

Narrative by Kathleen Clark

I went to NYC on Sept 4 to spend a few days there with Mary Ellen and Joe and, I hoped, with my nephews, Jonathan and Dave. Then, I headed to Vermont for a conference of, are you ready, The International Association of Holistic Lawyers!!! The conference was, for me, a very spiritual experience. Great speakers, great ideas, great location (looking out on Lake Champlain, watching the white birch trees blow in the wind). A whole new approach to lawyering, really, what I've been searching for for a long, long time. The location was part of the draw, since I lived 7 years in that area of Vermont and my parents lived there for thirty-seven years.

Because of my refusal to stop and ask for directions, I drove up the west side of Lake Champlain, instead of the east side. That probably doesn't mean much to most of you, but those in the know know that that means I was still in NY state and not Vermont. Eventually, I came upon a sign "Ferry To Vermont", which confirmed what I already suspected. I waited fifteen or twenty minutes for the ferry and then drove on to it for the crossing. The ferry ride for me and the car cost \$6, quite a shock for someone used to paying \$6 for a pack of gum in S.F.!!! On the short ferry ride, I saw a man wearing a t-shirt with that Margaret Mead quote:

"Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world; indeed, it's the only thing that ever has."

We started talking, he took my business card, and said he'd see if he could get the organization he worked for to send me one. Never would have met him if I had asked for directions!!! There are no accidents.

The conference was fabulous! Story after story of how people are acting as compassionate lawyers and making a contribution.

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I returned to NYC on Sunday, Sept 9, to have dinner with Mary Ellen, Joe, Jonathan and David to celebrate Jonathan's birthday (Sept 10). I went to hear George Mitchell speak at St. Bart's church on the Northern Ireland Peace Process. Thrilled to see him since he has always been one of my heroes. Bought his book "Making Peace". Looked at it briefly that night and again early on the next morning, the morning of Sept 11. In "Making Peace", Senator Mitchell quotes from a poem of a 14 year old Northern Ireland girl during "The Troubles":

"I am afraid,
afraid of the land that I live in,
That I was born in,
The ground I tread every day,
Resounds with shots,
With screams,
It is saturated with tears,
Tears that have never ceased flowing,
I have never known peace".

Her poem was fresh in my mind when the phone rang and a friend of Mary Ellen's said there was a plane crash at the WTC. What immediately came to mind was the time when I was quite young, perhaps seven years old, when two planes collided over Brooklyn, killing those on board and several people on the ground. I thought the WTC had been hit in some similar accidental way. The image on the TV, over and over again, though, was a video of the WTC with a plane coming into view from the top right, heading right into the second

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tower of the WTC. It was impossible, then and now, to take it all in. Driving to the airport days later, looking downtown at the ruins, still producing a huge cloud of smoke and ash, I thought: THIS CAN'T BE.

Joe and I were glued to the TV for several hours, trying to reach Mary Ellen and Jonathan and Dave by cell phone. That was hopeless. Calling anyone after the first fifteen minutes was hopeless. Finally, I think about 11am, David called and said he was two blocks away at a friend's apartment. He said he saw people jumping out of the windows. Then, we were cut off. Later, he called and said he was walking North on the West Side Highway. We were so grateful to hear from him and know he was safe. Joe later reached Jonathan and knew he was safe as well. Joe walked downtown with his cell phone to try to give blood, while I stayed at home, hoping Mary Ellen would call. Joe later called and said the line to give blood was six hours long.

The airports were all closed, the subways and buses were not running, the bridges and tunnels were closed, both inbound and outbound. I wondered how Mary Ellen would get home, since she teaches in New Jersey. At some point, Mary Ellen showed up; she had driven up to the Tappan Zee Bridge to get across the Hudson. When she came into the building, the doorman told her David was safe. It reminded me of racing home to Walnut Creek immediately after the earthquake in 1989, not knowing where Kevin was and if he was safe. When Mary Ellen walked in the door and I saw the look on her face, I could really identify.

As we sat and watched the TV, we could hear the military fighter jets overhead. At the same time, across the bottom of the screen, was the news flash that aircraft carriers were moving to New York Harbor to "protect" New York City. I just couldn't absorb it—"protect" New York City from what??? Why the military planes??? Isn't the military overreacting???? What is happening?? Are we in New York City not safe??? Will we ever be safe again??

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Couldn't get out on the phones. Finally, at some time, I'm not sure when, Kevin called. He sounded very relieved to hear my voice. He was in Chico, CA, but knew as much as I did, since he had been watching all day. Kevin then called my dad, who didn't know what had happened, to tell him that everyone was safe. He also talked to Joan, Matt, and Francie.

Jonathan and David hooked up somewhere??? and came for dinner. They came, one on roller blades and one on a bike, through deserted streets. We listened with horror to the stories of both Jonathan and David, where they'd been, what they'd seen. David saw people jumping out of the windows.

Wednesday: Started out on the phone, people calling about David, knowing that his office was connected to the WTC by a walkway. Mary Ellen called from downstairs to tell me that she was sending up on the elevator two NY Times, one for me and one for Kevin. Somehow, I missed that they were for me and Kevin. So I headed out to find the Times for me and Kevin, going from store to store. Streets were deserted. Could walk down the middle of Madison Avenue. Everyone was sold out of the Times but got the Post and Newsday. Got so far downtown that I decided to go to St. Patrick's Cathedral. Stayed for Mass, which, for me, after so many years, was unrecognizable. Walking downtown on Fifth Avenue, I happened upon the University Club. It occurred to me that a friend from S.F. might be there. It turned out he was registered there, but was out.

Continued to walk down Fifth Ave. after Mass to 34th Street; the entire block was cordoned off, due to fear that the Empire State Bldg might be next to be hit by a plane. Talked to a police officer, who told me that the department thought 143 officers had been lost at the WTC. He said some police would have been at that location but the department didn't have the peoplepower by then.

Sirens all night.

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Thursday: Went to a branch of the NY Public Library, the Business, Science, and Law branch, to see it and talk to Mary Ellen's good friend, Kristin, who is the director of that branch. Kristin was on the Staten Island Ferry at the time of the attack and saw the whole thing. She never mentioned it. After lunch with Kristin, I went to the Armory at 28th and Lexington to volunteer. There were so many volunteers there that the entire block was cordoned off by the police. A police officer asked me: Are you here to report a missing person or to volunteer? When I said volunteer, he said they had about ten thousand volunteers. He suggested that I go to the Javits Center on the West Side, so I headed over there. Police told me that Javits was overrun with volunteers as well. I felt personally very frustrated since I felt that I was RIGHT THERE and couldn't find anything to do to help. I wished that I were a medical person or a counselor/therapist or a fire fighter or a police officer so I could be USEFUL!

I continued walking downtown; I saw hundreds of flyers with smiling photographs and descriptions of those missing, hung by people desperate to find loved ones and friends. After seeing the same flyer for one middle-aged man on several buildings/telephone polls, I began to feel like I'd known him too. I saw thousands of people in the middle of the street, adjacent to Grand Central and the Pan Am (now MetLife) Building. Both buildings had been evacuated due to bomb threats. I was overwhelmed with sadness and, at the same time, wonder that the City's infrastructure could handle all the bomb scares (apparently 40 in midtown that day alone), emergencies, and rescue efforts. I don't know why, with all the death and destruction around me, that I became almost distraught that Grand Central might be destroyed by a bomb, but I did. I know it is only a building, but it is New York to me. While thinking about that, I recalled when Rembrandt's Night Watch was slashed twenty or thirty years ago and I was devastated. Someone said to me: "It's only a painting". Having seen it up close, I knew it was so much more than that—a treasure, created by a tremendously talented, creative, hard-working, disciplined artist.

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I walked over to Washington Square, where a monument had been erected and the ground was covered with notes, flowers, and candles. It reminded me of the first time I saw the AIDS quilt, all the messages, all the love, all the sadness, all the devastation. Hundreds of people were walking around reading the messages. I came upon two men, one with a TV camera, filming the messages, and the other with a microphone. I wanted to yell at them: get out of here and leave us alone to grieve in private!! I restrained my tongue. Just because they had a TV camera doesn't mean they weren't grieving as well.

I continued down to Washington Square to a further sea of messages, flowers and candles. I continued to walk downtown, although the streets were supposed to be closed. I walked down past NYU. I guess I wanted to see the devastation, but the smoke and the ash became overpowering. Most of the people walking around were wearing masks. I turned back uptown and found my way back to Mary Ellen and Joe's apartment.

Sirens all night. Lots of lightning as well.

Friday: Pouring rain! Read the NY Times. Overwhelmed by the newspaper and all the information. Went out to dinner with Mary Ellen and some of her friends. One woman said their local fire station lost five men. The elevator had two lists of items needed by the rescuers: one list contained items like flashlights, rain slickers, tents; the other list contained items such as coffee, coffee filters, coffee pots, and sandwiches. The day before, Mary Ellen put up a note in the elevator: "Mt. Sinai needs O negative blood".

Red Cross said on TV: don't need any more volunteers right now. Reporter standing in front of the Javits Center in the pouring rain said people had been there since 3AM to volunteer to help.

Called the airlines, as I had every day, to see what was happening. Joe said NYC airports might be closed "indefinitely". I tried Amtrak and a few other possibilities, but got a flight out of LaGuardia for Saturday morning.

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Saturday: got up about 6AM; Mary Ellen drove me to the airport. As we crossed the bridge to Queens, I looked south and saw the huge cloud of smoke and ash where the World Trade Center had been just a few days before. It still seemed like a dream-or one of those escapist movies. Mary Ellen and I kept saying: It still is incomprehensible.

Got to the airport; supposed to be there 3 hours early. Got there about 7:45am, with a flight scheduled for 11am. Several thousand people waited in line. By the time I got to the counter, it was after 11am. Everyone was calm; no one complained. The show of force was quite shocking. I felt like I was in a foreign country. I saw Port Authority Police, U.S. Marshals, NYPD, Immigration, Customs and K-9 uniformed personnel, all carrying guns. The dogs were sniffing luggage left unattended. I was again overwhelmed with sadness, thinking: BUT, THIS IS MY COUNTRY!! Why all these guns? Why all these police? So unreal.

Got on the flight; put in first class?? Don't know why, but who's complaining!!! The flight attendant came around with a bottle of wine in each hand, asking: What do you want to drink? I looked up at her to respond and burst into tears. She didn't seem the slightest bit disconcerted. I'm sure the airlines had prepared their people for that kind of response. I'm not sure why I started crying just at that moment; I wasn't afraid to fly. I did think that if nothing unusual happened in the first five minutes after we got off the ground, we'd be ok. I think I REALLY wanted to drink at that point. Since I hadn't had alcohol in more than ten years, having finally figured out that alcohol doesn't work for me, I restrained myself.

We touched down in Chicago; changed planes there, connected to San Francisco. Chicago Airport seemed to be operating as usual. No shows of force that I could see.

Got on there and read George Mitchell's book for a while. Got off the plane in S.F.; a friend met me and we went for a frozen yogurt to my favorite frozen yogurt place!!!