

The shoes of 9/11

by Mike Todaro

The Shoes of 9/11

Mike Todaro, 5/4/11

We celebrated the news from Pakistan with drinks and cigars by the pool above Miami Beach, marvelous breeze, clear skies. They had got him, the news said. I knew he had been there on 9/11, how he got off the train into this odor of petrol, went up the escalator to find people running as from a sniper but in no set direction.

How he opened the door and began to run when whatever was dropping from the top of the building ebbed, across the plaza and the street, up the hill past the chapel, down the hill of Maiden Lane then through the door and up to his 12th floor office there. I knew this before but learned the rest last night.

The World Trade Center had financed his company. For years, he was on the 87th floor. Over time, he found reason to move his company several blocks away. So he found a similar size company on Maiden Lane and worked out a swap of his office in the Tower for theirs down there. A year later, that company on the 87th floor lost everyone.

On 9/11, he cut through the debris, open field running downhill to Maiden Lane and up 12 floors, the top floor of the building, with access to the roof. As he stepped out onto it, the 2nd plane hit and then he knew what it was. Before then, he had phoned his wife in NJ to tell her to watch this, this event and she did.

The shut down of computers began, sending signals to their two backups upstate, billions in financial data, transactions routed different directions, laptops being closed, then back on the roof to watch, then the sound of this metal snapping, being forced to bend,

screaming and screeching against itself and then

.. instant thunder striking in a pancake cumulative, his building bouncing upon itself, life going Richter Scale, a billion pounds of panic per square second, a feeling of doom and dropping and damnation and that the devil was coming to get me, coming to get us all, coming at us bottom up to drag us back down to hell.

The building came down to his dropped jaw, eyes witness to all of this, ears overwhelmed with absolute silence of the terror of a heart not feeding a mind not working. The cloud. This cloud. This boiling, gray, seemingly solid, hundred yard high super-heated bioplastic volcanic airborne tsunami of a wall came wrapping down the street.

People ran, they ran for their lives, they stopped taking looks back and just ran. It didn't matter. He watched the cloud close on them, and hit each of them one after another, saw them go airborne in front of it, hitting the ground and being rolled over and tumbled along the asphalt probably. He didn't know. He had run inside.

It became night and a furious cloud swirled around the windows, objects hitting the glass, debris dashing haphazard, looking through a window gone a washing machine of chaos at its filthiest and fastest, its fullest and most fatal.

Now he could not call home. Those cell towers were gone. His family was in stress. And they were not alone. His town, and the towns around were affluent, packed with homes filled in the evening by those who filled the Towers during the day. So the schools watched too.

The schools watched this because they understood. They knew what this meant so they closed the schools and sent the kids straight home. The kids would learn soon enough. The community would too. So they sent these children home to be with Mom.

In time he went back on the roof stepping into over an inch of ash (a bottle of this on his desk now). This ash lasted for 30 of the many many blocks he walked to Penn Station. Along the way, merchants had pushed every drink they had outside and said please take it. They may have hated tourists but goddamnit this is NEW YORK.

He knew his train. He knew its track. Everything was locked down. He pushed the doors back and walked down into the empty bowels of the tracks, went to the end of his ramp and stood by his train in absolute chilled stillness. When they announced time to roll and the doors opened, he was the first one on.

By this time he had spoken with his wife. Had her Dad not been visiting, he told me, had her Dad not given her the calm his survival of WWII taught him was needed, he wonders how she would have been when he finally did reach her.

...the *shoes*. He can not forget the shoes.

He told me that when he reached the street that day and began his walk, all he could see for blocks were shoes. The wall had not just knocked them down, it had knocked them out of their shoes, which lay samegray everywhere, mismatched sets that all added up.

In time, the towns and the houses and the kids and the schools and the companies and the world knew who it was who did not come home. For the others, they went shopping for shoes, spent time sharing their thanks and savoring their families and silently, by themselves searching for why, you know, to this day, just why?

and there is one more thing
...the *papers*

he has this box of papers, all of them scorched around the edges, all four edges but otherwise perfectly readable. He found them settled softly on the ash piled atop the roof before he left to start home, picked them up, dusted them off, read them and saw them to be current market quotes of that same day, reports being being passed around hours before between people sharing papers in the offices of

Cantor
Fitzgerald

