

Will they smile again?

For fifteen years I made my way up to the 105th floor of 1 WTC. This was where I worked. I sat elbow to elbow with my fellow employees, in multi-tiered horseshoe shaped desks. Here in the New York Headquarters of Cantor Fitzgerald, we brokered US Treasury securities. We sat like this so we could fit the greatest number of people and still maintain eye contact. We worked from 7:30am to 5:30pm, we ate at our desks, and we shared our lives, our marriages, and the birth of our children. We shared so much, and spent so much time together that we became not just fellow employees, but family. We laughed and partied, but oh how we laughed! In the time that has gone by since I left Cantor, one thing I could always do, without even closing my eyes, was to look around, see the desk and still see those smiling faces. To be back there with them took only a moment's thought.

On September 11th, I lost a lot of family, for no one who was in that day got down from the 105th floor. And when I took a moment to remember their faces, to look around the desk, instead of smiles, I saw only death. When I woke in the middle of the night, only death, and I wondered if I would ever see them smile again. The memorial services started in September and went on and on. The tears flowed more in the weeks since September 11th than in all my fifty-one years combined. And I wondered would I ever see them smile again.

One of the things we learned at those memorial services was that just like a grieving family, we could only get through this as a family. So on November 27, we gathered. The word had gone out, that this holiday, like so many in the past, would bring us together again, certainly not in celebration like times of old, but to remember. So on that Tuesday night at a small restaurant in Manhattan, we came together, close to two hundred of the Cantor alumni. Some we had not seen in years, but we all came for the same reason, to remember and to help each other heal.

We hugged and kissed and shook hands, but mostly we held each other and said 'how good it was to see you,' and finished the thought with the word 'alive.' And after a few hours of talk, Bobby O said, "hey quiet down, Mary H has a poem she wrote and wants to share with us." And we grew quiet and listened as she talked of the bonds we had with each other, how what we had was special. When she finished we all raised our glasses and drank to those who were not there as well as to each other. And when I lowered my glass and looked around, I saw them all, those in the room and those who had perished on September 11th. And they all smiled.

Al Rieger