear. He would later say, "I was very sad for what happened at WTC but not scared since I had experienced catastrophic hurricanes as a young captain and seen a lot during my many travels around the world."

The only comment I remember him making at the time, though, was how crooked the gypsy cab that took him to the foot of the George Washington Bridge was. He'd charged him an exorbitant fare – "because he could get away with it."

"That's horrible," my mother said.

"That's life, Pati," my father said.

Years later, I asked him to recount what he'd experienced. He told me: "I found out what was going on from the controller of the company who had always open a TV, watching the market, across my desk. At the beginning we thought it was an accident from a small plane. Then we saw black smoke coming up from the World Trade Center downtown, where I used to take evening courses for years.

"We were still watching the news on the controller's TV, or going up and down on the crowded 5th Avenue, when our boss Bill Livanos' sister came up, fell on her brother's lap and asked for a double Scotch – while she had never drunk before! She was working on a top floor of the WTC when this happened. Luckily, contrary to the instructions to stay calm and wait further announcements, a male friend grabbed her by the hand and they rushed to the emergency exit stairs. A few minutes after they hit the ground safely the building collapsed!

"Since subway, buses, and bridges were shut down, I walked for a while in the evening, then took a cab to Jim and Linda's apartment uptown," he said, speaking of the Kriegsmanns. Linda was a fellow Greek-American, and she and Jim were my parents' first and longest-held friends. "Knowing Mom and all of you were anxiously waiting at Fort Lee, I thanked Jim and Linda for their continued friendship, took a taxi and eventually he dropped me close to GW Bridge. I went to the sidewalk of the bridge and walked to the NJ side of the bridge, where you guys were waiting, glad and thankful that myself and my family were fine."

After four planes were hijacked in the terrorist attacks of September 11, I was not surprised to never hear back about the job proofreading airline menus. However, by the next month, I was hired by barnesandnoble.com to proofread ebooks, a new fad in publishing that allowed people to read books on their Palm Pilots. It was a dream job. I got paid to read books all day in New York City.

I joined my father in the weekday commute to Manhattan. When I was growing up, my father had worked long hours and usually didn't have time to eat dinner with the family. Now, we sat together on the bus every morning. And every morning when the bus rounded the ramp toward the Lincoln Tunnel, I looked across the Hudson River and searched the Manhattan skyline. I had to ensure the Empire State Building was still there because I figured if terrorists were going to attack again, it would be the next to go. My father's calm demeanor on the day of the terrorist attacks had impacted me in such a way that I was never frightened going into the city, but everywhere I looked reminders lurked. Rifle-carrying, fatigue-wearing soldiers stood guard in the subways. Two beams of light representing the Twin Towers pierced the downtown skyline. Draped over the entryway of the Lincoln Tunnel was a banner that read "We Will Never Forget."

On the one-year anniversary of September 11, barnesandnoble.com set all the TVs in the office to broadcast the tribute. I remember name after name being read. I thought of people I knew who had lost family members and people I knew who were supposed to be in the World Trade Center that day but miraculously didn't go in to work that day. Coworkers told me stories of how from the Chelsea office they had a clear view of the atrocities happening further downtown.

Three years ago, I decided to put down roots in New York City, and my father came from Greece to help me look at apartments. While he was here, he asked that I go with him to the World Trade Center. He told me, "I wanted to see again the familiar World Trade Center site, albeit as an imaginary cemetery of 3000 people, to see the new 'Freedom Tower' and walk around silently and respectfully."

Now, fifteen years after September 11, I still work for Barnes & Noble, as an editor at its subsidiary book publishing company. I've had the privilege of editing books that recount the events of the terrorist attacks that day, and even got to meet Erik O. Ronningen, who was the last person to escape the South Tower before it collapsed and wrote about his experience in From the Inside Out.

My father and I were talking about September 11 and where our lives are now, and he gave me these pearls of wisdom: "Life is strange indeed. While you should work intelligently and hard, enjoying fully the 'ups,' you should also be prepared for the 'downs' in life, and the ongoing cynical world politics. Be confident to yourself and trust your ethics and values."

"Didyma, Get Up!"

By Chris Krimitsos, as told to Aliz Koletas

I remember 9/11 clear as day because Tuesday was my day off.

I was living on Long Island and my mom wakes up me and in Greek keeps yelling at me "didyma…get up, get up." I didn't understand why she was talking about twins since my family doesn't have twins. Once I turned on the TV, I saw the second Twin Tower getting hit and that's when it hit me what was happening. I immediately thought of my two cousins who worked in Manhattan. One cousin worked near Empire State Building and the other worked near the Financial District. We got really scared when the twin towers went down because that's when all communications ceased.

Then came the hardest part. We couldn't find my cousins. It was like the world was collapsing around us as the Twin Towers collapsed in NYC that day. Theio Kosta was worried about his son, my cousin Chris. "I'm going to go find my son. I don't care which roads are closed. I'm going to find my son." He didn't know that Chris was running across the 59th Street Bridge along with thousands of New Yorkers covered in soot- running because they didn't know if their bridge would get hit next. Running away from fear, running towards the unknown.

Eventually, my uncle found my cousin in Astoria over four hours later and he wouldn't let his son go when they finally reunited. I still get goosebumps thinking about it. My other cousin, Niko was Theio Giorgio's son, disappeared into radio silence. There's nothing you can do then but just pray and wait. Thankfully, Niko went with colleagues to Upper Manhattan and got in contact with us when communications cleared up. Our neighbor was a 9/11 firefighter and lost many friends in the attacks. He was never the same. He died a few years later, not directly from 9/11 but probably from a broken heart. He never talked about pulling people from the rubble or losing his friends, but you could see the pain etched on his eyes and he took that grief to the grave.

Living on Long Island I saw two things that stick out in my mind the most. One of those is the eerie silence when everything closed around us, like when the LI Expressway shut down and transportation just stopped. We were not used to seeing everything so dead. And then dealing with the aftermath: so many people in Long Island lost someone, it was like every neighborhood was in mourning because they had lost someone. And just one person affects so many others. Everyone knew someone who died in the attacks.

A few years later I was ready for a change of pace and moved to Florida. I've met so many people who moved here after 9/11 because they needed a change in their lives. But it was a change we could control, unlike how 9/11 transformed our lives.

Cathedral Connect's Big Fat Greek Fundraiser for Ground Zero Church

The group Cathedral Connect: a fun time for a good cause.

By Maria Margarites

When there's a good movie and a good cause linked by a common theme – in this case, Hellenism – it makes sense to put the two together.

That is exactly what Cathedral Connect (CC) did.

CC is a ministry for young adults that was formed in fall 2014 at the Holy Trinity Cathedral in New York City. The group's mission is to promote community development through various community outreach, philanthropic, spiritual, cultural, and social events. Since the group's launch, "Connectors" have grown from a room of ten to a lively organization.

The movie? That should be obvious: My Big Fat Greek Wedding 2, of course! The cause? The rebuilding of the St. Nicholas Greek Orthodox Church at the World Trade Center.

On March 24, CC sat more than 200 young adults in two movie theaters at the AMC-Loews Kips Bay in Manhattan for an early screening of My Big Fat Greek Wedding 2, the day before its nationwide premiere. The event was spearheaded by Connector Katie Artemas and Cathedral Connect leaders Christina Costas, Eva Grammatikaki, and Ioanna Tsakos. By making the movie premiere a fundraiser, more than $1,500 was raised to benefit the St. Nicholas National Shrine at the World Trade Center.

JOIN THE CAUSE

Other CC highlights over the past couple of years include a successful Christmas Coat Drive, where Connectors collected over ten boxes of coats that were given to a local NYC charity, regular post-coffee hour brunches, the organization and promotion of several Lenten lectures, a volunteer event at the Ronald McDonald house where Connectors prepared breakfast for the families staying at the house, a Lung Force walk fundraiser, and a picnic at Central Park.

In addition, CC has partnered up with the neighboring Annunciation Greek Orthodox Church's Young Professionals Group for two "Midnight Run" food and clothing drives. In partnership with the Hellenic American Leadership Council, Cathedral Connect has organized several "Kryfo Sxolio" (Secret School) on the Rocks Greek language learning series events where novice and native Greek language speakers met to learn and chat in Greek.

CC has great potential to grow as a fun organization, but also as an organization that provides value to the community by giving back to the church. One goal that Connectors are particularly passionate about is helping with restoration and upkeep needed around the Cathedral's facilities. Connectors are currently working with members of the greater Cathedral community to understand how their talents and abilities can be leveraged to make a difference.

CC invites those that are interested to join our monthly meetings, which usually take place every first Monday of the month at 7:30PM in the Cathedral Boardroom.

More info is available at Cathedral Connect's Facebook page, or by emailing inquiries to connect@thecathedralnyc.org.

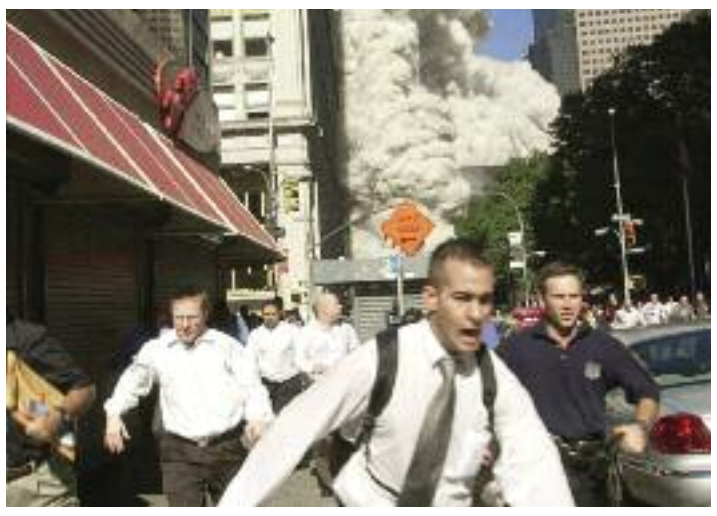
Maria Margarties is an account executive at Lippe Taylor in New York City.

A Seattleite's Time to Come Home

By Elizabeth M. Economou

A native Seattleite and New York City transplant from 1997-2007, I was three months into a new job in Midtown Manhattan as a publicist to a classical music producer and conductor on that fateful day. As I emerged from the subway platform that morning, silvery plumes of smoke billowed manically above in the clear blue sky. But in classic work-mode fashion, I paid little attention; I was too preoccupied with getting ready for the busy concert season ahead in Carnegie Hall.

When I reached my office, I learned that a plane had crashed into the North Tower of the World Trade Center, a few miles away. Minutes later, a second jet bound for Los Angeles had slammed into the South Tower.



Seconds later my boss, the conductor, e-mailed me from his home; he had not yet heard.

"Turn on the news," I urged. "We've been attacked."

At once, I realized the enormity of the situation, but felt frozen. That something so heinous could happen to thousands of innocent civilians was unfathomable, surreal. What to do? Who to call? Where to go? It was all a blur.

Pandemonium gripped Gotham like a horror film, only this time it was real. TV networks were reporting that people were plunging to their deaths. With every vivid detail, my urgency to flee the madness overwhelmed me. I remember flying down twelve flights of stairs, but the rest is hazy like the East River shrouded in morning fog.

Hastening towards my apartment on the Upper East Side in strappy sandals, I watched as throngs of resilient New Yorkers trudged like refugees across the 59th Street Bridge, a span connecting Manhattan to Queens, while fighter jets hovered over the Big Apple sky – a stark reminder that the world as we'd known it, in an instant, had changed forever.

My Greek immigrant parents, who witnessed the atrocities of war firsthand on their respective Aegean islands of Aegina and Leros during World War II, never imagined their children would live in a time when terrorism – yes, terrorism – would loom large and ominously.

"America the free," my father, a Truman Democrat, would proudly proclaim with a gleam in his eye. His patriotic words were now rendered meaningless. "Come home," he pleaded over the telephone.

With the newly imposed flight ban, the Emerald City seemed like a world away. And for the first time ever, along with legions of others, I was trapped on Manhattan, when all I yearned for was to be home surrounded by my family, where I felt safe.

For three nights, I slept on the bathroom floor in a fetal position as far from the windows as possible uncertain about the immediate future. Thank God, my roommate, a commodities trader at the New York Board of Trade (NYBOT), which was demolished on 9-11, happened to be on vacation.

I didn't lose anyone close to me, but an acquaintance of mine lost her brother, and another woman I know lost her husband.

Three months later my father passed away. Mom said he couldn't accept the fact that the United States had been attacked, his emotional state declining along with his diminished physical health.

I remained in New York for several years. And vigilance was now my new MO as fear sidled next to me on airplanes, subways, buses, and taxicabs.

Years later, my husband George and I were headed uptown on the No. 6 train after shopping at the mega J&R Superstore on Park Row in Lower Manhattan.

Somewhere along 59th and 68th streets, the jam-packed subway came to screeching halt. We and fellow straphangers stood drenched in our own perspiration. It was August in the city, after all.

Terror, meanwhile, coursed through my veins. And I thought the worst: that our time was up. I looked at George though I didn't say anything. "We'll be OK," he said firmly, as he reached for my hand.

Twenty minutes or so later, we started moving again. Someone had activated the emergency break, we were told.

I breathed a deep sigh of relief. Still, I had aged a lifetime.

And I could hear my father's voice – it was time to come home.

Elizabeth M. Economou, a former professor, writes on health, real estate, and higher education at elizabetheconomou.com.