



SEPTEMBER 11TH: WE NEVER FORGET

A commentary from Steven L. Fradkin, President, Wealth Management, Northern Trust

A good friend of mine survived September 11th notwithstanding that he worked in the World Trade Center, where many of his friends and colleagues perished. While he narrowly survived, like many others, I also had friends and acquaintances that did not. To some, it is trite to say we will “never forget.” I can tell you, however, I never do.

For most of us who were of age on September 11th, 2001 – we will never forget the day. In my case, I boarded an overnight flight from Chicago to Oslo, Norway on September 10th, arriving on the 11th in the morning (Oslo time). I showered at the airport, went into Oslo for a meeting, and returned to the Oslo airport that afternoon to catch a flight (morning time in New York) to Helsinki, Finland.

As I was preparing to board my flight to Helsinki, the World Trade Center was struck. At the time, we thought it was an accident and that it was a small plane. We did not know the truth, nor did we understand how extensive the impact would be on people all around the globe for years to come.

I will never forget arriving in Helsinki, later on September 11th (earlier EST in the United States), getting into a taxicab, and having the driver ask me what I thought about the Pentagon being “hit.” When I went to correct him, or at least thought I was correcting him in mixing up the iconic American sights of the World Trade Center and the Pentagon, it was he who corrected me. The Twin Towers had collapsed, the Pentagon had been attacked, and another plane was down in Shanksville, Pennsylvania after passengers valiantly fought back against the hijackers. In an unprecedented action, all air traffic across the United States and routes to and from were being shut down.

Approximately 2,950 people of all races, religions, and nationalities were murdered that day. I use the term “murdered” because that is what it was. It was a senseless series of acts inflicted on people who were simply going about their daily lives. For me, the moment was also a personal one. Acquaintances of mine died that day, and a very close friend who worked in the World Trade Center turned out, through sheer luck, to be one of the 17 people in his office who survived the day. Sixty six of his colleagues, however, perished on the 104th floor.

While those who sent the murderers to their death celebrated in safety, their actions also sealed their own fates – and those of many others. Over the next decade, thousands were killed in the war on terror. In the end, it was a war, like so many others, where both sides shared more in common than they appreciated at the outset – pain and loss.

The saddest truth is that the 2,950 innocent civilians are still gone, their families and friends are still grieving, and there is no cogent explanation for why beyond “hate.”

We cannot bring them back, but we do vow to remember, to stand a bit taller, to treat people a bit better, to live our lives more fully, and to behave in a way that those not fortunate enough to walk in our steps would be proud.

And so, for me, on each anniversary of September 11th, I reflect, remember, and renew my commitment to live life to the fullest. I hope you will do the same.

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