

# Of Horror and Hope: Two Vantage Points



On the infamous morning of Sept. 11, as the nation witnessed the unthinkable on television, I went to the rooftop of the building where we have a home in upper Manhattan and saw the billowing smoke from the collapse of the World Trade Center towers. The scene was more astounding than the television screen could express.

Numbed and horrorstruck, I ventured into the streets later that morn-

ing with the throngs of bewildered people. Some were covered in dust, barefoot women toted their high-heeled shoes, and parents, clutching the children they had just retrieved from schools, fought hard so their little ones wouldn't see their tears.

Two weeks later, as I got off the train at City Hall Station, two blocks east of what is now known as "Ground Zero," two things struck me: the unremitting smell of burned electrical parts, and that formidable void in the New York skyline—a void comprised of 5,500 innocent lost lives and of two amputated architectural marvels.

Returning to our oasis of beauty and tranquillity in Southwest Florida at first brought mixed emotions: comfort at being home among friends and the placid island landscape, and guilt for having left behind the destruction and death for others to deal with.

Against such a backdrop, many people cannot let themselves enjoy life again. Seasonal residents and visitors are struggling with guilt over whether to return to winter homes or proceed with vacations. I urge those people to heed our president's exhortation to resume life and reinvigorate the economy. Travel, go shopping, delight in area restaurants, and live with unprecedented gusto. It's the best call-to-arms against terror.

Gather the whole family for the holidays in the warm conviviality of Florida's wintertime. Join the ranks of businesses, as *Times of the Islands* has, in reaching out to those who lost dear ones by donating getaway vacations to the rescue workers, firefighters, and their families.

This country stands as a monolith of resolve. We will proceed united, with firm conviction amid new perils and unflinching faith that happiness will return.

—Friedrich N. Jaeger, Publisher

Sitting on the beach on a cool October morning, I am mesmerized by the gentle lap of the surf, the golden light on the Gulf of Mexico, and the off-season quiet of Sanibel. With the slow-down in tourism, it is even quieter now than in recent years. In the weeks since the terrorist attacks, the beaches, restaurants, and resorts have been noticeably devoid of vacationers.

Surveying the scene this morning, I can lose myself in the moment. In front of me, the gulf beckons with its infinite horizon as the fin of a dolphin breaks the surface. On a nearby sandbar, willets, gulls, and herons excitedly chatter in the light of a new day and the fear of terrorism washes away in the moment. Our shores provide some of the best solace to be found.

My optimistic nature tells me that people will still seek the magic of these islands, to renew their sense of security and peace of mind.

For islanders and vacationers alike, the holidays take on an added dimension this year; we all have a deeper understanding of what it means to give thanks for the goodness in our lives and to share more generously the joy that the holidays traditionally bring.

These are times to seize the beautiful and awesome moments of our lives. Let yourself be inspired again by a sunrise at the Sanibel lighthouse or by a vibrant Captiva sunset. We cannot escape the reality that evil exists, but we can bask in goodness and indulge fully in all that our region offers.

As the sun rises higher, shifting into a more opulent shine, I dig my toes deeper into the sand with a pang of knowledge that our world is forever changed, that I don't know what will happen between now and the time this magazine is in your hands. It's a new form of uncertainty, sadness, and discomfort.

At the same time, I feel more alive, more attuned to all that is good in this world, and I am very thankful to be able to call Sanibel my home.

—Barbara Linstrom



Award-winning writer and Sanibel resident Barbara Linstrom has been contributing to *Times of the Islands* since its inception in 1996. Several of her stories appear in this issue.