

HUMOR

What's so funny?

True stories of healing and laughter

Let me start by saying that nothing is remotely funny about thousands of innocent people dying. Nothing is funny about the senseless evil of terrorism or the unceasing sorrow of families and friends. Surely nothing is funny for a humorist like me to say right now.

Or is there?
I'm originally from New Jersey, so I know at least a half-dozen people who regularly do business in the World Trade Center but were lucky enough to be elsewhere that morning as well as another half-dozen who live or work nearby. I spent that horrible Tuesday anxiously making frantic phone calls all day.

But even in the midst of panic, at times I couldn't help but laugh, and I thank God for it, or else I might have lost my mind. The situation wasn't funny at all, but sometimes people can't help but be, particularly in an emergency.

I come by this will to laugh genetically. I call my aunt to make sure my cousin who lives in Greenwich Village is OK, and what do I hear in the background? Uncle Joe playing the piano. This is a prime example of the Acito Family Emergency Response System. In case of disaster, lift cover and play.

I read an e-mail from a gay couple in downtown Manhattan forced to evacuate their building. As their apartment fills with smoke and debris falls outside their window, they quickly grab emergency supplies: a first-aid kit, flashlights, batteries, a change of clothes and a wheel of brie.

A friend here in Portland gets a call from his parents even though they are nowhere near New York City. "We just wanted to let you know we're all right," they say from their Tus-

THE GOSPEL ACCORDING TO MARC

by Marc Acito



can retreat. He is relieved, of course, because whenever disaster strikes New York the next thing he always thinks of is the scenic hill towns of Tuscany.

I talk to a woman whose son works on Wall Street and had been frantic with worry until he called. "How are you feeling now?" I ask her a couple of days later.

"Pissed off," my friend barks. I respond gently that lots of people feel the same way right now. "Yeah," she says, "and I had tickets to *The Producers* this week."

I watch the news and hear the report of the woman who, upon waking to learn her entire lower body has been reconstructed by surgeons, whispers to the doctor, "Does that mean my ass is smaller?"

I get a call from a Los Angeles friend who's stranded in Manhattan. We talk about the firefighters we see on television and what heroes they are. "Absolutely," he says, "and they're such hunks, too, aren't they?"

Admit it. Surely he's not the only gay man in the country who, for a split second, forgot his grief, his shock and his rage and admired

the broad shoulders of some big fireman. I understand lots of people aren't ready to laugh yet—some aren't even ready to cry—but I firmly believe the ability to laugh even when the world is falling apart around you is as stirring a testament to the strength of the human spirit as any.

And if ever there was a time we needed to laugh, now is it. What could be funnier than the sight of Jerry Falwell of the Moronic Majority telling Pat Robertson of the Un-Christian Coalition, "The pagans and the abortionists and the feminists and the gays and lesbians...I point the finger in their face and say, 'You helped this happen.'"

I laugh hardest at these two clowns because they're not worthy of my shock or dismay. I'd love to point a finger in Falwell's doughy face myself, and you all know which finger.

If we deny ourselves laughter and joy, then our enemies, be they Falwell or some terrorist, have already won whatever war they've waged against us.

I have to laugh because the Red Cross not only refuses the blood of any man who has had

gay sex in the past 20 years but also doesn't want the blood of any woman who's had sex with a gay or bisexual man in the past 20 years. So I get an angry phone call from a female friend who has to leave the line at her church blood drive because 17 years ago I slept with her college boyfriend.

I have to laugh because able-bodied gay men and lesbians are denied the opportunity to serve in the military while my friend's 70-year-old father has just been called up by the Coast Guard to protect the coast of New Jersey.

If I didn't laugh, I'd be crying, and I can only cry so much.

I'm reminded of a time when a friend of mine suffering from AIDS, bedridden and mourning for his own life, smiled at me

through tears and said, "On the plus side, I won't have to worry about saving for retirement." He got better through a combination therapy of really good drugs and really bad jokes. The sicker the humor, the better he felt.

I'm absolutely certain that humor kept him alive. For where

there's humor, there's hope. We're going to need a lot of both in the months to come.

And that, my friends, is *The Gospel According to Marc*. ☐

MARC ACITO extends his condolences to all those who lost loved ones in this terrible tragedy. He can be reached at marcacito@home.com.

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