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Feature

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WEB VIEW

FROM TERROR TO HOPE

A CITY UNDER ATTACK On September 11, 2001, two planes flew into the Twin Towers. These 110-story skyscrapers were the tallest buildings in New York City.

One girl's incredible story of survival and healing after September 11

BY KRISTIN LEWIS



VOCABULARY

iconic: well-known, easily recognized

symbolized: stood for, represented

wreckage: what's left of something that has been destroyed

terrorists: people who use fear and violence to gain power

hijacked: took control of an airplane or vehicle by force

The morning of September 11, 2001, was cool and bright in New York City. Twelve-year-old Helaina Hovitz walked to school through the busy streets of lower Manhattan.

All around her, the city was bursting with energy: Men and women hurried to work, taxis honked, and police officers directed traffic.

Along the way, Helaina passed under the shadow of the Twin Towers. These two 110-story skyscrapers, the tallest buildings in the city, could be seen from miles away. They shot up into the sky, looking powerful and strong.

New York had always felt like the center of the world to Helaina. People moved to this amazing city to pursue their dreams.

Helaina never could have imagined that the city she loved was about to be attacked.



PAUSE AND THINK: What was New York like on the morning of September 11?



BRAD RICKERBY/REUTERS (WORLD TRADE CENTER); COURTESY OF FAMILY (HELAINA HOVITZ)



▲ **DAY OF TERROR** People watched the fires burn from across the river in Brooklyn. Most Americans will never forget where they were on September 11, 2001.

◀ **CLOSE TO HOME** Helaina lived in an apartment building at the southern end of Manhattan. Each day, she walked past the Twin Towers on her way to school.

Paper and Ash

At 8:46 a.m., Helaina was sitting in her first-period science class. Suddenly, the floor shook and the shelves rattled.

Students exchanged glances, surprised. Helaina thought a truck had popped a tire. But in fact, something terrible had happened. An airplane had crashed into one of the Twin Towers—the North Tower.

Before long, the sirens began. Then, at 9:03 a.m., a second airplane hit the South Tower.

Parents came to pick up their kids—but Helaina’s parents worked too far away to come get her.

She spotted her neighbor Charles and his mother, Ann. “Please take me with you,” Helaina begged.

As the three of them stepped outside, Helaina felt like she was in a disaster movie. Paper and ash rained from the sky, and shouts rang through the air.

Some people stood frozen, staring up at the smoke that poured from the sides of the towers. But

Helaina, Ann, and Charles kept moving. They just wanted to make it home alive.



PAUSE AND THINK: What happened at 8:46 a.m.? What happened at 9:03 a.m.?

Ghosts

The Twin Towers were **iconic**. They were part of a famous office and shopping center called the World Trade Center. Approximately 50,000 people worked there. Many people felt the towers **symbolized** America’s power.

But to Helaina, the World Trade Center was simply part of her neighborhood—the place where she and her mom bought doughnuts and books. Now, this familiar landmark was practically unrecognizable.

As Helaina walked, smoke stung her eyes and nose. Crowds of people pushed past, their clothing and faces covered with ash. Helaina thought they looked like ghosts. Then Helaina caught a glimpse of



TOTAL DESTRUCTION After the towers fell, brave firefighters searched for survivors. The piles of steel and other wreckage burned for 100 days.

her reflection in a window and was astonished to see that she looked like a ghost too.

The Twin Towers had been designed to survive almost anything, but the fires burned so hot that the steel frames of the buildings melted.

Seventy-three minutes after the first airplane struck, the South Tower collapsed. Twenty-nine minutes after that, the North Tower fell. When the smoke finally cleared, there was only sky.



PAUSE AND THINK: What were the Twin Towers? What did they symbolize?

The Coming Weeks

Helaina made it home safely to her family, but not everyone was so fortunate. Nearly 3,000 people lost their lives on September 11.

The news was filled with stories of incredible courage. Firefighters had rushed into the burning buildings. People had carried injured co-workers down smoke-filled stairwells.

The **wreckage** of the towers was massive. It stood 17 stories high and burned for months.

In the coming weeks, the world would learn everything that had happened on September 11. A group of **terrorists** called Al Qaeda (ahl KYE-duh) had **hijacked** four airplanes.

Al Qaeda followed a hate-filled form of the religion Islam and used terrorism to “punish” countries with different views. Most Muslims—people who follow Islam—don’t agree with Al Qaeda.

Al Qaeda members crashed two planes into the Twin Towers. They flew another plane into the Pentagon, the headquarters of the United States military near Washington, D.C.

The fourth plane was probably headed for the White House, but courageous passengers fought back against the terrorists. That plane crashed in a Pennsylvania field.



PAUSE AND THINK: Who was responsible for the attacks?



Changed Forever

The events of September 11, 2001, shaped the world we live in today. The U.S. government has worked hard to combat terrorism and protect against future attacks. New laws have been put into place. Security was tightened at airports and on planes.

Recovering from September 11 has been a slow process for Helaina and many other people. Three weeks after the attacks, Helaina returned to school in a temporary location. She and her family continued to live in lower Manhattan. Like so many, she struggled with intense sadness and nightmares.

With hard work and treatment, Helaina is doing well today. She's now 29 and a journalist. Helaina often writes about people who are creating positive change in the world. She also wrote a book called *After 9/11*.



PAUSE AND THINK: How did the events of September 11 change our country?

Rebuilding Hope

The city of New York has also recovered.

In lower Manhattan, the delicious aroma of sizzling meat wafts from food trucks. Tourists snap pictures with selfie sticks, and cyclists weave through traffic.

A new skyscraper called the Freedom Tower rises just steps from where the Twin Towers once stood. It's the tallest building in the U.S., and 5,000 people work there every day.

Each year on September 11, two streams of light are beamed from lower Manhattan and can be seen for miles around.

The lights rise into the sky and disappear into the night. They're powerful reminders of what New York lost that terrifying day 17 years ago—but they also symbolize the city's remarkable strength.

New York is a beautiful, brave city that no act of evil can destroy. •



PAUSE AND THINK: What happens every year on September 11? Why?

TIMELINE

What Happened on September 11?

Terrorists took control of four airplanes and used them as weapons.

8:46 A.M.

The first plane strikes the North Tower of the World Trade Center.



9:03 A.M.

The second plane hits the South Tower of the World Trade Center.

9:37 A.M.

The third plane crashes into the Pentagon near Washington, D.C.



10:03 A.M.

The fourth plane goes down in a field in southwestern Pennsylvania.

