

Survivors of 9/11 share soul-stirring experiences

Guides relive horrific day

By VERENA DOBNIK
Associated Press

NEW YORK — For almost a decade after her brother was killed on 9/11, Jeanmarie Hargrave avoided the World Trade Center. Being there was “too emotional, too sad.”

But five years ago, she tried a different way of grieving. She joined a group of about 800 people touched personally by the attacks who now lead tours of the Sept. 11 memorial plaza.

The guides, who include attack survivors, rescue and recovery workers and people who lost a loved one, give visitors the soul-stirring experience of walking through the rebuilt complex with people who came face to face with the attack and its aftermath.

And in return, guides like Hargrave, of Maplewood, New Jersey, get an emotional outlet.

At first, she said, “I had a very difficult time telling my personal story. I would cry through the whole thing.” But that soon changed.

“These people can cry with you and laugh with you. And that makes it much easier,” said Hargrave, whose brother, T.J. Hargrave, worked in the twin towers at the financial services company Cantor Fitzgerald.

The daily, 75-minute tours are organized by the 9/11 Tribute Center, a nonprofit created by the September 11 Families Association, one of the groups representing people who lost a relative in the attacks.

After leaving the Tribute Center’s gallery, which contains artifacts, images and oral histories of the attacks, the tour groups visit a memorial to lost firefighters on the side of a Liberty Street firehouse that was nearly destroyed in the attacks.

Deeply personal detail

Two guides then lead each group through the World Trade Center’s tree-filled plaza to the two memorial pools, explaining — often in deeply personal detail — what happened on the day of the attacks.

“We opened the office door, and the hall was a wall of black smoke,” guide Leokadia Glogowski told a group of two dozen visitors on one recent tour. She worked as an engineer on the 82nd floor of the north tower, and described how the building swayed when it was struck by an airliner.

“Somebody yelled, ‘Get out, right now! Get out!’” she told her group. She said she prayed before plunging into the smoke, feeling her way to the stairwell and walking the 82 stories to the ground.

Rose Starosta, a tourist from Saskatchewan, said hearing



AP Photo/Bebeto Matthews

Jean Nebbia, a schoolteacher from Oakland, N.J., talks with visitors to the Sept. 11 memorial site in New York. Nebbia serves as a volunteer tour guide, organized by the private nonprofit 9/11 Tribute Center, to tell tours about her brother Steven Schlag, a partner at Cantor Fitzgerald, who was killed in the Sept. 11 attacks on the World Trade Center.

that first-person account made her visit to the site far more moving and intimate.

“It doesn’t really hit you until somebody says she was afraid, but determined to get

down,” she said, her voice cracking with emotion. “When you hear someone’s story, you really feel it inside, and it’s totally different from just coming and looking at the buildings and memorial pools.”

The Tribute Center operates separately from the official National September 11 Memorial & Museum, which controls the plaza, the two giant memorial pools and an underground museum. It runs about six tours a day, at a cost of \$25 per person.

No scripts

The tours aren’t scripted, though the guides are trained in a series of workshops conducted in collaboration with the storytelling organization The Moth. Tribute volunteers, staff and story coaches work to craft each narration.

Jean Nebbia, a schoolteacher from Oakland, New Jersey, said that like Hargrave, she avoided the World Trade Center site for years before volunteering as a guide last June.

Now she tells the story of her brother Steven Schlag, who also worked at Cantor Fitzgerald.

“I had never really done anything as far as 9/11. I always had this heavy load that weighed me down, but I wasn’t ready till this past spring. I realized that I need to do some-

thing,” she said. “I don’t want to stop talking about what happened that day, and this gives me a voice. I am just so grateful that I’m meeting these people and that they’re willing to listen.”

Closest to son

Another guide, retired physician Barry Aron, 75, travels from Maryland for a day each month to lead two tours.

He ends each tour at the spot where the name of his son, Joshua Todd Aron, is engraved on the bronze parapet surrounding the north tower memorial pool.

The new World Trade Center is “the place where I feel closest to Josh,” he said.

He also leads his groups to a more hopeful spot — to the “Survivor Tree,” a stalwart pear that emerged from the fiery rubble, clinging to life.

“I point out to people, ‘You see the burned bark from 9/11? — and the new growth?’” he says. “It’s a symbol of our perseverance in the face of adversity.”

Glogowski’s presentation is tinged with hope, too. She tells her tour group that as she fled Manhattan after the attack, she encountered a saving grace: a girl handing out paper towels to ash-smearing survivors so they could wipe their faces.

“Goodness and love always win,” she said.

After 15 years, the last artifacts of 9/11 are finally put to rest

New York shared the relics of terror

By ADAM GELLER
Associated Press

NEW YORK — Behind the barbed wire, the minivan’s busted windows and crumpled roof hint at its story. But fork-lifted to this windblown spot on the John F. Kennedy International Airport tarmac, between a decommissioned 727 and an aircraft hangar, it’s doubtful passing drivers notice it at all.

In the long struggle with the memories of 9/11, though, the van’s solitary presence here marks a small but significant transition point.

Tons of wreckage — twisted steel beams, chunks of concrete smelling of smoke, a crushed fire engine, a dust-covered airline slipper — were salvaged from the World Trade Center site for preservation after the 2001 terrorist attacks. Now, 15 years later, this van from a government agency motor pool likely sheltered in a garage beneath the complex, is the last artifact without a resting place.

When the van is claimed it will fulfill a pledge that, to move beyond 9/11 without losing sight of it, New York would

share relics of that terror, along with the tales of sacrifice and fear that come with them. The decision to give away pieces of wreckage has been praised and criticized over the years. But its impact is undeniable.

More than 2,600 artifacts have gone to 1,585 fire and police departments, schools and museums, and other nonprofit organizations in every state and at least eight other countries.

“They are the relics of the destruction and they have the same power in the same way as medieval relics that have the power of the saints,” said Harriet Senie, author of “Memorials to Shattered Myths: Vietnam to 9/11.”

An architect combed site

After the attacks, it wasn’t at all clear what would happen to the wreckage. The Port Authority of New York & New Jersey, the Trade Center’s owner, dispatched an architect to comb the site, saving a fraction of the material, which was sent to JFK’s empty Hangar 17.

A judge determined the artifacts could be donated to those who promised to care for them. But where to begin?

“It was piles and piles, probably my height or higher, of steel beams,” says Amy Passiak, the archivist hired to catalog the



Jetta Fraser/The Columbus Dispatch

A beam from the destroyed World Trade Center buildings, part of the 9/11 Memorial near the Veterans’ Pavilion at the Fulton County Fair in Wauseon, Ohio.

artifacts, recalling the first time she walked into the hangar in 2010. Passiak, a high school senior in Michigan at the time of the attacks, had been working as an intern at New York’s 9/11 museum, but says she was still unprepared for the scene.

“I remember going home that day and just being exhausted, just from being there a few hours, just being emotionally exhausted and not being able to comprehend the amount of work that was going to go into the process.”

As word spread that the Port Authority was giving the material away, requests poured in. Through August, it had distributed 2,629 artifacts.

Many went to fire departments, local governments and organizations in the New York area with direct ties to those who perished.

“That’s where the DNA is,” said John Hodge of the Stephen Siller Tunnels to Towers Foundation, named for his cousin, a New York firefighter killed on 9/11. In late July, the foundation claimed an elevator motor from the Trade Center, a piece of the parking structure, and a portion of a broadcast antenna that crowned the complex.

“Neither my cousin or anybody else from Squad 1 was ever found, but it’s in that steel,” Hodge said.

Adopted artifacts

But for many of the people and groups that adopted artifacts, the loss was more abstract.

Heath Satow, a sculptor in California hired to design a 9/11 memorial for the plaza fronting Rosemead’s city offices, recalls awkwardly scanning a digital catalog showing beams available from the Trade Center. But hundreds of hours creating the memorial — a 10-foot beam cradled by hands of chrome, the palms and fingers formed from 2,976 interlocking birds representing individual victims — left a deep impression.

“Every individual was attended to,” said Satow, his voice breaking. “I just was totally unprepared for it. But when you spend all that time seeing it as individuals it will just wreck you.”

At Flour Bluff Junior High School in Corpus Christi, Texas, students from an officer training program stand guard each September alongside Trade Center steel displayed near the cafeteria. Bruce Chaney, the naval science instructor who applied for the artifacts, brings another, smaller piece to his classes.

The artifact is “twisted and somewhat burned. It’s not pretty. I’m hoping it will make them think as they’re growing up, that they have to pay attention to their past,” Chaney said.

Fears of terrorism

But 15 years after September 11, memories of the attacks are set against continued fears of terrorism.

“We just don’t know where the events of 9/11 have led us,” said Rick Sluder, fire chief in Wauseon, Ohio, which obtained a Trade Center beam and, together with neighboring departments, built a memorial at the Fulton County Fairgrounds.

“A lot of people are looking at this as, is this the point of downfall or the point at which we rose above the rest, the point of resiliency?” Sluder said.

By early this year, there was little left at Hangar 17, Passiak said. Items like police cruisers, whose purpose that day were clear, found takers. But unmarked vehicles, anonymous but for their place in the wreckage, were initially passed over.

When the Port Authority shuttered the artifact program in August, officials moved the only remaining artifact — a white Dodge Caravan — to the tarmac. It, too, is likely to go soon, to a group of officials who will not identify until its application has been approved.

Passiak, who recently moved to Michigan to start a job at an art museum, said some day she’d like to take a road trip, stopping to see where the artifacts have found homes.

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