

MEMORIES

Continued from A1

She had to repeat the figure twice.

"It was amazing," Whitney said. "We came together. We were all just devastated. How can you have any petty squabbles with anyone when you see something like that? So many people wanted to volunteer."

Two decades later, it's that community spirit that helps Whitney balance the sadness of her memories of what she, along with so many millions of Americans, saw that day.

She wasn't born when President John F. Kennedy was assassinated on Nov. 22, 1963.

And although she remembers Jan. 28, 1986, the day the space shuttle Challenger exploded, Whitney said 9/11 will always be the day that stands out.

She was an adult that day, and a parent.

"I remember being fully aware that these were parents and moms and dads and aunts and uncles," she said.

"When you're a parent you understand better the devastation that's happening before your eyes."

Bill Mitchell, retired teacher

Sept. 11, 2001, was a Tuesday, and every Tuesday Bill Mitchell played basketball at 6 a.m. before heading to his classroom at Baker Middle School, where he taught social studies.

As the time for school approached, he headed to get his mail at the school office.

"It's just as clear as if it was yesterday," he said.

Dana Blankenship, who taught science at BMS, met Mitchell at the stairs.

"He said 'It's Pearl Harbor all over again. Turn your TV on.'"

Mitchell did, and watched the chaos in New York City, a place he'd visited several years before with a group of middle school students.

And on that day, a Tuesday ingrained in so many American memories, he would stand before multiple classes.

"I remember thinking the lesson plan for today has changed drastically. It became a question-and-answer day," he said.

Mitchell remembers two reactions from his students. First, they were picking up — and absorbing — the anxiety

of the adults around them.

Second, they wanted answers.

"Their need to want definitive answers of what's happening and what were the consequences. And there were no answers," Mitchell said.

He did have one truth to offer.

"I told them things are going to change," he said.

He has not yet returned to New York City.

Grant Johnson

Johnson, now 32, was one of the seventh grade students in Mitchell's classroom that morning.

He remembers watching news coverage of the attacks on TV before he left for school.

When he got to BMS, Johnson said students, rather than dividing into groups of friends as they normally did, were congregated in one large mass, all of them, he said, "talking about what we had seen."

Johnson said Mitchell helped him, and his classmates, understand the historic nature of what had happened — and indeed, what was still happening as they sat in their desks.

"I think Mr. Mitchell really recognized the gravity of that event," Johnson said. "I don't think we, as students, understood the full magnitude of what was happening."

Johnson said the sober expressions on the faces of his teachers and other adults was at least as compelling, in terms of the significance of that day, as anything else.

"To see a building collapse, that's pretty startling," he said.

Johnson chuckles as he admits that he has a "terrible memory."

But he also understands that one reason his recollections aren't as vivid as they might be is that the situation changed so rapidly that morning — first the views of the towers on fire, then their collapse.

He's still grateful for Mitchell for helping students deal with events that were unprecedented in their lives.

"I think he put it in context for us," Johnson said. "He realized this was a tremendous moment."

Tabor Clarke

Clarke, a Baker City jewelry store owner, was in an unusual, and troubling, situation on the morning of Sept. 11, 2001.

His father and mother, F.B.



Greg Derr/The Patriot Ledger-TNS

Flags placed on the Braintree, Massachusetts, Town Common in honor of those killed on 9/11.

and Zona Clarke of Baker City, were in an airliner.

And in those anxious minutes, when it was not clear how many planes might have been hijacked, and from which airports, this seemed a precarious position indeed for worried relatives such as Clarke and his brother, Nelson, who also lives in Baker City.

Tabor Clarke was at home that morning when his wife, DeeDee, heard something on the radio about a plane crashing into one of the Twin Towers.

They turned on their TV.

"There it was," Tabor said. At that moment he didn't know exactly where his parents were — or even whether they were on the ground in Illinois, where they had traveled to visit F.B. Clarke's sister, or already airborne.

As it turned out, the latter was the case.

The Clarkes were en route from Chicago to St. Louis when the plane's captain told passengers about what by then was believed to be a planned terrorist attack. The flight was diverted from St. Louis to Wichita, Kansas.

Back in Baker City, Tabor and Nelson learned about 10 a.m., from a phone call from their father, that their parents were safe on the ground.

Kerry McQuisten, Baker City mayor

McQuisten submitted her recollections by email:

"I was living near Seattle at the time. I remember my mom calling me and telling me to turn on the TV. It was hard to believe what I was seeing. I started flipping through all of the news channels that were live from around Asia, and nothing is censored there in terms of footage, so I saw some scenes that definitely were not captured on mainstream media here.

"I have friends who ended up traveling to be on the scene

during cleanup, and search and rescue. One of them developed severe lifelong health issues from breathing whatever was in that dust. The loss of life and other damage to people extended far beyond what happened that morning, and continued for years afterward. The only bright spot was that for a little while, people everywhere came together to support each other, and remembered what America felt like."

Jamie Kassien

Kassien, who grew up in New York, was about three hours from Manhattan, at a friend's house and watching NBC's "Today" morning show, when he saw video of the first tower in flames.

Initially, he said, the presumption was that this was an accident, not a terrorist attack.

But Kassien continued to watch. And he remembers how somber Matt Lauer, the "Today" show host, looked as he interrupted the program, his hand to his earpiece, to tell viewers that a second plane had slammed into the other tower.

"Instantly my stomach dropped," Kassien said.

He had two friends who worked in the North Tower. One worked on the 82nd floor, about 10 stories below where the plane struck.

Kassien later learned that that friend had missed work that day because he had attended a party the night before and had a hangover.

His other friend, whose office was near the bottom of the North Tower, also was supposed to be at work that morning but his cab was

caught in traffic.

Kassien said he started trying to call many of his friends and relatives who were supposed to be in Manhattan that day. Cell service was sketchy, and in many cases he wasn't able to reach his loved ones.

He continued to watch TV coverage.

He watched the South Tower collapse, followed, 29 minutes later, by the North Tower.

"I was sitting in the kitchen of my friend's house in complete and utter disbelief," Kassien said.

Lori Lien

Lien submitted her memories by email:

"My husband and I had only been home a few days from having our second child at the local St. Elizabeth Hospital. On the morning of 9/11, we were up early with baby Eli and my mom called to alert us to what was happening. Turning on the TV, I could not grasp the evil that would inspire the events unfolding before us. I was holding the most precious gift life can offer anyone — our brand new baby boy. I remember thinking that the world that I grew up in would never be the reality for my two young children. Holding my kids throughout that day, gave me immense peace that my family was safe and at the same time, immense fear that I may not be able to protect them in a world where events like this can happen on any given Tuesday."

Mark Bennett, Baker County commissioner

On Sept. 11, 2001, Bennett was the county's emergency management director and planning director.

He was at his ranch near Unity, getting ready to drive the 50 or so miles to his office at the Courthouse in Baker City, when he got a phone call from Grant Young, then the assistant planning director.

"The nation's under attack," Bennett recalls Young telling him.

In those first few confusing hours, before the geographic scale of the threat to the country was clear, Bennett said federal and state officials were

trying to get in touch with all county emergency management directors.

At one point, he recalls, there was a call to "lock down" all airports, including a privately owned landing strip near Richland.

By mid-morning it was obvious that there was no significant risk to Baker County, Bennett said.

At that point his role became not so much official as that of a citizen, watching and pondering the situation like his friends and neighbors.

"I just remember the shock," Bennett said.

Gina Perkins

Perkins submitted her memories by email to the Herald:

"The strongest memory of what our experience was on September 11, is the complete normalcy in which the day began. We lived far from town and our kids always got up early to be ready for the bus. I remember them finishing breakfast with our two youngest sitting on the couch with their coats on watching a little TV before it was time to go. It was tuned into the news. And then the unthinkable happened right before our eyes.

"My husband and I wondered if we should allow the kids to go to school (which we did). So unsure of what might happen, I went to the grocery store to pick up some extra things — just in case — and I remember the utter silence in the store and nervous glances between customers who were obviously worried and scared. Me, too.

"A couple of days later when things were in the midst of turmoil, I remember attending a football game in Unity, literally next to a cow pasture, and how everything was so peaceful. It was very hard to imagine the suffering happening on the other side of our country. Flags were everywhere, including in the backs of pickups and on cars in the parking lot.

"What seemed to stand out the most was the noise of the kids playing and parents cheering seemed far away as thoughts drifted, again to what else might happen."

VISITORS

Continued from A1

support from the county through the lodging tax.

"That would be a total miscommunication that we are trying to stop them and I think it's really important they will continue, it's just going to continue in the right fashion and the right format and that's where it's at," Bennett said.

But Bennett said he believes the visitors center contract should deal with operation of the center and not other tasks, including managing events.

Nichols agreed with Bennett that although community

events are important, they should be overseen by their current sponsors.

"I agree with that, it makes perfect sense and we shouldn't have events being handled by whoever gets this contract with visitors services," Nichols said. "Events should be handled by, and this is not just my idea but multiple people, that the one that has the event should be responsible for that event."

Bennett said he doesn't think it's appropriate to include language in the new visitors center contract that requires the contractor, in addition to operating the center, to manage events.

"There's multiple applicants and what if the people

that are great visitors center people aren't capable of managing an event?" Bennett said.

Harvey, though, contends that including event management in the new visitors center contract is important to formalize what has happened for many years, including the Chamber's management of Miners Jubilee.

He acknowledged that event management wasn't mentioned in the previous visitors center contract.

"It didn't have to be because they were already doing the service, it was being provided for the last several years so we didn't think to put it in before because they were already doing it," Harvey said, referring to the Chamber.



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New At The Baker County Library

Patrons can reserve materials in advance online or by calling 541-523-6419.

Baker County Library's new additions include 15 new bestsellers, four new movies, 20 new children's books, and 125 other new books, including 103 that are available online. See everything new this week to Baker County Library District at wowbrary.org. Materials featured, and in library collection, does not indicate endorsement or approval of contents by the library. Selections are based on factors such as demand, public interest, diversity of viewpoint, community relevance, and others.

FICTION

- "The Guide," Peter Heller
- "Lightning Strike," William Kent Krueger
- "The Love Songs of W.E.B. Du Bois," Honoree Fanonne Jeffers.
- "Ridgeline," Michael Punke
- "A Slow Fire Burning," Paula Hawkins
- "Velvet Was the Night," Silvia Moreno-Garcia

NONFICTION

- "Unsettled : What Climate Science Tells Us, What It Doesn't, and Why It Matters," Steven E. Koonin
- "Unwinding Anxiety: New Science Shows How to Break the Cycles of Worry and Fear to Heal Your Mind,"

Judson Brewer

- "We Are What We Eat: A Slow Food Manifesto," Alice Waters
- "Whale Day and Other Poems," Billy Collins
- "W1nning : The Unforgiving Race to Greatness," Tim S. Grover
- "The Woman They Could Not Silence : One Woman, Her Incredible Fight For Freedom, and the Men Who Tried to Make Her Disappear," Kate Moore

MOVIES

- "12 Mighty Orphans" (Drama)
- "In the Heights" (Musical)
- "Peter Rabbit 2: The Runaway" (Family)

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