

9/17/01

Monday. 7:45 am. I wake up. I don't leave for work 'til 9:30. I pin on my red, white and blue ribbon.

I pick up the New York Post at the newsstand downstairs

DAILY NEWS: Photo: President Bush
Headline: **CRUSADE**

"We will rid the world of evildoers."

NEW YORK TIMES: **NATION SHIFTS ITS FOCUS TO
WALL STREET AS A MAJOR TEST
OF ATTACK'S AFTERMATH**

Since I'm running late, I decide not to walk. Still I'm not entirely at ease riding the subway right now. A man on the train, tall, thin, glasses, dreadlocks. Light-skinned black. Wearing a stylish business suit and carrying a leather briefcase. I catch him looking at my ribbon then over at a man next to me, who sports a flag pin on his lapel. Amazingly, not many people have any ribbons.

The black man reaches into his pocket and pulls out a pin with a ribbon attached. He fingers it gently. Looks around. Keeps it in his palm. It seems like he's not sure whether to put it on. Too Patriotic for our cynical NYC crowd?

In the building lobby, there's a basket of red, white and blue ribbons. Security is very tight. This time I remember my ID. On the 5th floor, I greet people in the hallway. I've forgotten my key and have to call security to open my door. I wait in the 5th floor lobby for 15 minutes. No make-up. Jeans. Sunken eyes. People pass me by, but I won't let them catch my eye. I just sit there.

I turn on my laptop and check e-mail. Then I call my client in LA. He has a friend who works for the Port Authority. Saw him a month ago. Now he's missing.

I bury myself in work. Print out some creative briefs. At the printer, Todd and Jerry are talking with Audrey. They're safe; they were volunteering at Ground Zero last week and I had left them a message to let them know they could shower at my place or sleep or whatever. I hadn't heard from them. I had even called Audrey on Saturday to see if she'd heard from them.

Todd and Jerry both come up to hug me. Audrey tells them I'd been at the Armory. Then they started talking about their experiences. Automatically I shut down. I can't take it and walk away while Jerry is in mid-sentence. Back in my office, I shut the door.

Christine pops her head in. “Hey, I heard you volunteered. How are you?” I burst into tears, say, “I can’t talk now,” I blurt out. She backs out, looking like she’s been caught by surprise and closes the door.

Audrey stops by and I tell her that I can’t be around people right now. That I don’t want to hear any more stories. She’s incredibly understanding. Tells me to do what I want. Stay here. Go home. Whatever.

I stay sequestered in my office ‘til 12:30 and head down to the fourth floor with Christine to a meeting. I stop by the cafeteria for a banana for lunch. Our team is gathered around a conference table. I don’t even ask how anybody is. I can’t. Our producer opens the meeting with a recommendation that we go around the table and talk about our week. What we did. How we feel. My stomach sinks.

Al, an account executive, talks of how he took his video recorder downtown to make a mini documentary. He boasts of how he got as far as Canal Street. Margarita relays how her asthma so bad that she and her husband drove to Chicago to escape the air. Before the next person could begin, Margarita notices my distraught look and asks me if I’m okay.

“No.” I mouth back. I stand up and walk out, bursting into tears as I go. “I don’t want to talk about this. I can’t.”

The nurse’s office is nearby, but no one’s there. She’s in a group counseling session they offered for people. I wash my face in the bathroom and return to my office and lock the door.

I conduct all business for the afternoon from my office. E-mail co-workers two offices away. Check e-mail. Check voice mail.

Michelle, an Armory volunteer calls my office. She’s upset. On Sunday, when she showed up to volunteer, the vibe had changed. People were getting territorial. Authoritative. Petty. “Be glad you didn’t go,” she said.

When she arrived at Pier 94 on Monday, she was initially turned away. Monique, from the mayor’s office told her she was being selfish. That other people needed to volunteer.

It seems that Simon and Michael — co-volunteers from the Armory — have the same birthday, so we fellow volunteers were going to meet up later at the Mercury Bar on 33rd and 3rd.

While I’m on the phone, Audrey pops her head in to tell me that we need to swap out some imagery on one of our web sites. It’s a picture of a construction site, with rubble strewn everywhere. It’s too sensitive. I instruct Alex, our art director,

to find new visuals. She finds them, but the captions don't work now. I can't even begin to think, so I ask our writer, Keith, to put together some recommendations.

To keep myself busy, I also search our other sites for any sensitive imagery. I key in "Pentagon" and up came a bundle of e-mails discussing the World Trade center/Pentagon tragedy. Some of it was insensitive. I copy the URLs and e-mail Audrey with my concerns.

By 5:30, we've sent off new imagery and captions and I get out of the building as fast as I can. I walk home, back through Grand Central. I pick up my dry cleaning and stop by the AT&T Wireless store to buy a cell phone. Now's the time to get one. Not surprisingly, there's been a huge bump in business since Tuesday.

At Shakespeare Books, I pick up a children's book for Simon, who's heading back to Australia on Wednesday. He's been volunteering since Wednesday and has become somewhat of a celebrity back home. He'd told me a few days ago that he'd written a few books, one of which is a children's book. The employee, after hearing my story, is incredibly helpful and leads me directly to the children's section. He pulls down a beautifully rendered book, "My New York." It's a children's book on New York City, obviously. It has some great folk art drawings of the city. Twin Towers included. I buy one for myself as well. I inscribe the front: "Simon, You're a true blue New Yorker. Yeah, I'm talkin' to you!"

I'm completely drained. Exhausted. And look horrible. But I still want to meet up with the other volunteers. I call Phyllis, the volunteer who lives upstairs and we head up to the bar.

Simon. Phyllis. Jon. Michael. Kris Ann. Michelle. Their friends. In all, we number more than 10 people. Simon loved the book. Everybody ended up signing the page that showed the NY harbor and the Twin Towers. He has me sign it again: "To Simon, our tower of strength. Come back when we've rebuilt."

Gwen doesn't show up. She, too, has been turned away at the Pier. She was to have quit her job to volunteer full time, so we don't know how that turned out.

Michael, from Galway, tells of his day at the Pier. He mentioned to a Red Cross worker that a bunch of volunteers were getting together and were going to keep in touch. Cynically, she tells him that it'll never happen. People talk about keeping in touch, but they never do. He is indignant and makes us promise not to let that happen.

John run out and buys a couple of chocolate rolls and candles and we sang happy birthday to Simon and Michael. At the bar, while I'm getting another drink, I meet two Swiss men who were displaced from their downtown apartments.

Kris Ann, another volunteer, hands me a flyer. A benefit on Friday for one of the Fire Companies that had lost 9 of their 11 company members. We'll all be there! As tired as I am, I'm completely energized being around these people. But after two pints of cider and many hugs, I walk downtown at midnight.

I fall asleep in my clothes, with the lights and radio on again. It's 1:30. I am not looking forward to work.