

Let Us Never Forget: Reflections on 9-11 with Recollections from John Carroll Alumni

*“Lord, take me where You want me to go,
let me meet who You want me to meet,
tell me what You want me to say,
and keep me out of Your way.”*

—Father Mychal F. Judge, OFM, NYFD



New York firefighters and rescue workers are seen Sept. 11, 2001, carrying Franciscan Father Mychal Judge, a chaplain with the New York Fire Department, who died while giving last rites to a firefighter in the aftermath of the terrorist attacks that brought down the twin towers of the World Trade Center. (CNS photo/Shannon Stapleton, Reuters)

Opening Mass for a New School Year:

Twelve years ago on September 11, 2001, the John Carroll community gathered at 9 a.m. in the gym for our Mass of the Holy Spirit for God's blessings on a new school year. Most of the students and faculty had no idea what was unfolding three hours north of us off of I-95 as we sang and prayed and listened and received.

The terrible reality of the first plane crashing into the North Tower at 8:46 a.m. was known only to a few of us, one of whom monitored the unfolding horror from a television in a nearby office. By the time the second plane crashed into the South Tower seventeen minutes later and the news media revealed unconfirmed suspicions of hijackings and terrorist plots, a sense of internal panic set in among a growing number of administrators and teachers. We knew that soon we had to reveal the unimaginable to the hundreds of young people in our care, the John Carroll Classes of 2002, 2003, 2004, and 2005.

Family Concerns:

Two of my own children were JC students at that time: Meighan was a senior and Joseph a freshman. Katie was in the eighth grade at nearby Saint Margaret School. I imagine that every parent joined me that morning in experiencing an enormous sense of panic wondering where their children and family members were and if they

were safe as the news from New York unfolded. I was fortunate that two of my children were right there in the gym with me at the time.

Looking back, Meighan shares that the announcement at the end of Mass by the principal who explained what had transpired was both shocking and unclear. It was not until later that day when she saw the constant replays on TV that the horror was comprehensible.

The Maggitti Family:

Later that afternoon we learned at school that Joe Maggitti, the father of one of our new freshmen, Lauren of the Class of 2005, was missing. He was at a meeting at his company's headquarters on the 94th floor of the North Tower of the World Trade Center. A vice president for Marsh & McLennan, Joe perished along with more than three hundred of his colleagues when the first plane crashed into their building. It took over a week before we received confirmation that his body had been found.

The days after the 9-11 attacks were filled with fear and uncertainty, bad dreams, many prayers, and lots of reassurances from a school community who sought to take care of our kids and their families. I spent a lot of time with the Maggitti Family at their Abingdon home: freshman Lauren, her dear mother Pam, and older brother Chris, and their relatives and neighbors.

Seniors Wanting to Make a Difference:

At the end of that same week on Saturday, the 15th of September, two of Meighan's senior classmates Lauren Faber and her friend Charles of the Class of 2002 actually jumped into a car and headed north going to see the unimaginable for themselves. I spoke to Lauren last year about her recollections of 9-11 and of heading up to New York.

She said that many of the students had little to no understanding of what had transpired after the announcements were made at the end of Mass. She recalled two girls talking at their lockers about how glad they were for the early dismissal as they had not studied for a test that was to be given that afternoon. Lauren said the gravity of the matter was uncertain for all of them, and that it did not hit her until she saw her drama teacher in tears after Mass.

Going back to her chemistry classroom to wait for our early dismissal Lauren recalls classmates asking about her own Dad who worked in New York. As she assured them that he worked in Long Island and was a distance from the city, it occurred to her that her aunt and uncle worked in the downtown business district. Lauren rushed to the main office where she used the secretary's phone to get through to her Mom and get an update on her family. Her aunt was near Wall Street and actually saw people jumping to their deaths. Lauren shared with me that these images became recurrent nightmares for her aunt for months to come.

When I asked her why she and Charles drove up to NYC Lauren recalled her

memories of everything being “so shocking and surreal.” She was overwhelmed with thoughts of those who were trapped in the rubble, hurt, and waiting to be rescued. According to Lauren, they drove up the New Jersey Turnpike where they could see the smoke from Ground Zero in the distance as they approached. Their car was searched before they entered the city through the Lincoln Tunnel. Parking close to St. Vincent Hospital, Lauren recalled the sad sights around them: empty stretchers on the sidewalk, fire hoses rolled up near hydrants, mountains of water bottles on street corners. The strangest part, Lauren shared, was the thick layer of dust and ash on everything as far as your eye could see. She remembers a grocery store with its delivery of fresh produce from that Monday still on the sidewalk covered in that layer of dust and ash.

Barricades were up everywhere. As Lauren and Charles walked through the streets they were struck with even more sadness coming upon a large group of officers from the NYPD, maybe twenty-five in number, who were standing together looking dazed. Lauren remembers National Guardsmen standing on each street corner, and large dump trucks driving away from Ground Zero with the words “Jet Parts” spray-painted on their sides.

Perhaps the most poignant memory of these two young people was of the large number of people like themselves who wanted desperately to help. There was very little for them to do. Lauren Faber recalls the many people who wanted to support the police and the guardsmen, but all they could do was stand outside the area by Ground Zero watching and perhaps offering water bottles. She said, “There wasn’t really anyone to rescue. Instead there were signs everywhere with pictures of missing people.” Lauren was changed forever by these experiences and has devoted much for her post-academic life to serving others in need.



*Remembering Joseph V. Maggitti at the National September 11 Memorial & Museum
(Photo Credit: Jeff Dembeck, John Carroll Class of 2008)*

Today at John Carroll:

Twelve years have quickly passed. We remember and pray for all those who lost their lives on that September day when the “world stopped turning.” Mass was held in our John Carroll Chapel at 9:30 this morning and we remembered in a special way the Maggitti Family as they remember their wonderful Dad, husband, and well-loved community coach.

Lauren Maggitti is now Lauren Salback, happily married with two beautiful young children. She posted on Facebook this afternoon:

“Thank you” just cannot express my gratitude to all of you who have been there for me and my family over these past 12 years. I’m still in awe of your support and

loving kindness. Thankfully, I no longer have to spend this day sulking in a corner. Though the pain is still very real and piercing at times, these times are fleeting, as I have two beautiful babies that swiftly take all of that pain away. These children have put an indescribable joy and sense of life back into my family. Callie, born just 11 days ago, has reminded me that even though... I lost my Dad whom I loved so dearly, God has now given me two precious angels to love and care for! I am spending today thanking God for them. I cannot stay down when I see their smiling faces.”

