

That Day  
In  
September

# **That Day In September**

**written by Artie Van Why**

Van Hughes Publishing  
New York, NY - Lancaster, PA  
(In association with Lulu Press)

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® Writers Guild of America 2005

Library of Congress Registration No. PAu-2-706-968

PRINTED IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA  
BY LULU PRESS

First paperback edition published 2006

ISBN 978-1-4116-8315-0

For my parents, Art and Thelma Van Why

## *Acknowledgments*

In thanking the people who have contributed professionally and/or personally to the evolution of *That Day In September*, I have to mention first, and foremost, Richard Masur. It was with his help that my words began to take form as a script. Richard encouraged me in the writing of it...committed himself to the directing of it...and supported me throughout the whole process.

Secondly, I have to thank James Carey for giving me the first opportunity to bring my words alive on stage at California Lutheran University and at the Celebration Theatre in Los Angeles.

I want to thank Carolyn Rossi Copeland, at the Lambs' Theatre, for allowing me to achieve my dream of telling my story Off Broadway in New York.

On a more personal side, there are many people to thank. It would be impossible to mention everyone. Throughout the months of writing, it was the people of New But West that were a source of continued support. They reminded me to take it one day at a time. And there was always the support of friends, to which I will be forever grateful.

I owe a great deal of thanks to Christine Cetrangelo, who was there to help in whatever way needed. And I will always be grateful for James Harder, being there throughout.

Thanks, and appreciation, for my family, who have always been there for me.

And last, but certainly not the least, is Ronald H. Hughes, to whom I owe so much, both professionally and personally. If not for him, this book wouldn't have happened.

Dedicated to the lives lost

## *From the Author*

We all have our stories to tell about where we were the morning of September 11, 2001. Whether in New York City or miles away, we all witnessed, and were part of, the horror of that day. Whether we watched the events unfold personally or on television, we were all affected, and changed, by that day.

This just happens to be my story...no more important or significant than yours. Just from my perspective. My experience. Along with your own memories of 9/11, perhaps these words will give you an added insight as to what it was like to be present in New York City on that morning...and the weeks and months following.

I live with the memory of 9/11 still...to this very day, often questioning why I survived, while others didn't. I live each day wishing there was more I could have done that morning.

The one thing I can do now is to continue to tell my story...to help keep the memory of that day alive. To honor those who died. That is my sole desire. To let my words be just a small piece of the history of that day in September.

Thank you for letting me share my story with you.

Artie Van Why

# Reflection

I want it to go away. I don't want it to have happened.

But it won't, and it did, and I was there.

I wanted to catch that falling man with the flailing arms and legs.

But I couldn't, and I didn't, though I was there.

I wanted to be a hero, doing more than I humanly could.

But I wasn't, and I didn't.

I wanted to stay there, in the street, not afraid.

But I didn't, and I was.

I wanted to be there through the end.

But I wasn't.

I wanted to stay and rescue.

But I didn't.

I wanted to be more injured, more dirty, more at risk.

But I wasn't.

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I want to imagine being buried, being missing, being gone.

But I can't.

I want to know why I survived, and others didn't.

But I don't.

I want it never to have happened.

But it did.

# **A Loud Boom**

I don't remember which came first, the shudder of the building or the loud sound. They probably came at the same time.

I don't remember how long it took before someone ran into the word processing center where I worked and told us that a plane had hit one of the World Trade Center towers. It seemed like seconds but was probably at least a minute or two.

In whatever the order, there was a loud boom; our building shook, and then there was quiet. My coworkers and I looked at one another.

I remember saying, "What was that?" Someone else asked, "Was that thunder?" What it had sounded like to me was as if a huge, metal trash dumpster had been dropped onto the 24th floor above me. That would have explained the reverberations of the building I had felt, but I knew there was no construction going on up there. Had something possibly exploded?

Someone ran into the center and told us that a secretary, who had just come to work, was hysterical, saying that a plane had hit one of the towers and that it was like a war zone out there. One of our phones rang, and it was our supervisor, calling from home. She screamed to the person who answered something about seeing it on TV and for us to, "Get out of the building!"

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What? My initial reaction was to go downstairs and see what was going on—more out of curiosity than alarm. I went to the elevator bank, along with a few other people who had the same idea. As we descended, though I didn't consciously think it through, I know I assumed a light plane had smashed into the tower. I imagined a small hole in the building, with the back end of a plane sticking out. Our conversation, as we headed down from the 23rd floor, was tinged with nervousness, but not fear. When the elevator doors opened to our lobby, I took a quick right and walked through a side revolving door.

As I passed through that door and out onto the street, three things went through my mind. The secretary was right; it did look like a war zone. It also looked like a movie set...for a disaster film. And it was like going through the door in *The Wizard of Oz*, walking out into a world that was unlike anything that I could ever have possibly imagined.