

Memories of September 11th Past, Present, and

Jerry Krase (September 16, 2009)



Every year around 9/11 I go out in my neighborhood of Park Slope, Brooklyn and retrace my steps (and re-photograph) as I walked about in 2001 looking at how ordinary people visibly responded to the murder of almost three thousand people in and around the World Trade Center when the Twin Towers fell. This is the second of my "Memories of September 11th Past, Present, and" that I have offered here on I-Italy and I will repeat this on every 9/11 anniversary.

Today is September 11, 2009. Eight Years Later and still America has not come to terms with what happened to us and what we did to others as a consequence. I have entered here some of what I wrote immediately after the attack. In addition are some of the hundreds of photos I took in my Park Slope neighborhood a few days after 9/11 and which was misinterpreted by many as simple patriotism as opposed to thoughtful commemoration of the victims and sympathy for friends and family.



On the evening of 9/11, 2001 I received the following message from my niece:

Subj: Is Everyone Safe????

Date: 9/11/01 5:37:29 PM Eastern Daylight Time

From: (Liz) To: (Uncle Johnny), (Uncle Jerry), (Kristen Krase), (Katherine Krase), (Aunt Maryann), (Aunt Suzanne)

I don't know where everyone works. Can someone please check in with me and let me know our family is all safe and accounted for. Thank you. Love Liz

I immediately sent Liz a note and the next day I sent out my own message in the early evening to everyone in my address book and to all the professional association list services to which I subscribed. Here it is:

Subj: Re: The View from Brooklyn, NYC

We live in Brooklyn but the smoke from the fires and dust from the debris coated the neighborhood and we had to close all the windows and people were wearing dust masks on the street. My family is fine but there is so much horror. I spent the day with my three daughters and two grandsons. My wife worked at one of the hospitals receiving some of the bodies and triaged patients. I and my daughters went to the local hospital to give blood but there were so many people who came to contribute their blood that we were told to come back the next day. I have asked everyone to give blood and say prayers. I will go into the college today and see if I can do something meaningful. I am worried about inter-group problems in the city and especially at the university where students had been at each other's throats over Middle Eastern issues. Jerry

The message continued: I decided to play squash today (September 12, 2001) as I usually do on Wednesday mornings and forgot that when I take the subway there is a point en route which has(d) such a wonderful view of the NYC skyline and the twin towers. As we approached the Smith and Ninth Street Station which reputedly is the world's highest subway station I moved to the window and almost simultaneously, and in total silence, people got out of their seats and moved to one side of the car. It was the most quiet time I have ever heard on a NYC subway car. I will not take any pictures of any of this as I've already seen too much. (I kept this promise by not venturing to the WTC until some years later but instead focused on how ordinary people responded to the tragedy with their own powerful messages. The photo below of the approach to Smith and (th St was taken some months after 9/11)

In response to my message I received hundreds of responses expressing various degrees of sympathy and support. I was shocked however at the number of people who added a "but" to their notes. As the time from 9/11 and distance from the World Trade Center increased I noticed how much the view of America, especially by Europeans, had radically changed since we were an Ugly but well-intentioned superpower. I naturally assumed that there would be immediate and unequivocal sympathy if not support for the U.S. from among my colleagues. There was for my family, and me but there was too often a qualifier to expressions of compassion. Academics have an annoying tendency to give some kind of informed, objective, emotionless opinion of an historical event and this one was no exception. The messages reminded me that Europeans are keenly aware of and sensitive to American foreign (and military) exploits.

The images which follow were taken as I walked around my neighborhood in the days immediately after 9/11. They show the ways that ordinary people responded.



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