

American enigma

A play of reflections on September 11th

Compiled and Written by
JUSTIN RIELLY

First Draft (2011)

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CHARACTERS

In order of appearance

JAMIE MICHAELS	<i>the writer</i>
MONA LEIGH ANDREWS	<i>the English teacher</i>
CHRISTINA MICHAELS	<i>the sister</i>
ANGELA PAYSON	<i>the real estate agent</i>
DEBORAH CHANDLER	<i>the government worker</i>
LUCINDA TAYLOR	<i>the justice official</i>
SELBY BURROWS	<i>the documenter</i>
ALEXANDRA HADLEY	<i>the military girl</i>
MITCH CHAPMAN	<i>the small town man</i>
MICHAEL WEBER	<i>the bookseller</i>
RANDALL ARTHUR	<i>the manager</i>
GREG KENDALL	<i>the preacher</i>
JONATHAN WILSON	<i>the “Renaissance man”</i>
JENNIFER CASWELL	<i>the actress</i>
COURTNEY HARRIS	<i>the musician</i>
ALYSSA MARTINEZ	<i>the high schooler</i>
NATHANIEL PRICE	<i>the music teacher</i>
THOMAS EVERETT	<i>the advisor</i>
DR. HARLAN GEORGE	<i>the philosopher</i>
PETER STANLEY	<i>the salesman</i>
ELLIOTT BAILEY	<i>the reporter</i>
MARK FLAHERTY	<i>the photographer</i>
LAURA JEAN ZELLER	<i>the mother</i>
ELLEN MICHAELS	<i>the responder</i>

SETTING An empty stage, town indeterminate

TIME September 10th (or any time past the publication year of 2011)

SPECIAL NOTE

*For this ensemble production, any actor can play more than one character.
The actors playing The Writer and The Sister are constant.*

- Justin Rielly

THE SHOW

The lights remain off, as a group of people walk onto the stage. They look over the row of chairs, and they sit down next to each other. After the people take their seats, another young man enters the stage. He sees a table with a chair underneath, and a laptop and notebook on top. The young man sits down, and opens his notebook.

After a few moments of silence, the lights fade up – and the audience is introduced to JAMIE MICHAELS (the writer). Jamie is in his mid-20s, and wears a regular T-shirt & jeans outfit. He looks at the monitor of his laptop, and for a few moments, he shows no emotion.

JAMIE MICHAELS

History defines us all...every era...every generation. Moments and places become part of time's ever-evolving fabric...moments etched in stone, each with their own meaning in the universe of time. Here are a particular few...Henry Hudson finds Manhattan Island...the computer has its first remote operation of signals through a phone line... Charles Lindbergh condemns his own country along with Jews and Brits in his "Des Moines" speech...Augusto Pinochet comes to power in Chile...Israel and Egypt form the Camp David Accords in an effort to find peace...genius writers O. Henry and D.H. Lawrence are born. Even the techno wizard Moby gets his first introduction.

(looks at the audience)

They all happened on September 11th. September 11th...it should have been just an ordinary day, where work and life just flew by without even a trace of warning. You get up, you get in your car, you go to work, you get things done, you go home, you be with family and friends, you sleep, and then it all starts again tomorrow.

(gets up from the desk)

Then there's September 11th, 2001...and time's circle ended for so many, without warning...without caution...without a memo from the man upstairs, if you believe in that. More than 3,000 lives were said to have been lost, when four planes were hijacked. One hit the Pentagon, another headed for D.C. landed in a Pennsylvania field, and two hit the towers of the World Trade Center in New York.

(looks at the floor)

It's been ten years since that day. It's defined me and my generation.

(looks up at the audience)

And I want to tell a story about 9/11. As a writer, it should come natural. After all, the one thing I love doing more than anything else in the world is write. I want to tell a story about how that day changed my life, and the lives of people I knew. But I couldn't find the right angle. Thankfully I was able to reach someone who could know...Ms. Mona Leigh Andrews, my high school history teacher. If I knew anyone who could get a good start on things, she seemed like an ideal choice.

As Jamie finishes his statement and walks to the darkened side, MONA LEIGH ANDREWS (the English teacher) enters. She is in her mid 40's, long blond hair, and wears a typical teacher's wardrobe.

MONA LEIGH ANDREWS

Well, Jamie, if you really want to tell the story of 9/11 through people you know...let me give you a good twist. Maybe you could be a journalist...which is perfect for you, since you're technically in that line of work now. A journalist happens to show at a social gathering of people who were alive that day...but not just that day.

(pauses)

These could be people who also remembered where they were at Pearl Harbor, or when JFK was assassinated in '63, or when Reagan was shot. I remember this play that was made into a movie years ago...it was about three girls who grew up together but went their separate ways and experienced different lives. Yet they would always come together at times, and the audience would see how they changed as time changed.

(taps her head)

The sad thing is, I don't remember what the name of it was. I know it was like 30 years ago or something when I saw it, but how can I forget? I'm an English teacher, I'm supposed to know this kind of stuff!

(calms herself)

Anyway, Jamie, I think it would be interesting if you could do the same thing except of having years go by, you would have different generations at the same party. It would certainly give a unique perspective of America's most tragic moments. Then again, what do I know about what *you* want to do? You're the writer...you do what you need to do. But I'm glad you're doing this...though I shouldn't be surprised. You love to write, after all.

Mona Leigh walks away, as Jamie returns to the spotlight.

JAMIE MICHAELS

I thanked her for the suggestion...but I was going to incorporate that with what I originally set out to do. Talk to people I knew...young and old...to get their feelings about that day. And dare I say...I even wanted to include my family in on this...including Christina. She's my sister...a few years older than me...and as any younger sibling can tell you: experience can bring perspective. Maybe.

As Jamie walks away, CHRISTINA MICHAELS (the sister) enters. She is in her late 20s, holding a laundry basket.

CHRISTINA MICHAELS

Oh, Jamie...you don't want to hear from your big sister on this. I'm sure you're looking for lots of people to talk, but I'm not *that* important. And yes, I'm your sister, and I'm still grateful that you took me to see that awesome Robert Pattinson movie *Remember Me*...even if the ending felt all too real for me. But still...I love me some R-Pattz.

(sighs, longingly)

He is the most handsome looking specimen I have ever seen...ever.

(waits a moment)

Ever.

(takes a breath)

But I can get you started on getting people to talk to you. Let me get back to you on that.

Jamie rushes back over, just a few feet away from Christina. The two do not see each other.

JAMIE MICHAELS

I waited a while for Christina to respond. It turns out she had a plan...a decent plan.

(a bit grossed out)

And yes...Edward Cullen was somewhat partially responsible.

Jamie remains in place, as Christina comes back in.

CHRISTINA MICHAELS

You know how I've got my website on R-Pattz? I shared your idea with the members, and they really like it. They feel after seeing *Remember Me*, it might be a good story worth telling. One person who really wanted to talk about it was Angela Payson. The ladies call her "Awesome Ang" on the website. She's a real estate agent in New York. She was there when it all happened.

Jamie backs away, and Christina leaves the area. ANGELA PAYSON (the real estate agent) enters, in her early 30s, wearing a dress suit.

ANGELA PAYSON

It was so clear on Long Island...a warm, sunny Tuesday. My husband was gone to work in Manhattan, and I was taking my younger son to pre-school. It was his first day, so the day was already memorable to begin with. After dropping him off, I went down to the market to get some groceries. When I turned the radio on afterwards, it was after 9 in the morning. That's when I heard about the attack for the first time.

(pause)

I had a hard time understanding right away...what had just happened. I couldn't believe it. It was just so difficult. Like everyone else, I watched and listened to the news, worrying about my husband. And my sister, too...she was in the city. I was really hoping they would find their way home safe. They did...but it was certainly agonizing for them. They actually walked across Queensboro Bridge...in the open...frightened.

(pause)

It took them a long while to get home, but they were lucky. Many people never returned home. The more I think about 9/11 now...I see a clear sky, with silence, and all of that being shattered by flying jets. It still scares me.

Angela quietly exits, and Jamie returns.

JAMIE MICHAELS

Angela's story got the ball rolling on people who were willing to talk. Christina continued to bring some names up. One person who volunteered was Debbie Chandler, a government employee who lives up in Seattle. She wasn't living in the New York area then, though she did for a time. But she still witnessed the attacks closely...and I mean, *really* closely.

Jamie leaves again, and DEBORAH CHANDLER (the government worker), enters. She is in her mid-to-late 30s, and wears a dark pants suit.

DEBORAH CHANDLER

I lived in North Jersey and worked in Manhattan for a time. I would pass the towers twice every day, pick up coffee and snacks at the lower level shops. From the street I lived on, I can remember walking to the end of my block...and the towers were right across the river. They were always cool to see from there...and even passing by.

(pause)

But I was in Washington when it all happened...not far from the White House. Even my house was just 12 blocks from the Capitol. Summer lasts usually in D.C. through October, and it was 80 degrees that day. Usually the car radio would be on, and yet I forgot. When I got to my office, I knew something was going on. Everyone was standing around in my office...I was the only one who had a working TV on...now usually when March Madness happens, there would be a scene.

(pause)

And there was a scene that day...everyone was inside watching, my boss telling me about a plane hitting the World Trade Center. Like the others, I thought it was a plane crash...an accident. Then came the second plane...and we all stood there in horror. At that moment, I must have started to stagger or fall, because I remember my boss grabbing my upper arms to keep me up. Then the chaos broke out.

(pause)

Phones were ringing...husbands, wives calling to talk to their spouses. I remember someone on the news saying people were getting calls from inside the towers...saying they were going to jump. The fires were getting close. Then the Pentagon was hit. We were less than 2 blocks away from the White House. We all felt then that we could be next. My boss told us to just get out, go home if you could. Within moments, the government shut down. Thousands of employees were out on the D.C. streets. It was insane. People waited for buses that would never show. Subways, trains, airports...all were shut down. Even rumors about the State Department being on fire were going off, though that turned out not to be true.

(pause)

My house was only 3 miles from the office, yet it took me two hours to get there. MP's and National Guardsmen were all over D.C., guiding traffic along. When they said "stop," you stopped...until they told you to move. And all the while, I was still in shock. When I did make it home, I went to my bedroom...and just lied there...not moving...not thinking...nothing.

(pause)

Then I remember later that night...and on a normal September night in D.C., the street would be packed with cars and dogs walking and kids riding their bikes. And yet there was nothing. No one was out, nothing was seen or heard...an eerie feeling I can never shake. I don't remember much about the next few days, except for seeing the side of the Pentagon that was hit. It looked like more of a destroyed movie set, it just didn't look real. That was the only time I saw that.

(pause)

And I never looked back.

Debbie leaves the stage, while Jamie returns.

JAMIE MICHAELS

Another government employee who was working that day was Lucinda Taylor. She works for the Department of Justice, but she wasn't very close to the capital at the time.

Jamie leaves, and LUCINDA TAYLOR (the justice official) steps in. Lucinda is in her mid 30s, and wears an all-black dress suit.

LUCINDA TAYLOR

My office was scheduled to have a meeting at a headquarters located about a hundred miles away. I hadn't left home when word got out on the first plane hitting the towers. And I was still trying to realize what had happened when the second plane hit. I never heard any call on canceling the meeting, so I made the drive...tears running down, listening to the radio, scared to believe it was really happening.

(pause)

I remember my fellow agents sitting in the conference room, watching the coverage unfold. And we were sitting there, helpless...I mean, we worked for the government, for God's sakes! Weren't we supposed to do *something*? That's an awful feeling that will never go away...the panic, the anxiety, the sorrow, the loss of feeling safe. Then I think about everyone who tried to rally the country...the firemen, the policemen, the EMT's, even the common people...doing whatever they could to help heal the country minute by minute.

(pause)

You know your sister told me about your idea, especially since "Remember Me" was set around that time. I took my daughter to see it, she was a junior in high school then. She was so mad about the ending. I later told her movies don't give us the endings we always want...and life doesn't do that sometimes, too. Some endings are permanent, but there are some endings we can only hope to change...and pray to God that somehow, good can prevail in the world. We can only hope.

Lucinda leaves, while Jamie returns to the stage.

JAMIE MICHAELS

I also received feedback from kids who went to the same high school I did. There was one girl, Selby Burrows, who now works for the Army as a combat documentation specialist. She had a close experience with 9/11...with her grandmother.

Jamie walks over to his desk, and leaves, as SELBY BURROWS (the documenter) comes in. She's in her mid-to-late 20s, wearing Army fatigues.

SELBY BURROWS

I was just 11. I remember not hearing anything about it at first. The school tried to keep it quiet, since there were many kids from military families going there. Yet on the bus, I heard about the Pentagon...and I'm thinking, "Oh, my grandma works there." So I come home, and there was my step-mom...with this worried look on her face. I dreaded it.

(pause)

She said, "First...I want you to know your grandma's all right." Someone was able to help get her out, after the plane hit there. She explained what happened at the Pentagon, then at the towers...which I saw on the TV, over and over. I was so afraid of planes for a long time, especially of planes coming out of nowhere and crashing where my family and I would be. Remember I was 11...it seems totally insane now.

(pause)

There was one other thing...when the attacks happened, my dad wanted to pull me and my brother out of school. My grandma talked him out of it. She didn't want us to be scared. He didn't have to make the call.

Selby leaves, as Jamie looks up from his desk.

JAMIE MICHAELS

Another military girl of today I heard from was Alexandra Hadley. She was a former band classmate, a few years behind me. Just like Selby, she came from a military family. And she was also just as uncertain about a close member of her own family.

Jamie looks away, as ALEXANDRA HADLEY (the military girl) enters the stage. She's also in her mid 20s, and wears Army fatigues.

ALEXANDRA HADLEY

My father was in Korea, where he was serving a year's tour. When the attacks happened, I didn't know what it would mean for him in the time to come. He ended up going to Afghanistan, after his time in Korea was over.

(pause)

As for my experience...I was in biology class when another teacher told everyone of the attacks. I remember walking by a classroom and seeing the TV...and the image of the smoke coming from the towers.

(pause)

I remember the bus taking hours to get back to Fort Drum, and the security was tight. The next day, all of the kids on my street were waiting a long time for the bus to come. Some of the parents started coming down to check on us around 7:20. Two hours later, more kids were walking by...because *their* buses weren't there! It would be another hour before any buses arrived. Security at the gates was tight, and it took forever for kids to get to school, and for people to get to work. That was intense stuff for a 14-year-old to take.

(pause)

9/11 has made an impact on my life, and it's a big one. My boyfriend ended up going into the army, though he got out safely...as well as other people I knew. Students I graduated from high school with were K.I.A. And when I hear of their deaths, I think of their families. It's hard to imagine being a family member or a friend of the dead...it just tears me apart. And for what...I'm still trying to figure that out. The fact so many of my friends had to sacrifice themselves afterwards in the name of a tragedy like this...it overwhelms me still.

Alexandra leaves, and Jamie gets up from his desk.

JAMIE MICHAELS

I also thought about my co-workers, when it came to writing this. I have an interesting working life...putting down time in the worlds of television and textbooks, a winning combination. One such co-worker is Mitch Chapman, who belongs more in the digital realm of television, as a web designer. He remembers that day well...but with a skeptical bent.

Jamie backs away, and MITCH CHAPMAN (the small town man) steps in. Mitch is in his mid 40s, and wears a plaid shirt and jeans.

MITCH CHAPMAN

I think about 9/11 in a way most people probably wouldn't dare to admit out loud. It was a sad day, with so many people losing their lives. As an American, it's hard to not feel like a part of you was broken. And yet at the same time, where I live, things seemed...a bit peculiar to me.

(pause)

I live in Churchville, just about a half-hour from Rochester...and what's interesting about Churchville's link to 9/11 is...well...there is none. No native from that small town, past or present, had anything to do with it. Not in New York, not in D.C., not anyone I knew or my neighbors knew had a connection. And yet...my town was taken in by the mood and spirit of the moment.

(pause)

The town board came together and decided...again, in the spirit of the moment...to get some money together to make a 9/11 memorial. It would be reasonable in New York, in D.C., or in any towns near there that had so much loss of life. And yet in a small town where 9/11 didn't have any personal traces, this board decides to pay for a memorial? It never made sense then, and it doesn't make sense even now.

(pause)

And what about the people who died in the towers, anyway? What did they sacrifice their lives for? They didn't die for their government. They didn't die for their country. They weren't destined to be martyrs. Maybe they died for corporate America...because all they did...was get up and go to work. And they never came back.

Mitch exits, cautiously; Jamie looks up again from his desk.

JAMIE MICHAELS

There was another gentleman I talked to, who was so skeptical about the impact 9/11 made. I work with Michael Weber down at this college bookstore, but before he began his days there, he was taking down another job...one he doesn't look back on with fond memories.

Jamie looks on, as MICHAEL WEBER (the bookseller) takes the stage. He is in his late 40s, and wears a dark-colored dress shirt and tan slacks. Michael also sports light-rimmed glasses on his face.

MICHAEL WEBER

Well, I was working at a drugstore during 9/11...don't worry about asking me what chain it was, I don't care to tell you. It's not worth it, anyway. When I was at this drugstore, the people I worked with...they were lazy as hell. They just stood around, waited for customers to come to them, didn't really do much of anything. The only major times they showed any movement was when they went out for smoke breaks. Even when I went out for a cigarette, I just kept to myself. When I was at the store, I kept myself busy wherever, whenever I could.

(pause)

Then the attacks happened...and everyone was listening to the radio, watching any TV's that could be plugged in somewhere. It was sad, no question about that. Then something remarkable happened at the store. Everyone was nice to each other. My co-workers were being cordial to me, even helping out customers, and in some cases, comforting them in this moment of national grief. For one week...that was the feeling.

(pause)

And just before you can say Afghanistan three times over...it was all downhill. The lack of civility that was so normal before 9/11 would ultimately roar back with a vengeance. People I thought had turned their laziness down for good had picked it back up again. It's like a habit that you think you shake off after years of trying...but once you're addicted, you can't pry it loose.

(pause)

I don't miss that job at all. I don't miss the bullshit I witnessed.

(points to audience)

And as far as seeing any form of civility again...whether it's politics, or social issues, or even your generation...there's no such thing. It's just a word that has no meaning in my lifetime. And if your generation is not careful...that feeling's only going to repeat itself.

Michael exits the stage, as Jamie stands up from his desk – but he doesn't leave the area.

JAMIE MICHAELS

Mike wasn't the only bookstore employee I talked to...as a matter of fact, I went to the top man himself. Randall Arthur's the manager of the store, and while he was watching like everyone else...he knew someone who was supposed to be up in the air that day.

Jamie sits back down, as RANDALL ARTHUR (the manager) steps up. He's in his late 40s, and wears a light blue dress shirt and dark slacks.

RANDALL ARTHUR

9/11 fell in the fall quarter of '01, and I think it was the third or fourth day of classes. I was textbook manager at the time. The impact on campus was certainly immediate... activity fell to a near stand-still. If there was a TV around, people were glued to it, watching the footage of the second plane hitting the towers.

(pause)

I had a friend of mine who was heading home from business that day...don't recall where he was leaving from. I know he wasn't on any of the planes...thank goodness for that.

Yet when it all happened, the plane he was on ended up landing in Chicago. It would take him a while to get home...a nearly half-day's drive to Nebraska. But he got there.

(pause)

I actually visited Ground Zero recently...there wasn't much, since it was still under construction. Yet the thought of that land being developed again is certainly uplifting. It is a good sign of progress...out of a great sadness. Maybe the events of 9/11 was a wake-up call to our complacency...sure, we've grown a bit more, and yet there's a long way to go...especially for global and security issues. We can certainly be better on these things, and we need to be.

Randall leaves the stage, and Jamie steps away from his desk.

JAMIE MICHAELS

I talked to a pastor about the project, and it was only because of musical connections. A local rock band I like attend church, and sometimes I visit them while making laundry runs. That's how I was able to meet Greg Kendall, who was willing to share his thoughts. How did 9/11 affect him as a man...and as someone with a strong belief in the man above?

Jamie walks back to his desk, and GREG KENDALL (the preacher) comes in. He's in his late 20s, slender-looking, dressed up in T-shirt and jeans.

GREG KENDALL

I was working at Borders on a big day...corporate was coming in and doing our annual audit. It's usually an all-day thing. We were two hours in, when we noticed customers whispering to each other. Soon we were in the break room...TV turned on.

(pause)

As all of those big moments happened...the planes hitting, the towers falling, the other planes being grounded...I just thought to myself, "This is one of those days...a day I'll remember where I was when it happened." It was so surreal to have that thought then.

(pause)

Then to see the unity in the country...how people rallied around each other, and President Bush...and the world's support pouring in...it was just moving. Yet all the while, I kept wondering if it would last a while. I remember the Gulf War of '90, '91, and seeing everyone's patriotism...only to see it drop so sharply after. I suspected any bump in goodwill would fade...and sure enough.

(poses to reflect his belief)

So much has changed in the 10 years since. I supported the military response of the time, and now to see the tragic results since...things are different. And since that time, I've become a pastor. From that post, the most important observation may be this...one of Christianity's central teachings is that we're all broken sinners...and we're all looking for God to give us His grace...to forgive us...to help us change.

(pause)

Sure, it may be easy to apply this thought to the heartless of the world, especially terrorists...and the harder thing is giving this to ourselves.

(pause)

At the time, the hatred we felt towards the attack might have been seen as righteous anger. And yet it wasn't...maybe we were reacting out of our own brokenness, out of pride, or maybe out of self-centered nature. And with all of that, we have the potential to add so much more death and destruction to the world. That's a scary thought, isn't it?

(pause)

As a pastor and a Christian, the solution should be a firm belief in Jesus, to surrender to His teachings, to treat others the way they would be treated, and to love the enemies and outcasts. It's kind of ironic about 9/11...there were so many Christians who felt the right response to the whole thing...to killing...was more killing.

(shakes his head)

And I felt that way, too...it's a sad irony, indeed.

Greg walks away from the stage, and returns to the group. Jamie remains at his desk.

JAMIE MICHAELS

One of Greg's friends is involved in my favorite local rock band...and attends the same church Greg preaches at. Jonathan Wilson is the "jack-of-all-trades" in the group Purple Betty. He plays guitar, percussion and sings backing vocals. Yet he does more than that...he works in a local graphic media business, and also develops websites. And this Renaissance man's a good friend of mine...so he said he would add his words.

Jamie goes away, as JONATHAN WILSON (the Renaissance man) enters. He's also in his mid 20s, and just as slender as Greg – if a bit shorter in height. He wears a plaid, buttoned-up dress shirt and jean shorts.

JONATHAN WILSON

I was a senior in high school, and calculus was my first class. There was time for us to work on our assignment, after the lesson was over. Instead I decided to use the time to take a nap. I did that all the time then.

(pause)

Then I was stirred out of my nap to see the TV on...very unusual in math class for that to happen. And my whole class was watching in complete silence. Between the video footage and the on-screen text, I started to grasp what was happening...but more in a factual way than realizing the significance of it. We all watched the news off-and-on in other classes...and it was through the day we all realized what was happening.

(pause)

The biggest emotion I felt that day...anger. I remember getting into my car after school and putting on some loud rock music. That was my way of letting out my frustration in privacy. Then when President Bush started talking about the war on terror, going into Afghanistan, I was just like many other Americans at the time...being right there, agreeing with him, cheering him all the way to war with the Taliban.

(pause)

But in hindsight...which is always 20/20...we made some poor decisions with Afghanistan. We were fueled to go there by our anger, and it doesn't diminish the heinousness of the attack on our soil. I can't imagine what it must have been like for those who lived in New York or Washington to go through the events of that day.

Yet when I hear the stories about how the lasting effects of 9/11...especially on the emergency workers who responded...it makes me sad that they had to go through that.

(pause)

I'll admit I'm not one to over-worry or feel paranoid, but occasionally, I find myself wondering of the possibilities of another attack. I think about the impact of another attack on areas that may be lucrative to terrorists. And it's a shame, too...sure, we haven't had another attack of a 9/11 magnitude since then. Yet people still live with this heightened state of anxiety and fear. I witness it, sometimes...even in myself.

Jonathan leaves the stage, as Jamie remains at his desk.

JAMIE MICHAELS

I was also looking to my high school class for help. How could I not? 9/11 was going to define their lives, as much as it would define mine. I'll admit I sent out an invite for any of them to share their story...and just like the way they treated me back then, they ignored my request.

(pause)

Yet one wasn't so ignorant...Jennifer Caswell was involved in band and theater, like I had been. If she totally agrees to this, she said she would express her thoughts as an actress...which she could've been, if she hadn't decided to be a college A.D. for graduates.

Jamie remains where he sits, as JENNIFER CASWELL (the actress) comes to the stage. She's in her late 20s, and wears a business dress suit.

JENNIFER CASWELL

I was a junior that day...I can easily remember walking down the halls and realizing through the quietness...that something was going on. I saw teachers checking out computers during breaks, and I could sense tension. Yet the students didn't know immediately. It wasn't until my last class, which was math with Mrs. Shannon, that I finally knew what went on.

(pause)

She didn't say anything about our homework assignments at the start of class. She felt all of her students had the right to know. So she grabbed a CNN article she had printed out, and read it out loud to the class. Yet I don't think the impact was clear until I got home. Every station on the TV was airing the attacks, and people were seen explaining it. That was the moment I realized what was happening.

(pause)

When you live in middle-class, small-town America, you seem to be living in your own world...especially if you were young. You hear bad things on the news, but you didn't face them head on...you felt like you were hearing stories of distant lands and people. Yet 9/11 made the news real to me...but it was the days following that were so surreal.

(pause)

Our cafeteria was being renovated around that time, and everyone was eating lunch in the gymnasium. We were all sitting there, quietly eating lunch, then I saw my friend Paige get up. She walked over to a side of the gym with some of the other chorus kids.

And then...they started singing the National Anthem. Everyone started getting up, and joined in. Sure, it all seems cheesy and a bit *Afterschool Special*...but at that moment, no matter what you were classified...jock, geek, theater nerd...none of that mattered.

(pause)

It also inspired me to take a chance as a theater actress. The fall musical that year was *Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat*, and auditions were happening that week. I had always liked theater and wanted to get involved, but I was always too scared to audition...I don't know if it was stage fright, but I just never tried it. Then I realized...with all the hate and destruction going on, you've got to live every moment. There are far scarier things in this world than auditioning for a musical. So I sang...and got a part in the show. I was involved in theater for the rest of my high school life. It was definitely a bright spot at such a dark time...a *real* bright spot.

Jennifer leaves the stage, as Jamie gets up from his desk.

JAMIE MICHAELS

Another member of this high school class was Courtney Harris. She did it all on the arts front...band, chorus, musicals...she was such a pure musical soul. It would carry over through college and her current job as an elementary music teacher. It turns out she had a connection to the tragedy...one she didn't realize right away...until she got the ultimate word.

Jamie sits down again, as COURTNEY HARRIS (the musician) walks onto the stage. She's in her late 20s, and wears a teacher's outfit.

COURTNEY HARRIS

I was in the wind ensemble when word got out of the attacks. Some classrooms had turned the news on to see it, so word of mouth had ultimately spread. Two students in the room were panicking about a loved one. Mr. Carley allowed them to use his office phone to try to get word. And while all of that was going on, he tried to get us rehearsing. It was useless...even he was filled with sadness in his eyes. We didn't play any music that morning.

(pause)

Since I was in high school, I wasn't completely aware of all my families' jobs. When I got home, my mother was sitting on her recliner, with the TV on. She simply looked at it, and I watched with her. A moment went by, when she said...she said, "Your Uncle Rick is dead." I didn't realize it then...that he actually worked at the World Trade Center. And he didn't survive the attack.

(pause)

It's hard to put into words on how his death affected me...I don't think I can ever give you a real clear analysis about the whole thing. What I can say, though, is that every September 11th, I wear my uncle's picture. That's my way to celebrate his life.

(pause)

9/11 didn't directly impact me at the start, outside of being saddened over the loss of life. I've come to realize it's a much more important day for me in such a personal way...and I'll never forget it for that reason alone.

Courtney leaves the stage, as Jamie remains at his desk, still seated.

JAMIE MICHAELS

Another high school student of the time responded to me...and once again, the influences of my sister and Edward Cullen played a role. Alyssa Martinez's a California girl who works as a hairdresser. She was a freshman out in Simi Valley during 9/11...which means when she got up in the morning her time...the attacks had happened for at least an hour plus.

Jamie turns away, as ALYSSA MARTINEZ (the high schooler) enters the stage. She's in her mid 20's, wearing a stylish dress shirt and pants (a hairstylist's usual outfit).

ALYSSA MARTINEZ

I had turned on the morning world news...and at first, I thought I was watching a trailer for some upcoming disaster movie. Then I started to feel sick to my stomach, as I watched the towers on fire...fear running down my spine. I was hoping it was all a sick joke, because I was watching the same image on almost all 65 channels. It was sick, but it wasn't a joke.

(pause)

Then I saw the towers collapse...and it broke me down. It's true I didn't know anyone on the planes or in the towers...but I felt personally offended by it all. Yet when I got to school, a few people knew about what was going on. Then came World History class.

(pause)

When I saw my teacher's face...red-eyed, full of horror...I knew he knew too. Soon after, my whole school was gathered into the gym, no classes, and all we did was watch everything on a projection screen. There were some who couldn't bear to watch it all, because they were so busy focused on calling family and friends around New York.

(pause)

My friends all feared what would happen next. Why were we attacked? Was this the beginning of World War III? We couldn't find the answers...even as we witnessed the falling rubble, and the debris. At the end of the day, I saw a long line for the ATM machine on campus...they were emptying their bank accounts to help out in the crisis. It was just so captivating. Instead of being so angry, we put any petty differences aside to help our fellow Americans. The spirit was so proud, so endearing.

(pause)

Then came the wars that followed...they saw my brother-in-law and cousin going overseas for what the Army called suicide missions. So many sleepless nights wondering if they were safe, or if they were killed...the phone calls from them being very few and far away...that certainly didn't help. Thankfully my brother-in-law has since come home from the war zone. I felt relieved...and still do.

(pause)

But what's the one thing I remember most about 9/11? When it was over, my principal told us to hug our families and our friends...and thank God for our safety, and pray for our friends on the East Coast. And he told us to pray for the terrorists...because if they hadn't learned from previous times, that Americans wouldn't take this shit lying down.

We were going to fight to keep our country free! And we would make sure they wouldn't forget!

(pause)

And even now...every time I think of the images of that day...I feel a fresh cut or wound being given to my heart. Sure, I was on the other side of the country...but I felt all the raw emotion, too.

Alyssa leaves the stage, and Jamie stands up from his desk – but he remains near it.

JAMIE MICHAELS

I went to college in Oklahoma after spending freshman year at a local community college. I thought it would be a vastly different place, because of its perceived conservative nature. That part was true...but I did excel there, going in for communications with a minor in theater arts. And I met some good people there.

(pause)

One of them was Dr. Thomas Everett. I didn't have classes with him, but he played a big role in my college life. I was president of the college's film society for three years, and he was the main advisor. The man's passionate about movies, and also of English, his subject of teaching. I asked him how he saw 9/11 from his part of the country...the middle of it.

Jamie remains standing, as he watches THOMAS EVERETT (the advisor) take the stage. He's in his early 60's, wearing a wool sweater and light blue dress slacks.

THOMAS EVERETT

I was listening to NPR in my office when the attacks happened. Soon after I got an e-mail from a former student, who was concerned for her friend – who just happened to be another student of mine. That friend worked across the street from the Twin Towers. He was shaken, but he made it out all right – to our relief. But watching those images of the planes hitting the tower...like the whole day, it was just...surreal.

(pause)

The fanatics behind it all...these religious fanatics...they went out and pulled this horrific and dastardly act of terrorism. And what a terrible way for these innocent people who worked in the towers to die...and for those rescue personnel who heroically rushed into those buildings...what a cruel act.

(pause)

There's no question that Bin Laden and Al-Qaeda were behind all of this, and they needed to be punished. Bin Laden being killed is a good start...we unseated Saddam in Iraq, but Al-Qaeda hasn't really be punished, and there's a chance its influence in Iraq may spread. And yet I'm deeply concerned about the wisdom of the war efforts undertaken by us since 9/11. And what about the war in Afghanistan? It might be foolhardy to say the least, and we've seen a tremendous amount of time, treasures and lives lost...but what's there to show for it? Al-Qaeda remains a dangerous force.

(pause)

The belief of 9/11 changing the way we do things is clearly obvious...even at the airports...every time I fly and go through the checkpoints, undergo the security measures.

I can't help but think about that day all over again. And the war efforts in the last ten years...all it's done is increase our deficits, increase our debts, and increase our fears. People feel less secure now...and I'm one of them.

Thomas leaves the stage, as Jamie returns to face the audience.

JAMIE MICHAELS

Another professor I met while in college was Dr. Harlan George. He came to the college I attended by way of the Southeast more than 40 years ago. The other professors in the communications department have labeled him the "grand emeritus of speech comm." I had him for Interpersonal Comm., and he was certainly helpful in that class. Without him, I probably wouldn't have gotten an A. The man's a communicating philosopher. I'm sure he'd be good for well-needed input.

Jamie goes away, as DR. HARLAN GEORGE (the philosopher) enters the stage. He's in his mid 60's, and wears a standard college professor's suit.

DR. HARLAN GEORGE

I was in my office when someone mentioned a plane had crashed into one of the tall buildings in New York. What came to my mind right away was that during World War II, a plane actually crashed into the Empire State Building. That really happened...it was a Mitchell B-25, lost in the fog, and it hit the building's north side.

(pause)

I left my office to see people looking at the burning building on TV. Then I started thinking about the car bombing that happened at the Twin Towers in '93. I couldn't link them together. Then again, after the bombing at Oklahoma City, I try not to jump to conclusions. Yet no matter what I thought...the obvious feelings were there to see...just shock and sadness.

(pause)

Sadness over the tremendous loss of life...it was horrifying. Then to see the whole thing unfold, with little information on the circumstances...I wasn't thinking about any terrorist attack. I thought to myself, "My God...what a terrible accident." Then again, was it really all an accident?

(pause)

9/11 changed the world, and it changed America in one big way. We're no longer isolated. We can be attacked like any other nation. And just like Pearl Harbor, nearly 70 years before, we can be attacked by an enemy close at hand...or far away. And I'm not certain if anyone has any idea of the financial cost of 9/11...but we're all busy living our daily lives...so it might be hard to give it some serious thought.

Harlan nods approvingly, before turning away from the audience. As he leaves, Jamie walks back to the center of the stage.

JAMIE MICHAELS

When you work in television, you get to meet some wonderful people...especially at the station I work at. And it's not just news happening there...there are business deals too.

And Peter Stanley's not just one of the shakers of sales...he *is* sales. He rose up through the ranks to become the station's head of sales marketing. What would a salesman feel about a tragedy like 9/11? I decided to ask...and he gave me a good deal on a story...a wise good deal, anyway.

Jamie walks away, as PETER STANLEY (the salesman) enters the room. Peter is in his early 50s, and wears a salesman's suit and tie.

PETER STANLEY

I came to work that day just like every other day...right around 9:00 every morning. At the station, I noticed more cars on the parking lot than usual. I would find out the reason why when I walked in the door to my office...as I watched the second plane hit the tower live on television. With my own eyes...I saw the plane go right through.

(pause, as he shakes his head)

I was scared, no doubt...not just about what happened, but also about what would happen next. Would there be more attacks? Would more buildings be destroyed? It was hard to not be afraid that day...wondering how America would respond, what we would do next. 9/11 was a quagmire for the world to witness...but how I see it now...ten years later...the United States ended up going into a quagmire of its own. And it's horrible for me to say it.

(pause)

Costly in treasure...and in human suffering...it all stems from the wars we fought overseas. It's not just the dead I feel for, but for the ones who do survive...and are never quite the same. I remembered reading this study online, and discovered that 40 percent of all U.S. soldiers who went to Iraq and Afghanistan have either been diagnosed with...or have signs...of P.T.S.D. It's hard to imagine if those men and women have any support to battle it.

(pause)

Terrible mistakes we've made in the aftermath of all this...this horrific tragedy we suffered. My heart was heavy then...and it's a little more so now...especially for what's happened to us.

Peter leaves the stage, as Jamie looks up from the desk.

JAMIE MICHAELS

While sales may be the driving force of a station's economy, it's the news that keeps people glued to the sets. I'm fortunate enough to work in such a division, and to do great work with great journalists. One of them is Elliott Bailey...he co-anchors the morning show there. He even writes regular blogs on the local political scene. I knew he would have an opinion on 9/11, and the impact it made on him.

Jamie sits down, as ELLIOTT BAILEY (the reporter) steps in. He's in his mid-30's, and wears a typical news anchor suit.

ELLIOTT BAILEY

On the 5th anniversary of the attacks, I was asked to give a brief on-air reflection. I brought up the story of a young boy and his mother...he must have been three or four.

I was working at another station in West Virginia at the time, when this happened. And I remember seeing the boy's face, and then he asked his mother, "What is a terrorist?"

(pause)

I literally started to feel sick...and started to wonder, "How could a little boy catch on to such a thing so early in his life?" I saw his mother's reaction...her face as pale as a ghost...and she never said a word. She couldn't answer her little boy.

(pause)

You know ten years later, you would think 9/11 would be a simple event to analyze. It was a raw moment in our history. It shouldn't have to be complicated to understand. After all, we *were* attacked...right? But it may be more complex than that.

(pause)

And what's become of us in the time since? Did 9/11 bring us closer together, or did it only drive us farther apart? Did it us give hope for peace, or did it drive us towards the thought of war? Was this an event that could give us more understanding of other religions...show tolerance...or would we be more divisive? Do we slander or fear other people's religion, simply because an alleged part of it could inflict so much damage?

(pause)

When it comes to that second Tuesday of September, 2001...there are no easy answers. There are no straight-forward conclusions. 9/11 is an enigma in American history...not easily understood, not simply interpreted. We were attacked...that much we know is true. What happened after that is more complicated...and it continues to be.

Elliott cautiously leaves the stage; Jamie gets up from his desk, but he stays near it.

JAMIE MICHAELS

I talked to a couple of photographers at the station wanting to share their stories. Yet they turned to one man who they said would be perfect. Mark Flaherty works up in production now, but at the start of his career, he was a photographer. And yet on 9/11, even he couldn't get away from the tragedy that no one could avoid...even though it was supposed to be his day off.

Jamie looks away, as MARK FLAHERTY (the photographer) comes onto the stage. He's in his late 30s, and wears a short-sleeved dress shirt and slacks.

MARK FLAHERTY

I was asleep when my wife called me...she asked if I was watching the news, and I turned on the TV. I saw the images of the towers being hit. I had this feeling in my mind...that I was going to go out there. Sure enough...I got a call from the station. "How quick can you get a bag ready to go to New York?" I arrive minutes later, I meet up with Jane, one of our senior reporters – and we were part of a convoy headed to New York to cover the tragedy.

(pause)

When we got there, it felt like being in a war zone...there were tanks guarding the bridge, and F-18's flying overhead. But there was no time to ponder the sights...I grabbed the camera and started filming as soon as we stopped. At one point, I was on 17th Street along the Hudson, close to Ground Zero. I can still see and feel the atmosphere.

The smell of metallic gas...the black cloud of smoke that hovered over us and the city...the people walking around like zombies...they couldn't believe what had happened.

(pause)

And then there were those with pictures of their family members...wondering if I had seen them. It's hard to keep your emotions in check, when something like that happens. Then again when you're in news, you stay more focused on the task at hand – and less on the other things. I was able to do that somehow.

(pause)

There's one image I can't shake, though...I remember having my camera on, filming this firefighter sitting on a curb. He had his gear on...and he had his hand between his hands...and he was crying. And that was the way he sat...never moved, never left the curb, just sat there and sobbed uncontrollably. He couldn't have imagined the horror.

(pause)

One thing I also remember...being in the car editing a story for the news, and Jane had gone to get a sandwich. I wasn't paying attention...and the next thing I knew, the car was surrounded by a SWAT team, because there was fear of a bomb under a manhole. I think bomb threats in New York City skyrocketed during that one week...went up about 300 percent. It turned out to be nothing...but then the inevitable feeling started to change.

(pause)

People were chanting "USA" for the rescue workers along the sides of the street going in and out of Ground Zero. That was an awesome moment. And then talking to survivors, and the fascinating stories they shared, while trying to deal with what had happened...I was seeing New York City in a different light...and a stronger one. That was so different from the first image of a New York that had gone dead silent...nothing moving...time seemingly frozen.

(pause)

We made a mistake in not getting to Bin Laden sooner...we made a mistake in getting involved in all these other battles we shouldn't have been in. Sure, Bin Laden's gone now...but ten years later...the feeling doesn't change. No matter how many times I've gone back to New York, for a story or with my family...I can sometimes still feel the emotion...and see the people with the posters of the missing...asking you to help them without saying a word. I knew on 9/11, I was never going to see New York the same way again.

Mark leaves the stage, as Jamie gets back up from his desk.

JAMIE MICHAELS

There was also this mother from West Texas that I've connected with. Her name's Laura Jean Zeller. We both met through Twitter because of our love of *Friday Night Lights*, the TV show. She did have one advantage I didn't...she lived near the set of the show, and actually got to appear as an extra in some episodes! I was jealous...and I still am, honestly. Yet I learned one year after the attacks, her 9/11 experience made the local papers. And she said she was willing to share it with me again.

Jamie sits down, as LAURA JEAN ZELLER (the mother) enters the stage. She's in her late 40s, and she wears a sweater-dress combination. She also wears glasses on her face.

LAURA JEAN ZELLER

It was a warm and sunny day in West Texas...no hints of the sadness that would come. I have 3 kids, a girl and 2 boys. After dropping off my 2-year-old sweetie at the neighbor's, I was working as a volunteer in my son's second-grade class. I was helping them with a reading exercise, when a weird request came over the intercom. "All teacher's aides need to report immediately...and for anyone with a TV with antennas, bring them down to the office as well."

(pause)

So I asked the teacher, Miss Williams, if something was going on. She wrote it all out on a piece of paper. "A plane's crashed into the Twin Towers." Now I remembered going there as a teenager, living in New Jersey at the time, and I was thinking, "Maybe the weather's bad in New York, or it was some stunt gone wrong." I wasn't thinking terrorism then. Only after another aide mentioned the second plane...I then realized it was all intentional.

(pause)

I called my husband Rick, who was serving in the Army. His base went into lockdown after the attack. He was trying to talk to me the whole time, with half my brain trying to accept what he was saying...and the other half refusing to believe any of it. I kept asking him what time he would be home for lunch. It was crazy. And all the while, none of the kids knew what was going on. They were more focused on their reading exercise.

(pause)

A fourth grader ultimately spilled the beans to his classmates, and the principal caught word. He ended up telling the older students what was going on. At that moment, I wanted to get my kids and go home...but I thought maybe they would be safe in school. I was right.

(pause)

The school was in lockdown, when I tried to leave that day. After that...everything else was all a blur. I spent the rest of the day hearing from friends and family members, wondering what he had heard and to even update us.

(pause)

After getting my toddler and my other kids from school, I noticed other children...and there had to be dozens of them...who were waiting for a ride home. The base was on lockdown, so if they had parents there, they couldn't get out to reach their kids. I know some of the other school employees worked the phones to make sure they had somewhere to go, or someone to pick them up. They worked their hearts out in the midst of the emotional chaos going around. They really shined.

(pause)

I was so grateful for my kids being nearby, because I was able to be with them when the day was over. We can't forget 9/11...even if we want to. We just can't.

Laura Jean leaves the stage, and Jamie gets up from the desk. He walks to the center of the stage.

JAMIE MICHAELS

Here's an ominous thought...maybe. There's someone I know whose birthday falls on September 11th...and that's my Aunt Ellen. She owns her own funeral home in Upstate New York, just near I-81 on the way to Watertown. When her birthday came down on that day in 2001, she knew what she needed to do after the towers fell. I'll admit...I was a little unsure if she would tell her story. It was so personal, so close to home, the fact that she was family...but she was willing to.

Jamie looks away, as he watches his aunt ELLEN MICHAELS (the responder) enter the stage. She's in her late 30's, and wears a dark dress suit.

ELLEN MICHAELS

I was in town when Jerry called me...my husband, your uncle...he told me to come home. When I got there, he told me what happened at the World Trade Center. I knew immediately...I was going there. I was part of a disaster mortuary team called D-MORT-II (two), and they're usually sent to disaster sites to help in recovery efforts. So soon after I got the word, I was in my car – uniforms and all – on my way to New York. As I was driving, I wondered...what was it going to be when I got there? What I thought was nothing compared to the actual scene I saw.

(pause)

When I made it to New York, I was given orders to head to the piers on the east side of the center. I couldn't find them, but I was so unnerved by the scene of no traffic heading out of the city. Thankfully, a police officer saw me and after I showed him my ID for D-MORT, I ended up at the piers. I wonder if he ever survived, or became sick with all the illnesses many of those rescue workers would come down with.

(pause)

So the entire team was told to stay together in the hot zone of activity, use the buddy system no matter what. We were even told rumors of terrorist possibly stealing uniforms from firemen and policemen to cause more harm. Yet none of that mattered when we reached the remains of the World Trade Center. We were going to search for survivors, and find bodies. The first thing I think of about that arrival...the smell. (*cringing*) God, the smell...so bad it made my eyes water. We tried wearing respirators, but the filters kept getting plugged up...they were useless.

(pause)

I'm sure the country was in tears, in mourning of the whole tragedy they were witnessing. But I couldn't cry...couldn't feel helpless...there was no time to feel *anything*. I was too focused in looking through the debris, piece-by-piece, hand-over-hand.

(pause)

Then the following morning saw me go to a family assistance center that was set up. The first family I saw was an older gentleman and his wife...they were looking for their daughter who worked in one of the towers...World Trade Center One, I think. And what was so remarkable was just how calm they were...even though I could see it in the father's eyes. He knew hope was fading, but he couldn't tell his wife that. As I was asking them about their girl's age, size, blood type, any possible marks...it dawned on me. This girl was just starting her life at 22 years old...with hopes and dreams.

(pause)

And that great life she was going to have...it would never come. Her remains were found two days after I met her parents. And it was the same thing over and over. I kept meeting such sweet people, whose only want...was answers. Where did their loved ones go? Were they killed instantly? How about a funeral for them? Yet for some of those people, no closure would come. When the buildings fell, some remains were gone in the debris.

(pause)

During our work at Ground Zero, we often heard air horn blasts from a fire engine. When they came, we stopped all activity and stood at attention. When the horns came, that signaled the remains of an M.O.S. was found...a member or service...police officer or firefighter. Their remains were placed in a basket, covered in the flag, and down to an ambulance. The hardest thing of all was to see these firemen...their eyes empty. They knew many of their brothers in arms had died, and yet they had to keep going. With them, we found personal effects...children's pictures, coffee cups, page after page of paperwork, still intact. We found shoes with feet in them. We even found firemen's gear with remains still in them...charred from the fire...and yet still intact.

(pause)

I couldn't sleep for three days...even if we were told to rest, it was impossible. Yet no one wanted to leave, including me. Even when I was talking to Jerry, I couldn't tell him what I was seeing. I just couldn't find the words to do it.

(pause)

I stayed three-and-a-half weeks on that first tour of Ground Zero, and I didn't want to go home until every victim was found. Yet a phone call from Jerry changed that. He understood my feelings, but he said, "Ellie, we need you too. We need you to come home." Ultimately I did...only to return a month later, and then a short time after that. I did about three tours.

(pause)

I last came to New York in December, and saw Ground Zero...and how different it was. No signs of the past...just construction of the Freedom Towers. But I think with those towers comes a new beginning, a chance to heal from the tragedy that was 9/11. It's still hard to imagine...on the day of my birth, a tragedy happened. But when I celebrate it now, I think of the people who gave their lives...of those who never made it home that day. They're all etched in my soul...and they will never fade.

Ellen walks away from the spotlight, and leaves the stage. Jamie watches her leave, before he turns back to face the audience.

JAMIE MICHAELS

Speaking of family...my sister Christina finally gave in. I had asked her to give her story about 9/11, and she wouldn't do it. That's how I got all of her R-Pattz, Spunk-Ransom friends involved. Then suddenly...without even a hint of warning...she wanted to be heard.

Jamie stands in front of his desk, and watches Christina return to the stage. He doesn't sit down, as she begins to talk.

CHRISTINA MICHAELS

I know there's one story you should tell...and that's what happened to you at school... and how I was the one to get you out. I was obviously aware of what happened by the time I got to the high school...panicked out of my mind, nervous, wondering if you knew already. Thank God the secretary looked your schedule up, and that you were in French class. And thank God the teacher said, "Monsieur Michaels, ta soeur est là-haut au bureau...vous repartez."

(pause)

I saw you coming up to the office, confused, wondering why I was there. I wasn't hesitating. "Come with me," I said to you. "I need to tell you something." Then we got in the car, and I told you about the attacks. I'll never forget the look on your face...total silence...no words out of your mouth. Then I told you the reason why I wanted to pick you up. I just needed someone to be home with...I didn't want to be alone.

(pause)

And I was at GCC waiting for my 9:00 World Affairs class to start, and my professor was running late. Then someone turned on the TV there, and the coverage was on. The first tower had just been hit. And then...live for me to see...I saw the second tower. I had to re-boot my brain, thinking to myself, "Did I just see that? For real?" I couldn't say a word...and not any of my classmates. It was just shock all over...and we were still the same when the professor finally arrived.

(pause)

I remember not being able to go to my internship that afternoon. It was in a basement at a local church...because there was potential of the churches being targets. I went home and called my fiancé who was living in Fort Drum with his family. The base went on lockdown soon after the attacks. Then after hearing he was all right, and his family was, too, I got you.

(pause)

Just think about where we are now...it's still amazing to think...ten years later. I still feel heartbroken over the deaths of all those victims. No one should have to die like that. Back then, after the sadness, came the anger fueled in the name of redemption. And for once, we were a nation as united as the name says...the United States of America. The terrorists tried to hurt us on 9/11, but we never gave up!

(pause)

But what about us going to war with a country that had nothing to do with 9/11? I was angry over how we weren't able to catch the real perpetrators behind this...that was, until we were able to get Bin Laden. His capture-and-kill mission was complete. And the mission of our men and women in uniform is complete. We need to bring our soldiers home.

(pause)

I hope we never encounter that kind of tragedy in our lifetime...but I'm afraid of how people will react...then again, everyone may be too busy pointing fingers at each other. I hope it never comes to any of that. And the public and the media...as every year passes, 9/11 becomes less significant. The meaning slowly gets lost. But maybe with Bin Laden gone, maybe there will be a renewed sense of reminder...and of justice.

(pause)

I hope my memories help you out with your story, Jamie. And I close by telling you the same four words I told you at the end of that night ten years ago. "I love you, brother."

Christina cautiously walks away from the stage, as Jamie watches her leave. As the light shines on Jamie, his face shows a pure, raw emotion.

JAMIE MICHAELS

She's right. She's right about everything...especially the teacher's French. I still remember telling my classmates, "I don't know what's going on." Then again, none of my classmates knew anything. Neither did I.

(pause)

I do remember the fear on my face, the concern...I was glad she called for me. And I remember just watching the TV when I got home, mostly seeing that second plane hit the tower over...and over...and over. I remember just not saying any words, just letting the images pour all over my head. The hurt was too overwhelming to respond, anyhow.

(pause)

We had been attacked...and the country rallied around itself. Feuds and rivalries were set aside in the name of freedom. We all felt we had a clue of who did this. We felt we knew who was responsible. And we vowed to be better people, in the name of America, the greatest country in the world. We would go on with our lives, as a way of telling those who did this and wanted to fall down...we moved on, hearts broken but still beating...and stronger. You lost! And hell, even Bin Laden...the one considered the "grand architect" of the whole enterprise...got shot and buried in some water near Pakistan! You would think that would alter things to a high degree.

(pause)

And yet...look where we are now. Ten years gone...two wars...two presidents...a country frayed in a way possibly not seen since the Civil War...and a memorial still being constructed, with victims' families for and against its creation. Even when it officially opens, it still won't be finished. And even with new towers, the old memories will be above the sacred ground.

(pause)

You have to wonder...why let the terrorists destroy us...when we have the ability to destroy ourselves? How could we let this happen? How could the atmosphere of hope and redemption that came out of such a tragedy...how could it slip from our fingers? Was it meant to be this way...was it meant to not last long? Who knows? It would've been nice to see it stick around, though.

(pause)

An event like 9/11 was supposed to challenge us...but challenge us to inspire, to be better people. Maybe we still can be. Maybe a play of these people's words can be a document for other generations to understand what happened that day...the lessons learned...and how we can't forget. No matter how we try to ignore it...we can't forget.

Jamie takes a deep breath, and looks around the room. He turns around, and walks back to the chair. He sits down, and faces the audience.

JAMIE MICHAELS

Oh, well...I can always think about it tomorrow...when the observances are marked.
And maybe then...I can put the words together.

(pause)

But I'll deal with it then...maybe then...maybe then.

Jamie puts his head down on the desk, and drifts to sleep.

Soft music begins to play, as the other actors slowly move around in their chairs. They grab signs near their chairs, and hold them as they start to leave their area. One by one, the other actors show a personal thought about 9/11 – and one by one, they leave.

The last person of the group to remain is Christina, who holds her sign of thought. She then turns to see Jamie asleep on the desk. She cautiously walks over to him, and taps his shoulder. Jamie looks up and sees Christina standing near him, and he embraces her. Christina kisses his forehead.

Jamie gets up from his desk, as he remains in Christina's embrace. Brother and sister walk away together, leaving the stage area. The lights fade out.

End of Show

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*In memory of the victims of September 11, 2011...and in tribute to the families who
continue to live every day, not letting their loved ones die in vain. United we stand.*

Justin Rielly

