

Reflections On September 11th

9-8-2007

For years to come people will ask each other "Where were you on 9/11?"

I was at home, sleeping in on my day off. My wife, pregnant with our third child, was preparing to go to work at her job as a waitress. Our two other children were at school.

I was awoken up by the phone ringing and was annoyed that someone ruined my plans. All of that was soon forgotten. My wife, whose sister had called from Minnesota, burst into the room with the breaking news.

The rest of the day was spent, like many of you, watching the day's horrific events unfold.

When the towers fell I knew, beyond a shadow of a doubt, that hundreds of firefighters had died. My heart sank.

You see, the men of the FDNY who died that day, to me, were not just faceless firefighters from our nation's largest fire department.

They were, like us, fathers, sons, brothers and husbands. New York firefighters had left behind 244 wives, 606 children and 15 widows who gave birth after their husbands had been killed. These staggering numbers don't include grieving brothers, sisters, or parents.

But those firefighters also are part of another family. A brotherhood that all firefighters belong to.

Working shifts of 24 hours together, firefighters grow together, learn each others strengths and weaknesses, learn to get along, or not. Learn to cope with each other. We share the ups and downs that life brings, births, weddings, funerals. In the process, we learn to love each other as family.

This bond is essential. In emergency situations, firefighters must have unshakable trust that the brother beside him will be there at the crucial moment.

Author and retired New York firefighter Dennis Smith wrote "The firehouse is, fundamentally, a family environment, and as in families, there is a code of behavior that its members are bound to honor. The firehouse is also about brotherhood and a strong, unquestioning relationship between the men and women. If a firefighter falls into danger in a burning building, there is only the man next to him who will save his life, and that dependence is the unwritten code that binds them."

Are the men that died that day heroes to me? Yes!
Do I consider them brothers? Even more so!

If they could have their choice of where they could be today, I have confidence that they would choose their families.

And we would welcome them home with open arms.

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