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Preface

The letter that follows was written as a "traditional" year-end letter that was included with my holiday greeting to old friends and neighbors, aunts and uncles, brothers, son, Jeffrey, daughter Christie and her husband, Ron, none of whom lives in Manhattan, and my youngest son, Decker, who does live here.

In earlier days I remember recounting the happy events of the year – new baby, new home, children's sports achievements – the usual, but as I've grown older and most of my correspondents have also, we exchange information that one can only wish didn't have to be – a child or mate's death or life-threatening illness, a divorce, loss of a job, relocation, bankruptcy, or one of life's lesser but life-altering disappointments. Yes, there's still good news and interesting experiences, but not nearly as many as there used to be.

This year I felt a particular need to connect to each person with whom I had shared special years of my life. I didn't set out to write the letter that follows, but when I sat down at my computer the words began to come in torrents, and I simply couldn't stop them. We had a very bad experience on 9/11 and its aftermath, individually and collectively, and there was just no ignoring it. Reading the unexpected letter startled one reader right out of her holiday spirit, at least briefly, and for that I am sorry. I know because she told me so – when I asked. In her early 30s and not a Manhattan resident, she thought it inappropriate for the holiday season, that I should have saved it for another time. I, on the other hand, could not end the second saddest year of my life without such a letter. How could we begin a new year without at least having tried to bring closure to the old one -- together.

I knew even as I mailed the letter that there was undoubtedly a syntactical error or two, but I had exhausted my emotional reserve in the writing. As I later reread it, I found the inevitable errors and knew that the addition of a few poignant details or even paragraphs would better complete my story of those days as best I remembered them. I made a few notes by year's end, thinking maybe someday . . . but determined that I would not alter the sense of it with an overlay of any information gained after the original writing, and I've stayed true to that.

Perfectionist that I am, I would probably have made these revisions without ever showing the letter again. Maybe not. However, three old friends and neighbors, those who remember World War II, have told me that they were deeply touched, so much so that they asked if they could share my letter with others. I was so moved by their response, that their letters will be kept in a folder with my own. And now I have to make the changes because I want it to be as right as I can make it.

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After ninety-three days the fires of Ground Zero still burn at 1000 degrees as deep as 10 stories below ground level, as we try to understand how a different foreign policy might have averted such hatred and our security might have foreseen such horrific terror and disaster. All that aside, we here in Manhattan are determined to move forward together embracing equality with evermore resolve to protect our way of life -- our independence, the pursuit of culture in every form, our thirst for knowledge -- and the very freedoms upon which our Constitution was written, all threatened to be taken away from us on September 11, 2001.

Because of my personal experience here that fateful day, the aftermath that sees no end, and my constant contact with photojournalists, photo editors and others who have experienced the attacks first hand and have been and are in Afghanistan, its neighboring countries, the Middle East in general, and the many other troubled areas around the world, I feel compelled to tell you my 9/11 story in this Christmas message.

As you know, my youngest son Decker and I both live here in Manhattan and were in town to share with and comfort one another through this horrific experience. Fortunately, neither of us was near the World Trade Center area, Ground Zero, as it is now known, as nothing remains in the twelve-square block radius but rubble, smoke, firemen, construction workers, security machinery, gruesome memories and onlookers remains.

Tuesday, September 11, 2001 is a memory in which we each know exactly where we were; and all things are measured in terms of before and after that event for the rest of our lives. Unfortunately, other terrible events have taken place in my lifetime and yours, as well: Pearl Harbor, WWII, the death of FDR, Korea, Vietnam, the assassinations of JFK, Bobby Kennedy, Martin Luther King, and Malcolm X, the Challenger explosion, the first WTC and Oklahoma bombings, and all the school killings.

I was to have been at 100 Centre Street, the New York State Supreme Court for a final day of jury duty. I just missed by about five minutes being on the subway that would have taken me precariously close as the first Tower came down. Luckily, as I was about to hurriedly throw on my clothes, I paused, as the morning news that I never leave without announced that a small, private plane had struck a World Trade Center tower near the top. I would have been one of those edging much too close, if even for just a quick look. Dressed in my best suit and heels, I was to attend a small reception that evening at the UN at which Kofi Annan was to be present, I would have been ill prepared to run in terror and choking dust.

I called Decker immediately to tell him of the first crash, before he got on the subway to Grand Central Station and his McCann Erickson office in midtown just blocks away, where there were to be hundreds of bomb threats over the next few weeks. Luckily he was still in his apartment, then on the Upper East Side. I begged him to stay put, to absolutely *not* get onto the subway at the same time he pooh-poohed it. However, our frequent conversations continued, and he soon understood that my cautionary note was well merited as we watched together the attack of the second Tower, then heard about the Pentagon and the United flight down in Pennsylvania. Days later I was told by a reliable security source that the United jet was actually targeting the nuclear power plant fifteen miles away. The heroes aboard saved much more than they could have imagined, or maybe they knew.

Initially, it was incomprehensible that the first Tower was no more, that that elegant tall building was not standing behind the belching black cloud of smoke and flying debris ready to appear beside its twin once again when the air cleared. Only as we watched in horror as the second Tower folded like an accordion on its side pressed by an invisible arm in the sky until there was nothing but another formidable black cloud undulating voraciously toward its next victims. As its antenna had slowly descended finally planting itself, still in an upright position, did we realize the rapidity and finality with which they both were . . . just gone. I let out an involuntary scream as it was falling joining in a chorus of scream throughout the city. We could actually hear one another as we screamed in unison, led by an invisible baton.

Still sitting on my bed alone arms hugging my knees, I had heard myself scream out for each of those thousands of souls who were being swallowed up in that instant, their terrifying flight down hundreds of steps of the towers or subway steps or running on the

ground from the buildings were abruptly halted; those perched on ledges contemplating the jump were no longer there to hesitate. All had vanished into dust in an instant. Two hours later I was still sitting motionless, paralyzed by the ongoing events while trying to make sense of it all. My now oh-so-inappropriate suit hanging just a few feet away, already a wardrobe of another lifetime it seemed. (It hung there on the door hook for three more weeks; perhaps I thought each day I might awaken to find that it was all a bad dream, and now it was the day to wear the suit.)

I observed in disbelief that it was a beautiful and warm fall day, a cruel oxymoron of a day. A pleasant breeze was blowing in the window lifting the lacey ferns and rustling the leaves of my ficus tree. The sky was a crystal clear blue, while the TV showed us that all of the lower third of Manhattan was covered with fire and billowing smoke belching its way to Brooklyn. In those four hours I had not left my vigil for so much as a drink of water.

My advice to Decker, based on my knowledge of the 1999-2000 New Year's Eve terrorist alert, had been to immediately get as much cash as he could from his bank and to buy food. We found that the banks' cash limit was \$200 if funds were still available, and food if available could be bought on a cash basis only. He called me two hours later to ask if I had followed my own advice. No, I hadn't moved. I wasn't even dressed, nor was I really aware of it. It was one of those perfect days when one actually didn't need clothing for comfort, and I had been staring at the TV, numbed in disbelief.

My camera was in the repair shop, so beyond understanding that I didn't belong at the site of the disaster, there was no hope of taking pictures anyway, of rushing to Ground Zero to photograph what so many were already capturing. I gratefully accepted that many of the photojournalists I know so well would be doing what they do best. Instead I have the visual memories of different scenes that I would like to share, that perhaps you haven't heard or seen. And I also have hundreds of photographs of the World Trade Center I took for many years, mostly from ferries docked there and on the Hudson River. They show the infinite beauty of two dignified Towers, the Twins, as the light shifted, casting shadows and reflections creating amazing color or black and white serenity. My pictures and my memories also include the community of families I observed playing together at the water's edge, reading, jogging, biking, and strolling . . . living. There were no children then who could tell you how people look as they jump

from the 86th floor, what bodies sound like when they hit the ground, what it felt like to wonder where your mother or dad who worked there might be.

Stupefied, I fumbled with my choice of clothing, not knowing if once out and only a few blocks away, I might be somehow prevented from returning even to my own apartment – or that I would find the need to bring that choice upon myself. Everything we had ever taken for granted was uncertain that day and for weeks that followed. I chose shoes for running, if I had to, or walking comfortably for miles. I thought of my bicycle with its flat tires and that I didn't, and don't, own a backpack or all the other survival gear one might need to escape and endure the 20, 30, 50, 100 mile walk. Who knew.

As I reached street level from my third floor, I could hear hundreds of hushed voices that in their sheer numbers became a solemn chorus. As I turned left, to head south on Columbus Avenue to go to my bank, completely disoriented, I was overcome with the feeling that I had just turned my car the wrong way onto a very busy street at rush hour. I vacantly wondered where everyone was going, was there something I should go see, too.

Reality broke through. Hundreds of men and women were escaping from the city, walking north on a southbound street on the sidewalks in the street, almost marching, as if in a parade, but with a stronger sense of purpose. There were no smiles, no bands, no batons. They had made their way north for three hours, first running frantically and finally because they couldn't run any longer had settled into a run-walk-run rhythm. And frightened though they were, they could see that all appeared more nearly "normal" as passed shops that were open, sort of, saw street lights blinking, though no one paid heed to them.

There were a few empty delivery trucks also making their way home that took on weary passengers as their cargo, and as if we'd just had a big winter storm there were almost no taxis or private cars. The unsettling quiet of no jets, no honking, no loud trucks was pierced by the screams of sirens all around that would continue in a steady, unnerving constancy for weeks to come.

These everyday New Yorkers were dressed for the work of their professions -- suits, polo shirts, short skirts and brief tops, high heels and sneakers shorts and t-shirts, uniforms -- all walking side by side. Their faces evidenced the unfathomable terror of

the two hours they had just survived, and their clothing also bore witness to that story -- some of it covered with gray ash with hair to match while others had only a faint hint of destruction's dust.

There were quiet, breathless conversations with strangers and sometimes by wonderful chance, an acquaintance, a fellow worker, a neighbor -- fragments of sentences, but all were saying the same thing: Where were you? How did you get out? Are you all right? What about your wife, husband, child, girlfriend, boyfriend . . .

Approaching my bank I could see two lines of people stretched around the corner, who were not necessarily my neighbors, strangers passing through who desperately needed cash. As we were in line we became a small community trading important information about the cash we might or might not be able to get as the bank, heavily guarded, closed then opened once again. We spoke of food and water and how long it would last, our safety, what might happen next, and what had been witnessed by those who had fled the attacks, stories each of us had heard from others. A freelance cameraman, in shock, had come to ABC just two blocks from me to deposit film and was reluctantly on his way back. He said there were heads everywhere, and other body parts, but mostly heads. He saw many jump from the flames at their backs. We now know that thousands including children of all ages witnessed unspeakable things.

Another said that as he stood in the ground floor lobby, he saw someone sliced in two by falling glass; another also in the lobby walking toward an elevator bank saw flames shoot from the elevator as it opened on the first jet's impact. There was a couple who held hands as they jumped, and there was a man in a suit, tie flying, who seemed to be gliding as if truly enjoying the ride of his life. Were they unconscious before their fall was abruptly halted, or were they miraculously unconscious after falling a part of the distance? We wanted that to be so. Oh, how we wanted that to be so.

I heard none of this on the news that day or later. There were just too many horrible things that no one really needed to see or hear or know. Perhaps. We were told that only one subway was caught underground and that it was empty, but that was not so. Also, there are several entrances/exits at Ground Zero; they were blocked by falling and fallen rubble. People arriving on trains just as the first Tower collapsed were exiting up the stairs only to find the unfolding tragedy. On trying to return, to run back down the stairs, they were met by armies of passengers who, previously on their way to catch a

train, now understood that they had to get out, too, but there was nowhere to go. Those who met their death there were packed so tightly that they had to be pried apart for removal. These are the scenes New Yorkers will carry to their graves, images that the remainder of the world will never know.

Our city was "locked down" almost immediately. It became very quiet with no air traffic, no trucks and few cars. We were afraid to leave our apartments because we didn't know what would come next. Afraid to watch TV, afraid not to watch. Even the wealthy with their private jets and limousines were prisoners in Manhattan, as all air ports, bridges and tunnels were closed.

By early afternoon military fighter jets were making their rounds every twenty minutes or so that became round the clock sojourns. Distinctive piercing thunderous sounds announcing their approach now brought in unison involuntary, visible cringes, frantic skyward glances and silent screams to the few on the streets and the many in their opened windowed apartments. These moments were starkly devoid of the comfort of security they were intended to provide. The fear of jets overhead has continued, no longer subliminally taking us if only for a moment to thoughts of a distant holiday.

Most of us stayed at home or privately in small groups of friends as much as possible for almost three weeks and avoided the subways when we did have to go out. Mayor Giuliani and President Bush's assurances of our safety and solution to "beating the terrorists" in their advice to spend our money aside, I believe we can credit the presence of our youngest citizens for bringing our city back to life. They eventually had to go back to school, and even before that their pent up energy forced their parents, faces taut with fear and determination, to venture out with them for a bike ride, a walk, a bit of play in the park, an ice cream cone. When the rest of us saw this "normalcy," the joy on innocent faces, their refreshing laughter, we felt a little embarrassed and decided we had to get on with it, too.

It wasn't easy, and for some it is still impossible. The suffering varies. There are those who lost loved ones, or homes, or schools; those who witnessed falling bodies and heard them as they landed – like watermelons one after another after another; those children who saw the Towers collapse knowing or thinking a parent was surely there; and those who had to go back to work or school or home in a building near Ground Zero.

Others of us, and that includes me, have been so traumatized in the past that we were unexpectedly forced to revisit that trauma once again, to deal with that pain all over again along with the new one. Unfortunately and as you may well remember, my firstborn son Eric and his fiancée of the same age died on his 28th birthday in a fiery car crash in which they were also crushed by the truck that hit them. The combination of their ages and the way they died was just too similar for me to escape the emotional replay. Luckily, I've adjusted remarkably well using the same mechanism that I learned after his death -- to turn a negative into a positive. When confronted with our own mortality, we understand more than ever the truly precious gift of life itself and our ability to bring positive changes to others' lives.

As we ventured out vowing that life had to go on, it was very, very difficult, as we were constantly reminded of the tragedy, couldn't have ignored it. First of all, we were then and continue to live in a police state. Everywhere we go we see armed guards and policemen, our identity is checked, for some more than others depending on the buildings we need to enter. My New York State driver's license has been shown more than a hundred times since 9/11. Mind you, no longer owning a car and renting one infrequently, my license is an item that has merely taken space in my small wallet for many years. Now its place is between my subway pass on top and my bankcard just below it. And frankly, I just hate showing it so often because the picture really is bad. It also reminds me that on the day that photo was taken several years ago, so also was my passport photo taken in preparation for my first trip to Italy. It now seems like someone else's life ... to remember the luxury of worrying only about making the flight, not fearing what would happen once I boarded.

There are still reminders of all those faces posted by hopeful loved ones, but for weeks, everywhere we went south of, say Houston Street, they were pinned and taped to almost any flat surface. There were thousands of them, surrounded by varying arrangements of flowers, candles, and notes from loved ones left behind and strangers just wanting to say something to someone, from very small to very large pictures, some drawn by children who had watched from their apartment or school window the horrific events of that day, lost their home, a parent or uncle or aunt or brother or sister or neighbor, or who just wanted to send a message to a fireman or policeman to say, "Thank you for being there for us."

I know you've heard a lot about the bravery and dedication of our firemen, the FDNY, and I would like to give you my snapshots. Briefly, we in midtown and above were not immediately involved the way those at Ground Zero were unless we lost someone we knew or our office was located there, but we have been greatly impacted by the downward spiraling economy, the drastic and ongoing changes to a police state and the constant threat of the unknown.

Our firemen, on the other hand, have suffered every loss many times over that all of the rest of us combined have. Many of us because of the poor economy could take a few days to recover in private and to talk with everyone we knew and didn't know. The firemen had losses, their brothers, have taken under personal care additional families of the fallen, and continue to put in the maximum workload any human being can endure. They witnessed and continue to witness horrors from which they protect us; they are under strict orders not to talk with anyone but another fireman about what they see and feel. They stay at their firehouses even on days off because they need to talk and they can't talk to their significant other. Their marriages and relationships are suffering, and now we learn that their health is suffering, too, because of the inhaled particles on site, the site that was deemed safe by the EPA. We all pretty much knew this would probably be so from the beginning, though the authorities insisted it wasn't so. We saw their reddened eyes with tears of irritation flowing down their ash covered cheeks as they choked and vomited, saw them, fatigued as they sagged into the rubble for an involuntary nap when their weary bodies temporarily refused to go on.

No longer are firehouses an almost imperceptible part of the cityscape, a spot on a block with red doors. Instead, after 9/11 their doors were opened wide and they served and continue to serve as living memorials. Clearly visible in each firehouse were the boots carefully placed in pairs side by side with the uniforms and hats hanging above that will never be worn again. Candles, flowers, posters with loving messages were placed outside and replaced many times as the weeks grew into months. The interior walls and flat surfaces near the front were covered with pictures of the missing firemen along and with their families, drawings and notes written by their children, wives and girlfriends left behind, and hundreds of letters of sympathy and thanks. There continues to be at least one fireman at the entrance who is waiting to help you through your sorrow and feeling of loss, just as he wants to tell you about his special firehouse family. They are proud to say that they distribute evenly between the bereaved families every dollar that comes in each day, and sadly that they still have nothing from the Red

Cross. We New Yorkers believe they are heroes beyond measure. Even though it has been said that they were only doing their jobs on 9/11 and since, we simply do not believe that. We saw them bravely and willingly and lovingly do what no one should ever have to do.

Another one of those pictures I didn't get to take because I didn't have my camera with me was this: last summer at sunset just as I was approaching the Hagan Daz right around the corner from my apartment at West 69th Street and Columbus Avenue, there was a fire truck that had been pulled up right in front of the shop to wait for its passengers. Out came at least ten fully uniformed firemen, hats and all, some with sleeves rolled up, suspenders dangling at their sides along with clanging pick axes, and flashlights clanging as they walked. All the while they licked ice cream cones, catching elbow bound drips, some smiling, some laughing as they said "hello" to the children, who stood wide eyed as the firemen climbed back into their truck. It would have been a wonderful photo to post at their firehouse nearby, as they lost 23 men.

Streets are blocked that never have been. Grand Central and Penn Stations, the Wall Street and government buildings are like fortresses. For two solid months we had subway stoppages for "police action" every time we were on a train, sitting sometimes over an hour not knowing what would transpire next. Sirens were constant and all over the city. No one had to tell us we were on "alert," as we were aware that nothing was close to normal. It is peaceful now, almost, and my blood pressure was 100 over 70 this week. The doctor says that's pretty good. The truth is I had just walked about two miles through beautiful residential neighborhoods observing a sense of normalcy and thinking grateful thoughts about you, my friends and family.

As I live on the Upper West Side with prevailing winds West to East, I seldom got the putrid clouds of microscopic debris from Ground Zero some ninety plus blocks south from me; however, as the days went by and winds changed from time to time, everything in my apartment was covered with the sticky ash from the disaster.

Weeks later I cleaned every surface, taking care as I washed the leaves of my indoor trees and plants; I understood that these were the ashes of fellow New Yorkers I was removing from the last living tissue they would touch. This process was remindful of when Jeffrey, Christie, Decker and I examined Eric's crumpled car that hot July day in

California, the unforgettable pungent mixture of spent fuel oil, burned and decaying flesh that was the greasy, ash-gray film coating everything; that was Eric and Sandy.

We are told to expect . . . well, something – biochemical warfare (anthrax, smallpox, etc.), a "dirty" (small suitcase nuclear) bomb, etc. – that something before Midnight 2002 is likely. While I don't take this lightly, I have been advised by friends who have lived through such terror, driven from their homeland and survived, that you must live each day to the fullest, to keep it all in perspective, to remember that politics are a nasty element to all of this. So that's what we're trying to do. Christie and Ron, Decker, our good friend Alexa and her two beautiful daughters and I will spend Christmas together with our big meal at Decker's new place in Soho. We'll say a prayer for you, as I know you will for us.