

Empty Spaces

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Today there is something missing as I view into the distance—there is a hole in the skyline. Yesterday, it was taken away.

As I entered my office in Queens, New York, on September 11, immediately after exiting the subway, I was stopped by some colleagues. They informed me that, during my commute from Manhattan, planes had collided into the towers of the World Trade Center and the Pentagon. I ran to the telephone and feverishly attempted to reach family members who worked in the immediate area in lower Manhattan. No one answered at work, and cell phone numbers were inactive. Eventually, in the next few hours, I located all of them; not everyone was so fortunate.

Glued to the radio and television between patients, we waited for updates. Were there more rogue planes in the sky? How could this have happened? A fourth plane crashed in Pennsylvania. Then a medical student informed me that one of the towers had completely collapsed. I was shocked and outraged. This was followed in short order by the collapse of the second tower. How many people were still inside? No way to know.

Phone calls were exchanged in the initial hours between family and friends to verify each person's safety. I found out that a good friend of mine left for her job at the top of one of the towers regularly at 9 AM, because she practiced piano. She learned of the tragedy from her doorman as she left her apartment; 700 of her coworkers were missing.

Today there are holes in peoples' lives—5000 people missing. Hundreds of rescuing firemen lost their lives in the collapse of the towers. So many stories, so many emotions. One friend collected her

missing roommate's hair sample from a brush in the event it was needed for DNA identification, and another called to see if I could help to determine if some of her husband's missing 70 coworkers were in local hospitals. Everyone is connected to this tragedy in some way.

We can be proud of the way the medical community responded. Hospital practices and clinics closed as physicians prepared to treat incoming wounded. They remained on call to quickly address any needs. Unfortunately, this flood of wounded never materialized, as most remained buried in the ruins. In addition, thousands of physicians and medical personnel rushed to the scene of the tragedy to offer assistance. Mental health professionals donated their time to counsel those directly connected to victims, as well as other citizens experiencing anxiety or depression.

The people of the city also came together in a unique way. So many people came out in response to a call to donate blood that many were turned away. Others donated clothes, towels, flashlights, and other needed commodities.

All the staff at *Cutis*[®] offer our heartfelt sympathy to anyone directly touched by this disaster and those indirectly affected. We salute the bravery of the rescue workers, firemen, police, and medical personnel who gave of themselves at the risk of their own lives. We also salute the heroic passengers of United Airlines Flight 93 who apparently resisted hijackers at the cost of their own lives and averted the destruction of another target.

Today there is an empty space in the skyline but a larger one in our hearts.