



REMEMBERING SEPTEMBER 11

Daily Herald

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A deafening silence left in the wake of terrorism

By Timothy R. Nunes

Lisle

Watching the world change before your very eyes, but not knowing how to react.

I walked out of my office building this afternoon and was greeted by the surreal ... Quiet.

Standing on the State Street bridge, above the Chicago River and surrounded by one of the largest and busiest cities in the world, the hustle and bustle I'd always been greeted with when I exited my downtown office building was strangely absent. Thousands of people rushing this way and that, noisy cabs and buses supporting the movement of the human masses, all missing. Today was like a page out of a fantasy or science fiction novel, wherein most of the people had miraculously, inexplicably disappeared, leaving but a few lost souls behind.

All of the city's "landmarks," the Sears Tower, the Hancock Building, the AON (Amoco) Tower, the Merchandise Mart, the Chicago Board of Trade, the Mercantile Exchange, even the Wrigley Building, had all since emptied out hours before, evacuated one by one out of concern related to the day's tragic events.

Walking the 14 or so blocks from the office to Union Station intensified the impression that something was indeed wrong, that a balance had been upset, that reality itself was somehow askew. Huge, monolithic towers with empty windows, sidewalks bereft of the usual pedestrian throngs, streets silent as never before.

I'd stayed at the office later than most of my coworkers, catching up on this and that, coordinating with company security and management related to the temporary closing of the office. Truth be told, while everything that I managed to accomplish this afternoon needed to be done, it didn't necessarily need to be done today. I was simply postponing the inevitable. The return home, to reality and the news of the day, with no work-related tasks to shield me.

After an uneventful commute by train back out to the suburbs where I live, I entered my house and was greeted with a cold, harsh dose of reality; Pictures of destruction, death, and horror, all presented in vivid, digitally enhanced, replayable glory. It was too much to bear, and I still wasn't ready to listen, to try and get my mind around all of the pain and tragedy. And so, I ran away.

I got in the car and drove to the store, where I wandered for minutes, tens of minutes, close to an hour or more, down aisles, picking up this and that.

Meat, to be sacrificed to the Gods of Propane. Wine, to numb the Gods of Wisdom. Corn, to assuage the Gods of Fiber.

As I drove back home, I couldn't help but notice the sky. It was a beautiful clear blue, with the colors of the twilight's last gleaming tingeing the few thin ribbons of clouds with shades of pink, red, orange. A blue, azure sea with subtle hints of colorful flame flickering through the waves. It was then that I noticed something I'd never seen before, at least not since moving to the Chicago area. A silent sky.

The Western suburbs of Chicago, which I now call home, are on the flight paths of two major airports: Chicago Midway, which at one time was (and possibly still is) the fastest-growing airport in the United States, and Chicago O'Hare, the country's busiest airport. In the entire two years that I've lived in "Chicagoland," I can't recall a single moment when there weren't multiple planes visible in the skies above. As a matter of fact, one afternoon not so very long ago, I was actually able to count fourteen planes overhead at one time.

Driving home from the store and looking at that beautiful but impossibly empty sky simply tore at the ragged edges of my emotions, emotions I'd been fighting all day to keep under control, and which I managed to restrain even then.

An hour or so later, with the sacrificial meat charring away on the grill and liquid oblivion flowing freely through my veins, I stood once again under that same suburban Chicago sky. Pure dark blue, pierced here and there with stars and planets, unmoving celestial bodies, yet oddly free of movement, the everyday colored lights and blinking patterns missing from the sky.

It was then that it truly, inescapably hit me. That silent sky was subtly, irrefutably screaming out the loss of hundreds of valiant firemen and military personnel, of thousands upon thousands of dead mothers, fathers, sisters, brothers, daughters, sons, husbands, wives, and, perhaps the greatest loss of all, of a nation's irreplaceable innocence, violently torn asunder by the bloody hands of terrorism.

Standing there underneath that deafening silence, I was no longer able to avoid the realities of the day, or escape the horrific visions I'd seen. Instead, I prayed for all that had been lost this day, for the safety of family and friends, and for the future of this great country of ours, the United States of America. I then did what many of my fellow countrymen and women had done many hours before. I cried, shedding tears not only for myself, but also for the very future of our world.