

## **Episode 116: Two New York City 9/11 stories**

This weekend will mark the 21<sup>st</sup> anniversary of the terrorist attacks that happened on September 11, 2001.

We all remember where we were when we first started to hear what was happening. It was such a big and horrible thing, the memory sticks with us. That might be why it seems like it wasn't really that long ago.

But think about it like this. A new baby that was born that year, is now a senior in college. There's a whole generation who didn't experience 9/11 in real time. They only know what they see on old news reports, or online articles, or documentaries.

A big way we keep that memory alive is by hearing from people who were there – in New York City, or at the Pentagon, or in Shanksville, Pennsylvania.

So, for the past few years on this podcast, around September 11, we've set aside a special episode to hear those stories. That's what we're doing today.

You're about to hear two ladies talk about what they experienced, and how they dealt with it.

First is Siobhan. She was just 18 years old at the time. She has a YouTube channel, which I'll link to in the show notes, and she told this story 10 years after it happened.

The second story is from Jeanette. Her office was on the 16<sup>th</sup> floor, directly across the street from One World Trade. She told her story just last year, in 2021.

At the end, I'll have some important information about the 9/11 Tribute Museum, and a few other announcements.

Never forget.

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### **Siobhan**

On the morning of September 11 2001, I was 18 years old. I had only just graduated from high school. High school had been really awful for me - I had an exceptionally terrible time - so I was relieved to be a graduate. I was also going to Hunter College, which is on 16 Lexington, which is actually not very far from where I live now. I wasn't happy about that because it wasn't the college that I had wanted to go to. My first choice was just too expensive for my parents to handle. I had a wonderful, amazing childhood. I'm just one of those lucky people who can't say anything bad about my childhood. My parents had just been divorced - they just recently got divorced - so my brother and I, along with my mother and father were kind of still mourning. We were in shock, kind of, over the whole entire thing. It was, sort of, a difficult, strange time - the end of childhood, the beginning of adulthood, learning how to balance a checkbook, work, school, and just trying to be responsible for myself for the first time ever.

I was still living at home with my mom and my younger brother. I grew up in the West Village housing in Greenwich Village on Washington and Bank Street, which was about a block away from the Hudson River. It's an awesome neighborhood. It's home to me everywhere. I've been in New York and I have literally lived in all of the borough's in so many different places. I was a gypsy for a very long time going from one place to another. I have not been able to find a place that feels like home, except when I'm there - very strange. Anyway, besides going to college, I was working part-time at the Children's Aid Society - it's a nursery school - on Sullivan and Bleecker Street in the village.

On that particular day, I didn't have to be at work until 1 o'clock in the afternoon and I didn't have any classes, so I was in bed. Both of my parents were at work. My younger brother is 5 years younger than me, so he was still in grammar school. School actually just started that week. My mom called me and I was really, sort of, annoyed with her because I had all this time in the morning to, sort of, lounge around the apartment and not do anything. I didn't turn on the TV and I was, kind of, just hanging around my bedroom trying to decide what to do because it was a beautiful day. I was thinking about calling in sick, playing hooky, and just not going to work at all that day. My mom called me and she basically said, "Turn on the news. Something's going on with the Twin Towers. You need to check out the news." Sure enough, one of the towers was on fire and they were playing this clip about a plane hitting it. Nobody really knew in the beginning what had happened. I think a lot of people - myself included - just thought it was a terrible accident. I hadn't ever contemplated the fact that, maybe, somebody would have flown the plane into the tower on purpose.

Being a curious teenager, I got dressed, leashed my dog, walked into my apartment, walked up Bank Street, and went to Hudson Street. I think one of the things that's really funny is that I stood in front of Abington Square playground. Actually, that's the playground that I grew up going to. I had amazing memories there. It's just kind of strange that I should be standing in front of this place while I was watching my city, kind of, turning to shit. As soon as I kind of stopped walking, I was looking up at the first tower, which was smoking, and the smell was incredible - something I won't forget.

Another plane came, so I actually saw the second plane hit. At that point, everyone was careening out of their windows and the traffic stopped. It was really, sort of, scary to even see your hometown streets, sort of, closed down. Nobody really knew what the heck was going on. When the second plane hit, I was sure that we were under attack somehow. I didn't really know what was going to happen next. I knew that something bad was going on and that it was planned. In terms of how close I was to the towers, I could probably walk to the towers from where I was living in 25 minutes, maybe - I don't know - probably, maybe a mile or two away. They were huge, incredible structures - totally impressive.

One of the things that is really strange - it happens to me less and less - is whenever I would be lost, like, coming out of the subway, I would look around for the towers because I knew that was downtown and the other direction was uptown. It happened a few times to me over the years - I've searched for them but they're gone. So the towers falling was something I will never forget. I really felt like I was kind of standing in the middle of history as it was happening - terrible history but history nonetheless.

The first tower, kind of - it was really scary - fell in pieces. Boom, boom, boom. I can't even really explain. The sound was deafening. It was frightening. I don't even know how to explain. It was almost like you watch the news and you see all these terrible things happen in third world countries, and it just kind of felt like I was transported into a place like that. The second tower falling was like a really grotesque accordion. It did this boom, boom, boom, boom, and that was more frightening to me. Within

minutes of the second tower falling, thousands of people were coming up Hudson and the West Side Highway. Some were covered in blood, grit and dust. There were sirens everywhere, obviously.

At that moment, people started to scream things like “Bombs! There are bombs!” Because I was outside, I wasn't near a TV or radio. I was just in the middle of all of this mass chaos. I was 18, young, impressionable, and alone. I couldn't get in touch with my mother or father. I had a cell phone but I couldn't seem to get on the phone with anybody. I panicked. I really panicked. I'm getting chills thinking about it. It's pretty awful. Fear is a really intense emotion.

I remember, kind of, running up town with the rest of the crowd, looking at different places, and thinking about where I could hide. At one point, I picked up the dog that I had with me - she's a little Beagle, not a very big Beagle like my dog now. I was carrying her and she was heavy. It was hot. I got as far as 34th Street, Penn Station. Penn Station is really crowded anyway just because this is, kind of, where the commuters come in from other places. I mean, you could just feel the fear in the air - like everything seems to stop running. The trains and taxis were at a halt and not knowing what to do. I just sort of sat outside of Madison Square Garden, and I just couldn't really move. I didn't know what to do. I wasn't sure where to go.

There were police everywhere, kind of, shuffling people around. A cop saw me, sort of, hanging around. I was sitting down again with the dog taking a break. I hadn't brought my money or wallet with me, so I didn't have any money to buy water. At that time, I was smoking cigarettes like crazy. A cop saw me and was just like, “You should go home. You should get out of this crowd.” Not knowing what else to do, I turned right back around and went back downtown towards my home. Within 5 minutes of getting in the door, my mom walked in with my younger brother. The first thing she said to me was, “Are you okay?” I said, “Yeah, I'm fine.” She said, “We have to go to St. Vincent's,” which was the hospital in our neighborhood on 14th Street. She said, “We have to donate blood.” So she changed out of her work clothes really quickly and we walked over there very fast.

St. Vincent's was amazing. It was quartered off. There were barricades everywhere. There were ambulances being driven all over the place. I mean, all of the hospital staff were out on the steps. Some of them were smoking or drinking coffee. You could feel the fear and the anxiety in the air. There were thousands of people. Nobody knew what the heck had really happened yet. Nobody really understood what just transpired except that people were stuck on these top floors and - can you just imagine the fear of many people - actually jumped to their own deaths. They decided that it would be better to die quickly than die in a fire.

Because nobody knew what was going on, everyone was sort of climbing over each other to get at the news crews that were being set up all over the place. They were shouting into the camera, things like, “So-and-so is my husband, my brother, my sister, and my friends. They were in Tower 1 or Tower 2 on such-and-such floor. I haven't heard from them. I don't know what to do.”

There was one woman in particular that I remember - she was not much older than I am now. She had blonde hair in a ponytail and she had a gap T-shirt on. She was crying into the camera about her fiance. She was a school teacher. Her fiance had been in Tower 2, I think, on one of the top floors. She was screaming about how she couldn't get hold of him. She was not sure where he was. I had never seen such hysterical grief before in my entire life, and I'm ashamed to say that I had to turn away. I couldn't actually look at her. Like, I'd never seen that. I don't think I've ever seen it.

All the while I was so frustrated that there was nothing that I could do. I mean, we stood in this crowd of thousands of people in front of the hospital like so many others. We really just wanted to help in some way but we didn't know how. After about an hour of this, my mom decided that we should leave because she was just, kind of, like, "Your brother's really little. There's no way we're gonna get near the hospital." 10 minutes before we left, the ambulances just stopped coming. It was amazing. They were coming in droves, one after another after another. Then, all of a sudden, nothing.

So we walked home and went into our supermarket. Obviously, we bought some supplies because my mom was unsure of what would happen. She was finally able to reach my father and let him know that we were okay. A lot of people actually walked home that day from midtown and other places too because nobody knew the trains were running. Nobody knew about the buses, the taxis. It was just really intense. So, a lot of people walked down. The streets were pretty packed that day. We drew up some signs. We went down to the river, stood along the river, and held up these encouraging posters and signs with hundreds of thousands of other people. We cheered on the firefighters who were coming from all states and all boroughs all around. We just stood there cheering them on.

I was incredibly frustrated that there was not a whole lot that I could do besides this, so I went down to Pier 40, where they had a makeshift Red Cross camp and I worked for 48 hours straight, making sandwiches, making care packages, trying to help out with the firefighters and cops that needed to be fed. By the end of 48 hours, I was exhausted. In the days that followed 9/11, the smoke and smell were intense. I mean, it didn't really dissipate for more than a few days - I'd say a week and a half. So it was pretty commonplace to wear a mask as you were walking around downtown just because the air was so horrible to breathe. I mean, I walked around with a sore throat all the time. To get home, I had to show my ID.

The army was there, so it was really surreal seeing the army with a bunch of machine guns, standing on corners where you would go grocery shopping or put your kid in a taxi at the corner, the playground, or even near the bank where you take a taxi every morning. I had to go through barricade after barricade after barricade showing ID to get home, and that was really pretty scary. Paperwork from the offices flew all over the city. I mean, for miles, you'd find all sorts of office documents that were blown everywhere. You'd see things that were just carried along on the wind on the street.

There were masses being held at St. Patrick's Cathedral, and it was really important to both my mother and myself that we went to them. I think, for like one or two days, maybe, a mass was held every couple of hours and it really felt like the entire city showed up. The politicians, family members of police and firefighters - everybody - filled the cathedral. So, they put speakers all around Fifth Avenue, blocked off the street, and they held mass. My mother, brother and I stayed home because he was little. We stood there amongst hundreds of thousands of other New Yorkers listening to the cardinal over speakers outside of St. Pat's. We cried with all of our other New Yorkers, all of our neighbors, and our friends. That was one of the most touching moments of my life.

The other thing that happened were the missing posters springing up on every wall of every building of every city block in the millions. I mean, you couldn't walk anywhere without seeing a missing poster. It was really horrifying. In some places, there are still memorials that have been left up. To this day, you cannot even walk past a precinct or a firehouse that doesn't have a memorial up for somebody who was lost on September 11 - everywhere all over the city.

Couple days after that, a girlfriend of mine came to visit me and we were curious. We wanted to see what ground zero looked like. We walked for - whatever it was - 1.5 or 2 miles down to it. Of course, the army was all around it, but the gates in this one section were open, so we literally just walked in. There were other New Yorkers too that would, kind of, come, look and see because we were all sort of like, "What happened?" It was like a hole in the ground - I mean, literally a hole in the ground. There were workers. I mean, we were in a really bad place. We shouldn't have gone down there. We did get in trouble for being down there, but this was our city. Our beautiful skyline had just been taken from us. Not to mention, all the stories that we were now hearing on the news about the people in the airplane who had tried to fight off the terrorists— we were also hearing reports about the Pentagon and what happened there. Definitely, the towers took the brunt of this attack, for sure.

Finally, I had to go back to work. I also had to go back to school. On that day, we had to walk, I believe, to Union Square. We had to go to Union Square because most of the trains were not working. There were only, like, a few lines that were working at all. Of course, everybody needed to get back to work. One of the more amazing parts of this story was that the platform was so crowded that if you just pushed someone a little, someone on the other side would literally fall off into the tracks. Nobody complained. I didn't hear anybody cursing, swearing, and getting angry or upset about this. It was just silence. I thought it was pretty amazing to live through that and to, kind of, just see New Yorkers banding together, being respectful of the event and the people that died in this horrible event, and just not complaining about having to suffer a little on the morning commute. Normally, rush hour in New York is pretty intense and ugly words are said all the time, but not after September 11.

September 11 was kind of a catalyst for a bunch of things that went wrong in my life. I was horribly depressed. I'm sure that I probably had some sort of post-traumatic stress, but I'm definitely not on the same scale as some of my friends who lived closer or who had people that died. There's not a single New Yorker my age who doesn't have a story or who wasn't affected in some way. For 10 years, I have literally sabotaged myself making the wrong decisions all the time. I dropped out of college and I never went back. I went from one lovely boyfriend to one really destructive boyfriend. I moved around constantly. I had horrible roommates. I lived from check to check. I just chose all the wrong things for myself over and over and over again. It just really confused me having experienced this. I don't know. Something about September 11 just really set me back - I guess that's the only way I can kind of explain.

However, in the last 10 years, I have grown up and gotten married. I had a baby. I haven't forgotten that day or the events that happened in my life afterwards, and I never will never, but I feel happier. I feel more at ease with my life. New York has bounced back. I mean, it went through its declines, obviously, with the economy - it goes up and down, up and down. I've had my moments of walking through Times Square, feeling afraid, and thinking to myself, "Well, is this the day that Times Square is gonna get blown up while I'm here with my family?" I've seen some scary things happen.

I guess, if I wanted to leave you guys with any kind of advice or any sort of final thought, I guess it would be, "Don't live your life in fear and don't teach your children to hate." The men that committed that act were evil, but they came from communities where there were probably people just like you and me trying to live every day, taking care of their children, going to school, and having their jobs. We need to remember that. Don't live your life with a box or with a fence around your heart. Don't live in ignorance. Open your heart and open your mind. One of my best friends is actually Muslim-raised. We've had many conversations about this particular subject. The action of a few should not define a whole group of people. There's evil in every ethnic group in the world, even white people here in the States. What about all those? Never mind, I don't want to go down that road.

I'm just sorry. I'm shaking. I don't know. I don't really know why I decided to talk about this today. It really is not easy for me. I just hope that people don't forget that this happened. As an 18-year-old watching this and experiencing this, I never once thought about why this happened to us. Maybe that's something that we should have thought about. Maybe that's something we should continue to think about. Why would our actions as a country makes someone else hate us so much that they would do something like this to us? I think that if you think about that long enough, you might feel surprised about how you end up feeling about the whole thing. My point is racism exists and it's really sad thing. A lot of people died that day - people of all backgrounds - and we shouldn't soil their memory by filling ourselves with hate. I wouldn't teach that to my daughter. I feel very sad for someone who felt that way.

Now that the 10th anniversary of September 11 is coming up in the next couple of days, I'm probably going to go down there if I can and pay my respects. It's the end of a decade that literally changed my life. I'm happy that it's over. I'm happy that we got through the first 10 years. I wish the families all the best. I hope that they're okay. I hope that they're at peace. I love New York. It's part of my soul. I'll never leave no matter how many times they blow us up and no matter how many times they've threatened to blow us up. I will never leave New York. It is the greatest city in the world and I am so lucky and blessed to live here. It's home and it's a wonderful place. No matter what anyone says, New Yorkers are super friendly. Bye.

#### **Jeanette**

Hi, my name is Jeanette, and I am a 9/11 survivor. First of all, I want to thank you for listening. It's important to tell my story and it's important that someone listens. So, thank you for that. I'm going to try to tell you my 9/11 experience in a very short amount of time, and I'll begin by that morning on 9/11. I was sitting at my desk right across the street from one world trade at 8.46am. When the first plane hit, I heard it and I felt it, but I didn't know it was a plane. I was on the 16th floor of my building. The plane hit way up high on the top of the World Trade Center, so it was far away from me. You hear strange things in New York City all the time - strange noises. As long as it's not gunshots, really, what am I going to do? So I didn't really pay too much attention to it. Then, out of the corner of my eye, I looked out the window. So One World Trade was to my right. I wasn't facing it.

I saw something past the window going down. I thought that was kind of weird, like, "Nothing that big should be going down. If anything, it would be going up." So, then, I became the nosy New Yorker and I looked out the window. I had to press my face against the window to look up to see the top of the World Trade Center - that's how close the buildings were - and I saw a big hole and lots of black smoke. It wasn't good. Something bad happened up there. So, I ran back to my desk and called my oldest sister Gail, who also worked downtown - not in the immediate area but close enough for me to walk to her office. She worked for the government - some things more than others - and I had to let her know like, "Something happened across the street. The World Trade Center is bad. People are dead."

I was a little upset because I knew people were hurt - it was a big hole - but there was nothing I could do about it. I went back to work. She called me back quickly after the act to tell me it was a small airplane that hit the World Trade Center. I thought that was kind of weird because the sky was so beautiful that morning - I'll never forget it. How can a plane hit the World Trade Center? It's not like you can't see it - maybe on a cloudy day, but not that day. I thought, "Well, maybe the pilot had some kind of health issue and crashed into the World Trade Center." I said a quick prayer and I went back to work.

17 minutes later, at 9.03, my phone rang and it was my sister. She said 2 World Trade just got hit by a plane. I argued with her and said, "No, Gail. It was 1 World Trade." She was like, "No, this is a different plane." She wasn't upset. She wasn't loud. She didn't say terrorists. She just said, "You need to leave." In my head, I was thinking, "Another plane? Two pilots had strokes or heart attacks? How could that be?" Terrorists never went through my brain.

She was insistent. My oldest sister is not pushy. She's not loud, but she's forceful and she insisted that I leave. I still said, "No," especially because, over the loudspeaker, they had said, "Stay put. We were safe where we were." At that moment, we were safer being inside rather than outside. She just insisted. So, I finally agreed only because she said she would come to me and we could leave together. She was like, "Why don't you just meet me at McDonald's and we'll walk out of the city together?" In my head, I was like, "Walk? Who's walking?" I didn't realize what's going on at that point, but I finally did agree with my sister because we were going to meet - that made sense to me. Whatever was going on, we were going to be together, and that was important.

So without any rush, I closed at my desk, went down to the gym, got my sneakers - because I had heels on that day - and left the building. While I was exiting the building, that's when I noticed that things weren't just happening up high in the buildings in the World Trade Center - they were happening on the ground, too. There was debris and people who were hurt. It was really scary. They want to go back upstairs. I wanted to stay in the building, but I had already agreed to meet my sister and our meeting point was closer to my office than her office. So I knew she would be gone already. I didn't have a cell phone. My cell phone was in my car under the seat in Staten Island. We didn't have cell phones like that back then. So I made my way up to the meeting point.

When I looked up the block, I saw my sister there with her friend. The whole time I walked - which had to be, maybe, 12-15, I never thought about what was going on around me and never accepted that we were under attack. None of that went through my head. The only thing that was in my head was that I had to meet my sister, Gail. That was my purpose. I was like a robot. I know now that it was my way of protecting myself from the reality of what was going on because that would have probably made me curl up in a ball in a dark car somewhere. I wouldn't have been able to move. So, my brain knew enough to shut all that out and just have my purpose. Once I met my sister, that purpose was served and everything flooded in at once. "You're going to die today. People are trying to kill you. Other people are already dead." Like, all these different terrible thoughts. I was pretty much hysterical.

My sister is not a crier - I am. I cry for everything - good and bad. So, I held her tight and sobbed. She let me cry for - I don't know - 10 seconds, maybe, pulled me away from her, and said "We gotta go now." I remember thinking, "Geez, you're not even gonna let me cry?" it's because I just didn't grasp what was happening. What could still happen? Thankfully, she did because we walked from Lower Manhattan all the way up to 34th Street, and it took us probably an 1 hour and 15 minutes. How do I know that? Well, the first plane hit at 8.46 when I was at my desk. The second plane hit at 9.03. I was at my desk at 9.37. The Pentagon was hit - we had no idea. We had no radio or TV. Google wasn't putting news out there then. Even if they were, I didn't have a phone. 9.59 was when the south tower collapsed. 10.03 was when the plane went down in Shanksville. Again, no idea. Then, at 10.28, 1 World Trade collapsed. Again, no idea.

So when you think about my life as a survivor or my day as a survivor, I experienced less than most people on 9/11 because, even though I was there, I was not aware, so I was kind of lucky. When it comes to that, that whole thing took 102 minutes to happen - from the first plane hitting to the north

tower collapsing. In those 102 minutes, 2,977 people were killed. I didn't know that. What I didn't know was that we weren't going home. We ended up at a friend's house and we stayed there. That's why I watched everything play over and over and over and over again. Boy, was that a shock to me.

Then, interestingly enough, later that night, my sister and I did make it home to Staten Island. We caught a bus and we got home. It was dark out. It was definitely after nine. My sister is married to one of my best friends. She has 3 kids. At that time, they were 6, maybe 9, and 19 - they're all 7 years apart. She was very happy to be home with her family. She wanted me to stay and I was like, "Man, I don't really want to stay here. I want to go home and, like, be in my space." So I helped everybody, went home, and put the TV on again." That's when I saw not just the collapse, not just the horror, I saw the heroes everywhere. I saw the firefighters, policemen, women, EMTs, and regular normal people like you and me helping others, reaching out, and putting themselves in danger.

I thought I can't really imagine how people put themselves in danger to help somebody else. I have no children. They say mothers will do anything for their children. I have no children, but I did come to the realization that heroes don't always wear uniforms and they don't always wear capes. Sometimes they look just like this. This is a picture of me and my sister. That's me. That's my sister. We look a lot alike. That's what the hero looks like - just like that. That day, she came towards what everybody else was running away from and I still wonder why. She's my big sister. She took care of me. I can wonder for the rest of my life. What I do know is that I'm very grateful she did because I could have easily been a part of that number of people killed if I stayed in my office.

We never stayed downtown. We left the downtown area after 9/11 and moved to Midtown so that I didn't have to see Ground Zero. I didn't have to see the pile. I didn't have to see the pit. I didn't have to face anything that reminded me of 9/11, but I had to live with it. Of course, I don't live with the fear that something else is gonna happen. I live being afraid to stay inside, being afraid to go outside, being afraid to get on a plane, and being afraid to do everything.

The hardest part for me afterwards, directly after 9/11, I think, was the fact that I could find no solace and no hope that things would be okay from anyone because we were all equally afraid. That being said, at the same time, I realized that life is too short and we really need to slow down. What my company asked me was if I wanted to go back to work that Friday. 9/11 was a Tuesday. I said, "Absolutely," because I needed to do something. I couldn't just stay in my house watching TV all day and night. So I went back to work in Midtown. That was the day that I shut 9/11 off. Didn't think about it. Didn't think about the day. Didn't think of what could have happened. Didn't even think about what happened. What I did was change just a little bit for the better and a lot for not-so-much better because I just wasn't that Jeanette before 9/11. She doesn't exist anymore. She didn't then and she doesn't now.

I did slow down a little bit. I was kinder. I was more helpful to people. I noticed that I was meeting people's eyes in the street, which I don't usually do as a New Yorker. Those changes were good and I held on to that. I never went downtown. I never talked about 9/11. I didn't talk to my sister about it at all. That's how my life went until 2010 when I got a new job downtown right next door to the building I was in on 9/11. It all came flooding back and it, like, punched me in the stomach. I was just totally taken by surprise with everything flooding back.

I heard a tour go through my building - the 9/11 tribute center, now the 9/11 tribute museum - and I thought, "Hmm, I don't know why anybody would really give a tour on that. That's kind of weird. Maybe I should go check it out." I did and that changed my life totally because, after my tour, I spoke to a nice

young lady named Desiree who was my tour guide, and told her that I was a survivor. She said, "You should try this. It's very good for you. It's very good for your soul." I don't think I want to do that. Then, I thought about it, prayed about it, talked to my mom about it, and I tried it.

My 9/11 story - the day, the months, and even the first 9 years that followed 9/11 - were all nice and crunched up because I don't know if I could explain it properly because I didn't think about it. They were not 9/11 related. My thoughts and my feelings were not 9/11 related because they were put away. Fast forward to 2011 - we're gonna reflect now from 2011, from when I first moved back downtown to today - the next few years were so positively life-changing and so affirming with the hope that mankind, that all of us can do it if we do it together.

I did become a tour guide, thanks to the tour guide that took me on a tour, Desiree. She said, "You can do it," and I did. I learned from the tribute museum that you can tell your story in a short amount of time even though it spans many hours, days, and years. In doing that, I had to speak to my sister about 9/11. I just spoke to her the other day, literally - this is now 2021 - and I told her, "I'm reflecting on the last few years here and I gotta condense my story." When I said, "While I walked down Broadway and there you were—" she was like, "You didn't walk down Broadway. You walked down Church Street - two different streets parallel." "I looked left and there I saw you." She was like, "No, you looked right." So how much more of my own story that I do not really understand or that I tucked away so deeply that I'm recollecting things that are not quite right? I'll tell you what I do remember. I do remember turning around and looking up at that building while it was burning, and it was awful. That's one of the things that I wish I couldn't remember, but I do.

Now, today and in the last, maybe, 8 years, doing all the tours, speaking to people from all around the country, reaching out to people of all ages, and speaking about 9/11 and my experiences - the day, the months, the years that followed - have helped me heal. The Tribute Museum— the people there helped me to know that it's okay not to be okay. I'm not okay with what happened to me. I'm not okay with what happened to New York. I'm not okay with what happened to this country. But I'm okay with not being okay. I've accepted it. What am I going to do with it? That was the question. What am I going to do with it? I give tours. I share my story.

I've learned that one of the things I was dealing with was survivor's guilt. I can't change what happened. I can't change the fact that I feel guilty about that. So many mothers were killed on 9/11 and I was not. This is the guilt I live with every day. I don't have children. If I could switch places with a mother so that they could raise their child and that child could have a mother, I would. I'm not saying nobody would miss me. I'm not saying I want to die. I'm just saying that's what I deal with. But to honor all the people that were killed and to show them respect, I tell the story because we keep people alive in our hearts when we talk about them.

Now, I didn't know anybody that was killed on 9/11 - not one person. I'm pretty fortunate. I know so many people that were killed and that's only because I'm friends with people who lost their mothers, sisters, children, or husbands. All because of my work with the 9/11 Tribute Museum, I ended up being so confident in expressing my feelings about 9/11 and telling my story that I, then, became a docent at the National 911 Museum - which has a different role, but I still do it. Is it difficult? Absolutely. Do I cry? Absolutely - all the time - but I do it and it helps me to feel like I am worthy to be a survivor. Hope that makes sense.

Through the 9/11 Tribute Museum, I went to Japan in 2012 to reach out to the survivors and first responders and family members of the great Japan earthquake, which killed 18,000 people. It was scary. It was exciting. It was healing for us even though we were going to help people there. Then, many years later, I ended up going again to Newfoundland with a group of docents from the 9/11 National Museum and the 9/11 Tribute Museum to say thank you to them for reaching out and helping all the people who landed there on 9/11 when the airspace was closed. When I left Newfoundland, somehow, they were thanking me and I'm not sure why. I'm just a survivor. I'm just a person who happened to be in the wrong place - pardon me - at the wrong time and lucky enough to get out. I'm not a first responder. Those are the people you got to thank - people that helped other people.

I ended up being friends with so many people in Gander and so many people in Japan. I can't even begin to tell you how many people I'm close friends with at the Tribute Museum and outside of any 9/11 experience. We go on vacation and we have dinner together. We sleep over at each others' houses. We travel. Part of my 9/11 story makes me reflect on the power of healing, the power of communication, and the power of love - love for each other and mankind. It doesn't matter where you're from, what religion you practice, what race you are, what your gender identity is. We're just people that need to stick together. If not for those people that helped me through - including my family and my faith - I wouldn't be able to say that I'm okay with not being okay.

I'm actually better than okay because when I reflect all the years between September 11, 2001 and today, I look back at all the things I've done and all the people I've met—

(Sniffing)

Sorry. All the people we lost because so many people are sick now from 9/11 related diseases. When I think of all of that, the loudest thought in my mind - it's actually a great one - is a question. I replied to that question. The question is, "I'm not really sure how this is my life. How did I get to this place where I can be so happy and so confident in so many relationships that heal and help my soul, and my life filled with love, friendship, acceptance? How could this be my life?" I'm really not sure, but I'll tell you what. I'm really glad it is. Thank you for listening.

### **Scott**

You heard Jeanette talk about the 9/11 Tribute Museum, and how it has helped her – and many others – deal with the aftermath of that day, and honor those who did not survive.

The museum opened in lower Manhattan in 2006, but just last month was forced to close its physical location because of fewer visitors due to the pandemic.

### **Female News Reporter**

The 9/11 Tribute Museum in New York City is shutting down for good. Starting today, it's moving fully online. The small intimate museum opened more than 15 years ago, but workers say they've struggled to attract visitors during the pandemic. It relied heavily on tourists. Unlike the nearby National September 11 Memorial Museum, the tribute museum focuses more on the people, the people who were at the towers during the attacks, the victims, the survivors and the first responders. For years the museum has been a place to honor them and tell their stories. But that ends today.

### **Scott**

That announcement was made just last month – on August 17, 2022. The museum is now online only, and you can experience it at the website – [911tributemuseum.org](http://911tributemuseum.org). Visitors are able to purchase an audio tour for just \$10, and you can also sign a petition to save the museum. I signed it, and I hope you do as well. I'll have that link in the show notes.

**Woman 1**

I am currently living in Weimer, Oklahoma and I had just recently listened to the podcast about Garrett in Duncan. I was surprised I had never heard that story before, and I was like 8-10 miles away. I've been to Duncan all the time and to Braum's all the time. Thank you so much for your podcast. I enjoy them so much, and I will be listening for more.

**Scott**

The new Raw Audio episode just went live – this is episode 26 with 3 more cases, and the actual 911 audio that happened at the time. So just signing up to support the show for \$5 a month gets you 26 episodes to binge immediately, and you get all the new What Was That Like episodes without any ads. You can sign up for this at [WhatWasThatLike.com/support](http://WhatWasThatLike.com/support).

In this new Raw Audio episode, a woman is abducted and has to be very quiet as she calls 911:

**911 Operator**

Where's he at now?

**Woman 2**

Sleeping.

**911 Operator**

He's sleeping how?

**Woman 2**

In my bedroom.

**Scott**

A man attacks his family, just to get revenge on his wife:

**Man 1**

I'll kill myself now too! I'll kill myself!

**Officer**

Sir. Sir.

**Scott**

And a guru sweat lodge ceremony turns deadly:

**Woman 3**

This is sweat lodge.

**911 Operator**

Sweat lodge?

**Woman 3**

Yes.

**911 Operator**

Okay.

**Woman 3**

The man's unconscious - no pulse and no breathing.

**911 Operator**

Alright, are you there by yourself?

**Woman 3**

No, there's a lot of people here.

**Scott**

These are exclusive bonus episodes, and you can get all of them by signing up at [WhatWasThatLike.com/support](https://www.WhatWasThatLike.com/support). And you'll be supporting the podcast, which I greatly appreciate!

And you know what else I like? Listener Stories. If you're new here, this is how we end each episode – with a story, sent in by a listener. If you have an interesting personal story that you can tell in about 5 minutes, record it and send it to me at [Scott@WhatWasThatLike.com](mailto:Scott@WhatWasThatLike.com). Or you can call it in to the podcast voice mail line, at 727-386-9468.

This week's story is from a man who made a surprising discovery.

Stay safe, and I'll see you in two weeks.

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**(Listener Story)**

For my entire childhood, I was the only child of a single mother growing up in Birmingham, Alabama. At the age of 16, my mother found my father's family in Orlando, Florida, but discovered that he had died of testicular cancer four years earlier. Nonetheless, I got to know cousins and aunts and uncles. Through them, I got to know what my father, Joe, was like - kind of vague ideas of what life could have been like had he met me and been a part of my life. So, for the next 30 years, sometimes, with large gaps in between, this was my extended family down in Florida.

Fast forward to Christmas 2018, which was the first holidays I had with my new husband, his mother had given us both the gift of an AncestryDNA kit. This was so we can find out our ethnic national heritages, particularly for my husband, to see how Native American fit into his ancestry. Now, after my first test failed, I tried it again. Finally, I got my results back in April of 2019. One of the features of AncestryDNA is the ability to see genetic matches and reach out to people who could be family members. Well, I started receiving messages from a particular woman down in South Alabama, whose name I didn't recognize at all. I brought this up to my mother, who went silent. She recognized that last name. Back in

1972, she had dated two men - one named Joe, and the other named Leroy. In her own mind and timeline, Joe seemed like the correct pick when it came to being my father. However, this DNA results indicated it was Leroy instead. I came to find out that both men had actually visited me as a baby but at separate times, but neither wanting to take on the role of a father at that time.

One of the most surprising stories my mother told me was that a favorite panda bear doll that I had as a kid actually came from Leroy's toy shop. The woman who had messaged me on AncestryDNA turns out to be one of 3 half sisters I now have on my father's side. Now, he is alive and well. It's been quite the adjustment to no longer have a dead father or the need to worry about testicular cancer. But as of yet, Leroy has no interest in meeting me. So we'll see where that goes.