Fall 2017 9/11 Readers’ Theatre

Momma came in the room with a face as pale as the egg whites she’d cooked us for breakfast that morning.

She crawled into the bed behind me as I sat watching cartoons.

I had the sniffles so there was no need to go to school today.

Momma sounded like she had the sniffles too. She squished me in her arms

As her legs wrapped around me crisscross-applesauce like Ms. Melendy had taught us.

She pressed my head against her chest, smothering me some more.

I tried to give her a back rub like she gives me when I sniffle.

My hands circled her shoulder bones as she began to shake.

I rest my head on her shoulder and blow raspberries on her skin to make her giggle.

Instead her eyes stay locked on the smoke on TV.

I got off the bed and left, slamming the door, it was my turn to watch the TV,

She wasn’t supposed to change the channel!

Momma screamed. I had never seen her throw a tantrum.

I decided to wait outside her door the way she always did.

A long time later, her face was puffy and red

And I didn’t have an uncle anymore. Kenna

I browsed the digital camera for any picture.

I didn’t want to be in Yearbook this year

My mantra, my mantra, free A?

Sell ad space? Get that A

Sell none? You are in charge of more work instead.

A class that is pay to win.

Daisy is posing cutely, a saturated image of Cyril,

Seagulls eyeing discarded pizza crust.

Mr. Brummer walks back in briskly and calls our attention to the TV

Click! Buzz!

The wall TV hums to life.

 I see a plane smashing into a building.

Oh snap. Kyle

Every morning started the same

I woke up at the same time

And started watching my favorite morning cartoons at the same time.

The air feels different today

Not in a way I can see or smell

Just the way it feels passing into my body

Boston is cold this time of year

I pull my blanket around my toes

I feel a hand on my shoulder

It’s my mom

“Can you go play with the toys in your room for me right now?”

She seems serious from what I can tell

“And close the door”

I do as she tells me

Sitting in the middle of my room

I can’t help but hear the high-pitched noise of my cartoons

Being changed

It’s the voice of a man

I open my door

I’ve always been too curious

I see my mom sitting with my dad next to her

They are as close to the screen as could be

and they are crying

Moving closer I see smoke on the TV

but I don't understand

I see people jumping, and it looks like a movie

not one I’d be allowed to watch

I run back to my room

I don’t want to get in trouble

I look out my window to the view of our street

In a neighborhood full of families

Not a single person is outside Veronica

I didn’t notice that Papi wasn’t being himself

He still picked me up from school on time

He still dropped me off at my grandparents’ house

He still went to work afterwards

And he still picked me up later that night

I don’t know what clued me in

I’d had another day at school

I was six years old, already in the second grade,

So I guess people said I was smart

I could tell he was nervous

And the smile on his face looked all wrong

When the news came out on the TV that night

All I could see was fire and smoke

I asked my Papi what it was

And with a weird sound in his voice he told me:

The twin towers were hit

And I didn’t know what that was

So I asked, ‘cause that’s just what you do,

And he said it was a big building in the States

And that they were hit by terrorists

I knew what terrorists were

I knew where the States were though it wasn’t my country

I didn’t know what states were or how big the country was

All I knew was:

That’s where Mami went a few weeks ago

Went to work for three months

So we could have money for my school

And so my sister could go to university

And then I felt my hands start shaking

Like Papi’s were, holding my own

And the three of us sat there together

Huddled up on the couch

Watching as each broadcast showed the same things

More smoke

And more fire

More planes

And more loud voices

The people on the television talking about what it meant

Talking about the president and the people

Saying words like more attacks and war and response and death

And oh! I knew that word

I knew what being dead meant

It meant that the person was gone like my auntie and my grandmother

And a question popped in my head

A question I couldn’t get out:

Did that mean my Mami was dead? Gabriela

the smell of bacon and eggs was thick in the air

i ran down the stairs as hunger rang in my tummy.

the tv was on, like all mornings

playing all those stories of peoples and things.

my mom was watching in the other room as always.

that’s when I heard her yell funny.

i got down from my chair and hurried to the room,

the expression on her face was funny as she looked at the tv.

the building had smoke,

and I wondered if the firefighter’s hoses

could reach all the way that high.

it didn’t matter though.

it all came down anyways. (intentionally using lower case) Jannah

The television was up in flames.

Every channel was the same.

I watched the first tower sink over and over again

and I sank with it,

took to my knees on the rough carpet of the living room and stared at the screen.

Time escaped me,

and before I knew it, the kids were late to school.

But kids couldn’t go to school on a day like today.

Late to shower.

Late to dress.

Late to pick up coffee shop,

And late to catch a cab.

Late to work, but that didn’t matter today.

For once, being late saved my life. Stevey

Flight 93 was supposed to be like any other flight.

I had family to see after three long months

of working out of state.

The man that kept talking,

bragging more like,

actually let slip something that changed everything.

He said that we were all going to die,

along with everyone we managed to hit.

One man stood up, then another.

Both were military.

Both had guns.

They told everyone to fight.

They roared out to protect America.

Then they fired on the terrorists.

I didn’t think about America.

I thought about my daughter and my wife.

Several other men,

older than me, tackled one of them,

leaving the way clear for me.

I went to the pilot,

heard a gunshot as I opened the door,

knocked out the man flying the plane,

and felt the air rush out of my lungs.

I didn’t know how to fly,

but I heard more gunfire behind me.

We were losing.

It’s a good thing it doesn’t take much

to crash a plane.

I’m sorry Sarah, Emi.

I love you both. Ryan

Firefighter - named Frank

A call came in

No time to waste

Reports of a fire,

People in danger

We don’t know what to expect

But we must go

Flames everywhere

Debris falling

Screams blasting

We rush in,

Not knowing what we are up against.

Tears falling down faces.

Emotions overwhelmed

We must do our jobs

No time to waste

More screams

Walls coming down.

We must get out.

Everyone is hurt

We must fight to help

Suddenly everything falls.

Everyone must … Brian

Damp morning before school,

Eating the hot oatmeal with the brown sugar in it,

That you had to eat fast before it turned into clay.

Mom was on the phone with Dad,

Who was in Dallas –

A business trip –

And she changed the channel.

My sister wailed –

She was two and needed PBS –

And then Mom turned it off.

Real fast.

Too fast.

I asked her why.

You don’t need to see this, she said.

Dad is safe, she said.

But he won’t be coming home tonight.

School was normal until the afternoon,

When the teacher had us sit in a circle on the soft carpet,

The same way we would when she would teach us about periods,

And had us talk about our feelings,

Our feelings about What Had Happened.

None of us had feelings.

We were nine-years-old

And New York City was a whole dimension away.

We had family in Oakland, or Taiwan, or Chicago,

But not New York.

What was New York?

What was there to feel? Taylor

I was sitting in my grandma’s kitchen doing my homework, as I always did after school, but something was different today. The TV was on, which was odd because it is always off when I was doing my homework. I guess what was happening on TV was too important not to watch. I looked over to the right and saw my grandma staring with a look of disbelief at the TV. Too young to comprehend what was going on, I continued to do my homework. I only knew something serious happened when my grandma came over and hugged me like she never had before. Silvia

I got up for school, like any other day,

I put on my shirt, my pants, shoes and socks.

I was ready to go and headed to the living room.

Dad was on the phone with Mom and seemed frantic.

To think, my dad, a guy who usually kept to schedule,

Was frantic. I wondered what was going on.

He turned on the TV to the news.

I stared with him as two buildings were on fire.

I wondered what happened, the grown-ups were talking

Fast and I couldn’t keep up.

I wasn’t going to school,

It was dark birthday for Mom. Stephen

I was five years old when it happened,

When the first plane hit, followed by the second, followed by the world through their TV screens.

My mom sat on the coffee table, her face too close to the scene, tears running down her face

And the crumpled tissue unused, clutched in her shaking hand.

Dad was at work.

We went to the church, but it wasn’t Sunday, and we knelt on the floor instead of sitting on the pews.

My knees hurt by the end, and everyone too young to understand was getting restless.

After church, the not Sunday church, ended, we went to McDonalds with all of our friends.

It still breaks my heart to think that I was able to smile that day while so many others were wracked with grief, fear, and terror.

Years later, on 9/11, I asked my sister why everyone was so solemn.

I was still so young.

That day, I learned what had happened years ago.

I had seen it with my own eyes.

Heard it with my own ears.

But I did not comprehend.

The grief hit me, so many years later.

But it hit all the same. Shelby

Firefighter Rick Jones

We blow full speed toward the tower

I’ve heard the siren a thousand times,

only this times it feels like thousands of

sirens go off at once.

We brace ourselves as the debris devours

our bright red truck. We can drive no further.

Why did this happen?

In my ten years of service, I’ve never

seen anything like this.

Will I be able to save a soul? Will I

leave home tonight with mine?

I look toward the sky, powerless, the

tower crumbles.

We run. Karla

I see the smoke

so dark. So dark

Mommy was screaming at me

but I couldn’t hear what she was saying.

She waved her arms crazily. I thought she was having

a stroke.

The air looked like mist with dust.

Just flying in the air.

It was kind of hard to breathe.

Mommy ran to me when there was an enormous

black shadow closing toward me.

She was shouting again, water coming out of her

eyes.

Oh, don’t cry, Mommy. Why are you crying?

She tried reaching for me

but I could only see darkness. Tiffany

I am 8-years-old

in my school uniform

scratching the sleep out of my eyes

when my father says, “Come here and see history.”

The news anchor talks,

recapping the tragedy of the day before

as the Towers fall over and over again in the split screen.

I don’t quite understand,

but I know it’s important

because my father is shaking his head

and my mother is wiping her tears and everyone is silent.

Years later, people ask me, “Where were you when the Towers fell?”

I was safe. Miriam

I woke up at the same time I woke up at on school

days. My mom had gone to San Francisco for her citizenship and as usual

my uniform had been placed on the green chair from the night before.

I brushed my teeth, got dressed, and walked down to my aunt’s house

where I would wait for

my uncle to get my cousin ready and drop

us at school. I would always wait in the living room

but this day was different.

My uncle said something; from his voice I could tell something was wrong.

I walked down the hall to my aunt’s room

where my cousin was by her side as she flipped

to the news channel. I remember sitting by

her watching the plane crash, smoke filling the air.

My cousin and I were dropped off at school.

There I remember my 4th grade teacher rolling in the TV and turning it on

for a few minutes showing us the breaking news.

There was silence in the room; the teacher spoke a

few words. I didn’t know what to say but my

heart did not feel good.

Many lives forever changed after that terror attack.

My Muslim friends

still face troubles, and my cousins are

stopped at airports for further than the routine security checks. Devanshi

*The Pet Goat* by Engelmann and Bruner

News of an attack, children still reading

*The Pet Goat*, expectant children

sit a while longer as the country waits Steven

haunting images, horrific images

there I was at Western Carolina University

in the computer classroom where my freshman

composition class was meeting

I came to the room unaware of the terror.

the previous professor had left CNN on

my students and I watched as the second

tower crumbled; ash, smoke, dust clouded

the air

we watched as people jumped to their deaths

Later in the day, I watched more replays

of the shocking scenes

heard cell phone calls made by passengers

of the plane that crashed in a Pennsylvania field

I didn’t have a cell phone at that point in

my life

I knew though I would have wanted to make

calls

to say, “I love you… good by” Dr. Warner

It is dark.

I see nothing but darkness.

I don’t even know how many days or weeks it has

been since I have been stuck under these

piles of stones.

Cold. It is very cold.

All around, I feel the icy cold air hitting my face.

All I can feel is my face.

The numbness has started since I am not even sure…

I am scared.

I wonder if I can even live on to another day.

Hunger is not even a question.

The heavy brick tiles have crushed my hunger,

leaving me with absolutely no feelings.

As I lie here, I slowly accept my death…

“Hello! Is anyone down there?”

“Help is here!” Christine

I sat at home next to my grandma watching

the commotion on TV. The headline stated that

America was under attack. I only knew America as

a whole, no states, but just one big city.

My mom was in America at that time. I was not disturbed.

I was in Fiji. I remember thinking that my mom was

in that building because she worked in an office,

not knowing that California was on the opposite

end of the country from the World Trade Center.

However, the fear was the same, still real, still

painful, still unimaginable. I wondered how people

could do so many bad things and why. Adi

My classmates and I filed into the pews, they had

the whole school in the church. Our teachers and

principal explained to us what had happened.

It was so quiet; they showed us on a screen

what happened and what was happening during

the event. The amount of smoke and rubble

that had fallen, I could feel the tension in

the air. Everyone was crying; every child in the

room was shaken up. After the assembly, we had

all gone back to class; we sat there talking

about what happened. We were expected to go

on again as if nothing happened. When I think

of September 11, I feel sadness and I get goosebumps.

The day we all realized we are not

untouchable; our safety bubble had popped.

I didn’t really understand it then; I was 6,

But I could feel it in my chest. Nellie

To be quite honest

I don’t remember the day.

What was I doing?

My memory is from pictures I’ve seen.

Billows of black smoke

People jumping from high above

There’s nowhere else to go

but down,

or be burned alive.

Tiny specks falling to the earth.

That’s how I remember 9-11.

They are not my memories.

I don’t think I even felt fear.

I was probably at school

maybe I was home.

Living my very sheltered lifestyle. Erica

First Responder:

Smoke.

Fire.

Fear

Death.

and Panic.

That was all I could see. That was all I could feel.

Among the chaos, I froze. I froze in place instead of

running to save whoever I could. And that made

all the difference.

I’m sorry.

Child in the Street:

Everyone started screaming

So I screamed with them

Everyone started running

So I ran too

I didn’t want to run because Mom was supposed to

pick me up, but she was late

She never was late to pick me up, but for some reason,

I knew she wouldn’t be able to pick me up today. Alen