

**Digital Memories:**

Interactive remembrance of September 11

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### Abstract

The proliferation of the Internet in the last two decades has transformed how we communicate; consumers become creators and instant long-distance communication is common. The Internet changes how we as a culture memorialize tragic events, enabling individual recollection and allowing a more thorough collective memory of those events. This article will look at how new media have assisted in the cultivation of our story of the attacks of September 11, 2001. It will focus on the National 9/11 Memorial and Museum in New York City, particularly the interactive sections of the memorial's website at [911memorial.org](http://911memorial.org), and how individual memories and digital artifacts help shape our understanding of the attacks.

## September 11, 2001

### The attacks

Tuesday, September 11, 2001, dawned temperate and nearly cloudless in the eastern United States. Millions of men and women readied themselves for work. Some made their way to the Twin Towers, the signature structures of the World Trade Center complex in New York City. Others went to Arlington, Virginia, to the Pentagon. Across the Potomac River, the United States Congress was back in session. At the other end of Pennsylvania Avenue, people began to line up for a White House tour. In Sarasota, Florida, President George W. Bush went for an early morning run.

For those heading to an airport, weather conditions could not have been better for a safe and pleasant journey. (National Commission on Terrorist Attacks, 2004, p. 1; hereafter NCTA)

On the morning of September 11, 2001, nineteen men later determined to be members of the extremist Islamic organization al Qaeda boarded four transcontinental flights and took control of the planes with the intention of crashing them into well-known American buildings.

They were planning to hijack these planes and turn them into large guided missiles, loaded with up to 11,400 gallons of jet fuel. By 8:00 a.m. on the morning of Tuesday, September 11, 2001, they had defeated all the security layers that America's civil aviation security system then had in place to prevent a hijacking. (NCTA, 2004, p. 4)

Two of those planes crashed into the Twin Towers at the World Trade Center in New York City, a pair of office buildings that stood more than a quarter-mile tall and served as the working place for more than 50,000 people and a tourist site for tens of thousands more (Blais, Rasic & Bloomberg, 2011, 1).

American Airlines Flight 11 hit 1 World Trade Center (or the North Tower) at 8:46 a.m., beginning what the National Commission on Terrorists Attacks called, "the largest rescue operation in the city's history." (p. 293) By the time United Airlines Flight 175 hit 2 World Trade Center (or the South Tower) 17 minutes later, more than one thousand first responders had come to help evacuate the pair of 110-story buildings

(NCTA, 2004, p. 293). Thousands were able to evacuate, but miscommunication among emergency crews and a system unprepared for an event of that nature – no one anticipated a total collapse of both towers (NCTA, 2004, section 9.2).

Communications as well as command and control became increasingly critical and increasingly difficult. First responders assisted thousands of civilians in evacuating the towers, even as incident commanders from responding agencies lacked knowledge of what other agencies and, in some cases, their own responders were doing. (NCTA, 2004, p. 305)

Then, at 9:59 a.m., the South Tower collapsed, immediately killing everyone inside. Evacuation of the North Tower continued until it too collapsed at 10:28 a.m. Nearly everyone was killed; twelve firefighters, one Port Authority police officer and three civilians in stairwell B survived the collapse.

On September 11, the nation suffered the largest loss of life – 2,973 – on its soil as a result of hostile attack in history. The FDNY suffered 343 fatalities – the largest loss of life of any emergency response agency in history. The PAPD suffered 37 fatalities – the largest loss of life of any police force in history. The NYPD suffered 23 fatalities – the second largest loss of life of any police force in history, exceeded only by the number of PAPD officers lost the same day. (NCTA, 2004, p. 311)

A third hijacked flight, American Airlines Flight 77, crashed into the west wall of the Pentagon in Washington, DC, at 9:37 a.m., killing all 64 people aboard the airplane and 125 people inside the Pentagon. The building suffered a partial collapse, but the National Commission on Terrorist Attacks says the response to the attack was mainly a success (p. 314).

When the fourth plane, United Airlines Flight 93, took off, its passengers and crew were unaware of the attacks in New York City and Washington, DC. The four hijackers took control at 9:28 a.m., more than 45 minutes after takeoff.

Shortly thereafter, the passengers and flight crew began a series of calls from GTE airphones and cellular phones. These calls between family, friends and colleagues took place until the end of the flight and provided those on the ground

with firsthand accounts. They enabled the passengers to gain critical information, including the news that two aircraft had slammed into the World Trade Center. (NCTA, 2004, p. 12)

With that information, the surviving crew and passengers aboard the plane decided to take action, staging a revolt against the hijackers. As the passengers fought to get to the cockpit, the plane's hijacked captain, Ziad Jarrah, began to roll the plane to the left and right in an attempt to knock the passengers off balance. Five minutes later, "the hijackers remained at the controls but must have judged that the passengers were only seconds from overcoming them," (NCTA, 2004, p. 14), and Jarrah turned the plane towards the ground, crashing it into an empty field in Shanksville, Pennsylvania, killing the seven crew members, 33 passengers and four hijackers. "Jarrah's objective was to crash his airliner into symbols of the American Republic, the Capitol or the White House. He was defeated by the alerted, unarmed passengers of United 93" (NCTA, 2004, p. 14).

### **Rescue and recovery**

Rescue efforts at the site of the Twin Towers started within hours of the collapse as an estimated 5,000 people searched through the rubble, often by hand, for any survivors. Eighteen people were pulled alive from the wreckage, fourteen in one stairwell; the last survivor was found at 12:30 p.m. on September 12 (Blais, Rasic & Bloomberg, 2011, ch. 3).

By mid-October, rescue had formally shifted to recovery, as crews worked to find remains of the dead and any other personal affects as they removed the wreckage of the buildings.

The “Last Column,” a 36-foot-tall piece of steel was a core column of the South Tower that had been adorned with tributes from first responders and recovery workers, was removed from the site on May 30, 2002, to mark the official end of recovery. Nearly 22,000 human remains were located among the estimated 3.6 billion pounds of debris removed from the site (Blais, Rasic & Bloomberg, 2011, ch. 3).

### **Online memorials**

As explained by Zelizer and Halbwachs, our memories are shaped, in part, by connection with others. Individual memories come together to create a more complete collective memory. “Yet another basic premise in our understanding of collective memory concerns its partiality. No single memory contains all that we know, or could know, about any given event, personality or issue. Rather, memories are often pieced together as a mosaic” (Zelizer 1995, p. 221).

The Internet has given a voice to more people, allowing them to communicate – through the use of blogs, message boards and, more recently, social media – and share their stories and perspectives to “piece together” a more comprehensive collective memory. Online communication allows individuals to connect with a more diverse community, allowing perspectives from across great distances and from different backgrounds and social groups, helping to create a broader understanding of an event.

### **Memorializing September 11 online**

Unlike so many other historical events that are reconstructed from diaries, letters, or the retrospective testimony of eyewitnesses, the story of September 11—occurring as it did on the cusp of the twenty-first century—can be told using the myriad real-time digital documentation of cell phone communications, emails, voice mail recordings, and cockpit recordings. Each one of these born-

digital media has the potential to place the visitor inside the story in a most immediate fashion. (Greenwald, 2010, p. 120)

The September 11 attacks were the first true test of the Internet, and traffic to news sites saw a huge spike as “the Internet became a channel for anguished and prayerful gatherings, for heartfelt communication through email, and for vital information” (Fox, Rainie, & Madden, 2002, p. 4).

According to a 2002 study conducted by the Pew Research Center’s Internet & American Life Project, “for those whose only contact with the attacks came through a television set, the Internet provided a way to connect emotionally with a virtual community whose ties were not geographic, but bounded by common experience” (p. 7).

Those both directly impacted by the destruction in New York City and Washington, DC, and those connected only via the Internet or television were able to collect and distribute information. They were able to share their individual perspectives and memories.

Instead of only official accounts disseminated by mainstream media and the government, all kinds of stories can now become part of an evolving patchwork of public memory. Formerly limited in time and space, ephemeral gestures can be preserved in still and moving images, ready to be viewed and replayed on demand.

Previously banished to dark storage rooms, mementos left at memorial sites can be displayed for all to see. (Haskins, 2007, p. 405)

Some websites have becoming collecting ground for those memories and experiences, creating a more permanent archive of our collective experience on September 11. This collection allows us to look at the shifting memories of September 11 as time passes and its place in our nation’s history becomes more apparent.

**WhereWereYou.org**

Wouldn't it have been wonderful to have known what everyday people felt when Pearl Harbor was bombed or what the nation was thinking when the word Vietnam was first introduced into our nation's psyche or when Kennedy was assassinated, and how those views changed as the events afterwards unfolded? It would be a great historical resource. The media records everything, true, but those records get lost and aren't compiled like these fresh ongoing thoughts from people of all backgrounds. ("Where were you," 2001)

WhereWereYou.org, started by three American teenagers on September 15, 2001, allowed visitors from around the world to share their memories of September 11. It collected more than 2,500 posts before closing to new entries one year later. Some entries were limited to recollections of the attacks from both those in New York City and those around the world (Jarvis, 2011). From Viktorya B, 24, New York: "Then it happened, the second plane hit. We all grew silent. We all knew it was not an accident," to Joe Hanley, 40, New Jersey:

I was stuck in a group of several hundred people one block from the Trade Center when building 2 collapsed. We tried running till the choking wall of debris overwhelmed us. I've experienced mortal fear. Near misses and car accidents narrowly avoided. Moments of panic. But not like this. In those minutes I was sure I was going to die. Absolutely sure. (Jarvis, 2011)

Others expressed disbelief at the attacks and hatred towards the attackers. Asks Kristin, 19, Michigan: "Why do people hate us so much and why would you go to this extent to express that hate?" (Jarvis, 2011). Some called for a return to normalcy, while others demanded retaliation.

As Jarvis describes, the inclusion of hundreds of individual narratives and perspectives offers a counter to attempts to create an official story for September 11 and its response. Visitors can better understand, "the World's hearts and thoughts" ("Where Were You," 2001).

### **The September 11 Digital Archive**

The September 11 Digital Archive, organized by George Mason University's Center for History and New Media and the City University of New York's American Social History Project, and supported by the Library of Congress, is an attempt to collect a comprehensive history of the attacks on September 11, not only from official news sources, but from those who experienced the attack (Haskins, 2007). The Archive, its creators say, is designed to:

Act as a mediator of a historical event as it was witnessed by regular people, to provide a well-sorted repository of materials for future historians, and to furnish a space where the disparate experiences and reactions could be relived and reflected on. (Haskins, 2007, p. 409-10)

The Archive's curators only collect and sort the information, providing an unedited perspective of attitudes about the event. Even inaccurate or not factual accounts, they say, "contribute in some way to the historical record...[and] could reveal certain personal and emotional aspects of the event" (as quoted in Haskins, 2007, p. 415).

Through this exhaustive attempt to be impartial collectors of history, Haskins says the Archive "offers a panoramic view of the fractious cacophony of public expression that cannot be accommodated by a permanent, professionally designed memorial" (p. 414). This collection, then, will allow future historians to get a more complete understanding of the memories of the event rather than just an official narrative provided in traditional media sources.

## **The National September 11 Memorial and Museum**

### **Goal of the Memorial**

Demonstrating the consequences of terrorism on individual lives and its impact on communities at the local, national, and international levels, the Museum

attests to the triumph of human dignity over human depravity and affirms an unwavering commitment to the fundamental value of human life. (National September 11 Memorial & Museum, 2013, “The Mission”; hereafter 911Memorial)

The National September 11 Memorial and Museum (hereafter Memorial Museum), according to its mission statement, is intended to “bear solemn witness” to the attacks on September 11 and in February 1993. It is designed to honor the victims of the attacks and those who risked their lives to help those victims (911Memorial, 2013, “The Mission”).

### **The Challenge**

The Memorial Museum’s curators were faced with the challenge of how to portray an event that is “unsettled and still evolving” (Haskins, 2007, p. 411) with varied, often disparate, remembrances. Further complicating matters, the Memorial Museum is located at the site of tragedy that serves as a graveyard for nearly 3,000 citizens.

Alice M. Greenwald, director of the museum, said:

At its core, the Memorial Museum must carefully balance the act of commemoration— which has its own requirements of sensibility and reverence— with the imperatives of education, historical documentation, and fidelity to the emotionally. (Greenwald, 2010, p. 117)

This challenge is one Greenwald had faced before. She worked for nearly two decades at the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum, another site where curators had to tell a traumatic event and transform it into one of conscience (Greenwald, 2010). A goal of the Holocaust Memorial Museum, as described by Hasian (2004) could be utilized at the September 11 Memorial:

But they do provide us with vivid reminders of the importance of memory-work in the retrieval of the relics and narratives of our traumatic pasts. If these imperfect visual representations serve as catalysts for continued debates about the Holocaust or other genocidal events, then these pilgrimages will have helped

facilitate, rather than close off, the preservation of tragic memories. A monument can, indeed, only be a monument, and we need to remember that the preservation of Holocaust remembrances involves active human intervention and rhetorical negotiations. (Hasian, 2004, p. 88)

To achieve this, museum staff worked with not only historians and museum theorists, but trauma psychologists and representatives of groups that claim ownership of some part of the history of September 11. “Months were spent crafting...the fundamental intention of the museum, describing not the “what” but the “so what” of this project” (Greenwald, 2010, p. 121).

### **The Memorial**

The Lower Manhattan Development Corporation (hereafter LMDC) was formed in November 2001 by then-Governor George Pataki and then-Mayor Rudy Giuliani to help rebuild and revitalize the World Trade Center site and the surrounding area (LMDC, 2007). After six preliminary plans were rejected by the public, a worldwide design competition was held to decide on a master plan for the site. 406 designs were narrowed down to two finalists and, after thousands of comments, “Memory Foundations” by Studio Daniel Libeskind was selected as the winner (Blais, Rasic & Bloomberg, 2011). The master plan called for a memorial and museum, the design of which would be decided by another international design competition.

The competition for the National September 11 Memorial was held in 2003. More than 5,200 designs from 63 nations were received, and eight finalists were selected. From those finalists, “Reflecting Absence,” by Michael Arad and Peter Walker, was selected.

Arad's design places a pair of pools in the footprints of the North and South Towers, with the largest manmade waterfalls in North America. The names of every person who died in the attacks on September 11, 2001 – at the World Trade Center, the Pentagon and in Pennsylvania – as well as the victims of the 1993 bombing of the World Trade Center are inscribed into bronze panels edging the pools (911Memorial, 2013, “About the Memorial”).

Surrounding the pools on bronze parapets are the names. The enormity of this space and the multitude of names underscore the vast scope of the destruction. Standing there at the water's edge, looking at a pool of water that is flowing away into an abyss, a visitor to the site can sense that what is beyond this parapet edge is inaccessible. (911 Memorial, 2013, from the design statement of Arad and Walker)

The twin pools, each nearly an acre in size and 30 feet deep (911Memorial, 2013, “About the memorial), are a physical reminder of the monumental loss to the both the local and international community. The names of the nearly 3,000 people who died on September 11 and in 1993 humanize that loss, showing both the human and institutional victims of the attacks.

### **The names**

Developers were faced with the task of how to list the names of the 2,977 people who died in the attacks at the World Trade Center, at the Pentagon and in Shanksville, Pennsylvania, on September 11, 2001, and the six people who died in the February 1993 World Trade Center bombing. Their initial plan was for a random arrangement, but Arad advocated for an arrangement of “meaningful adjacencies,” or an arrangement by victims' relationships, which “allows the names of family, friends, and colleagues to be together, as they lived and died” (911Memorial, 2013, “Memorial Guide”).

It was important to not put the names in an arrangement that looked like the pages of a ledger. To the naked eye, it looks random. But to those who know, and for those who bother to learn, it is anything but. (Dunlap, 2011)

Using software, designers were able to group employees within a company, crew members on the same flight or friends or family. The year-long process also took into account around 1,200 requests from victims' family and friends. Some victims grouped together were family or longtime friends while others met for the first time on September 11 and spent their last hours together (Dunlap, 2011).

For the most part, there is no listing of affiliations on the Memorial itself; it is simply a list of nearly 3,000 names engraved on the 76 panels surrounding each pool (Dunlap, 2011). There is a designation for those who died in the North Tower, the South Tower, at the Pentagon, in each of the four hijacked flights, in February 1993 and those who were considered first responders (911Memorial, 2013, "Memorial Guide").

The use of just a seemingly endless list of names that appears random but is, in fact, anything but, gives visitors a sense of both the collective and individual loss. It provides a sense of both chaos and order, much like that which surrounded the attacks on September 11.

One can compare the inscription of names on the September 11 Memorial to the names of those lost in Vietnam inscribed on the National Vietnam War Memorial in Washington, DC. Foss (1986) and Sturken (1997) suggest that the listing of each name and visitors' ability to touch those names encourages a more personal, concrete reaction than in traditional memorials. "Each name suggests individual features, actions, personalities, families, and friends that defy their placement in a general, ideal class" (Foss 1986, p. 332). The memorials speak to the loss New York City and the world

experienced and allows each visitor to contemplate and create his own memory of the attack.

### **The Museum**

These many challenges have afforded an opportunity to transform a historical site of atrocity into a site of conscience. It is this goal that has most directly shaped the museum planning process...the national 9/11 museum will be devoted to the telling of a complex, challenging, and fundamentally disturbing human narrative. (Greenwald, 2010, p. 117)

In a 2010 article published in *Curator: The Museum Journal*, Alice M.

Greenwald, director of the museum, emphasizes the importance of individual memories and allowing visitors to immerse themselves in the events of September 11. This is achieved through interactive multimedia displays, narratives of survivors of the attacks and a collection of artifacts from the collapse and its victims (Greenwald, 2010).

The museum itself will be housed underground at the foundation of the World Trade Center site. "Visitors will reach the museum by progressing along a ramped descent that provides periodic glimpses into the cavernous space below." (Greenwald, 2010, p. 122)

The museum will be divided into three exhibitions: the Historical Exhibition, which will tell the story of the events on September 11, the events that led up to the attacks and how our world has changed since the attacks; the Memorial Exhibition, which will tell the stories of the nearly 3,000 people who died that day; and the Foundation Hall, which houses the "slurry wall," a retaining wall from the WTC that survived the collapse, and the "Last Column."

Visitors' first encounter in the museum is a "chamber of memory" where a multimedia program creates a "soundscape of recollections" of the attack.

Visitors will hear personal stories told by real people from across the nation, and from all over the world—some finishing each other’s sentences, some speaking in their native languages. Listening as they go along, visitors will recall their own experiences on that fateful day, taking note that while the attacks of September 11 happened on American soil, their effect was experienced globally. (Greenwald, 2010, p. 119)

Later in the museum, visitors will have a chance to record and share their memories, some of which will be added to the dynamic memorial exhibit.

Artifacts in the museum vary from the monumental – the Vesey Street stairs, the “Last Column” and a fire truck from Engine Company 21 – to the tiny – ID cards and dollar bills – that represent the heroism and loss at the World Trade Center site.

(Greenwald & Chanin, 2013)

Hein, as quoted in Hasian (2004), explains:

“Synthesizing experience,” noted Hein in 2000, has “become a major museum project, contributing to a metamorphosed conception of the museums” (p. 84). More traditional ideas about allowing memorials and museums to merely “warehouse” or speak for themselves have now been augmented with commemorative sites that are concerned with evocations that “intentionally arouse feeling and therewith a new dimension of authenticity” (p. 84). (Hasian, 2004, p. 70)

The smaller, seemingly inconsequential, artifacts like ID cards and shoes, combined with survivors’ stories allow visitors to connect with the victims and personalize the events, evoking more powerful memories and reaction to the museum’s artifacts.

While the Memorial offers a simple yet powerful tribute to those lost in the attacks, the museum offers a more complex perspective, speaking not only about loss but also about heroism and survival. Some artifacts celebrate first responders who lost their lives to save others while others show the commemorative response of survivors in New York City and throughout the world.

## **Controversy**

It was always clear that there were too many people and organizations with conflicting interests involved in the World Trade Center site for anything there to go smoothly (Loos, 2011).

The design and construction of both the Memorial and the Museum were marred by controversy. As Greenwald (2010) describes, the designers faced a challenge of how to memorialize and commemorate “unimaginable collective loss” as “key constituencies may still be traumatized by grief, both personal and communal” (p. 117).

Planning for a memorial plaza began less than a year after the September 11 attacks and a memorial design was selected in 2004. Construction didn't begin until September 2008 as debates over money, ownership and design delayed production. The Memorial was dedicated on September 11, 2011, a decade after the attack. The Museum was scheduled to open in 2011, but that date has been pushed back multiple times. It is currently scheduled to open in spring 2014 (Dunlap, 2008).

## **Exhibits**

Curators faced the task of deciding what should be remembered through artifacts in the Memorial Museum, a topic that many of the relatives of victims and residents of New York City felt passionately – and often differently – about.

*Should it be limited to the events that happened on September 11, 2001, and in February 1993 or should it speak to a greater lesson?*

Earlier plans for an “International Freedom Center” were to connect the victims of September 11 to the evolution of freedom, something victims' families worried would

turn the tragedy into “political or artistic commentary and angry debate” (Ramirez, 2005).

Debra Burlingame, sister of one of the pilots who crashed into the World Trade Center on September 11, said that placing such a museum “over the ashes of Ground Zero is like creating a Museum of Tolerance over the sunken graves of the USS Arizona” (Donofrio, 2010, p. 151).

Listening to those concerns, curators eventually decided that the Museum should focus on the victims and survivors of the attacks, but should not be limited to the events of that day. It will include the rise of al Qaeda in the Middle East and American foreign policy, allowing visitors to have an understanding of what led up to the attack.

The final exhibition will show how our understanding of September 11 has evolved, “changing as the world changes and deepening as we come to understand more fully the reality that we live in a world forever changed by 9/11” (Greenwald, 2010, p. 124)”

*How should the hijackers be included and remembered in the museum?*

Curators felt it necessary to include the story of the nineteen hijackers in the museum, and considered offering an in-depth history on their plot and activities leading up to the attacks. But the decision of how much information should be provided led to much debate. Some felt that leaving out that information would “whitewash” the tragedy while others worried that including information about the “murderers” could feel like blaming the victim or celebrating the perpetrators.

In the end, curators decided to move away from displaying the hijackers’ motivations, only showing evidence that proved their guilt. They decided to focus instead on the rise of al Qaeda in the 1980s (Cohen 2012).

The decision to include images of the hijackers was also met with contention. A 2012 *New York Times* article said:

New York City's fire chief protested that such a display would "honor" the terrorists who destroyed the World Trade Center. A New York Post editorial called the idea "appalling." Groups representing rescuers, survivors and victims' families asked how anyone could even think of showing the faces of the men who killed their relatives, colleagues and friends (Cohen, 2012).

Curators decided to shrink the images of the hijackers, "from 6 by 4 inches to 2 by 1-1/2 inches, the faces a little bigger than a thumbnail. And they will have evidence stickers from the F.B.I. attached" (Cohen, 2012).

### **Remains**

Thousands of body fragments collected after the attacks remain unidentified and, for a decade, were stored near Memorial Park. The plan is to put those remains in a room that would share space with the Memorial Museum at Ground Zero. The area would be closed to all but the victims' families. "Visitors will just see an outer wall inscribed with a quotation from Virgil: 'No day shall erase you from the memory of time'" (Cohen, 2012).

Rosaleen Tallon, whose brother died on September 11, said in a 2012 *New York Times* article, "the insensitivity was mirrored in the museum's decision to stock its gift shop with \$40 souvenir key chains engraved with the Virgil phrase. 'They're marketing the headstones of our loved ones on key chains,' she said. 'How disgusting is that?'" (Cohen, 2012).

Some families of victims also disagree with that placement of the remains below ground, particularly after the area was flooded from Hurricane Sandy in 2012.

Seventeen families filed a lawsuit against the city in hopes to reopen the decision on the placement of the remains.

But Greenwald told the *New York Times* that the decision to place the remains underground at Ground Zero “represented an equally earnest effort to fulfill a longstanding promise to other families who had sought, above all, to ensure that the remains stayed at bedrock” (Cohen, 2012).

### **Finances**

The National September 11 Memorial & Museum at the World Trade Center Foundation estimates that the total building cost will be about \$710 million, with an additional \$60 million annually in operating costs. That number is higher than the initial \$500 million estimate, but lower than the billion dollars estimated at one point in construction; the foundation and its designers were forced to simplify their plans to lower the price tag (Loos, 2011), prolonging the construction process.

That cost is higher than necessary, as construction was halted for nearly a year over a multi-million dispute between the foundation and the Port Authority of New York and New Jersey, which is responsible for the construction. The Port Authority claimed the foundation owed them \$300 million for their part in the construction and the surrounding infrastructure. The foundation claimed they owe nothing. That dispute was finally resolved and construction resumed on September 11, 2012 (Bagli, 2012).

### **The Online Memorial**

Portions of the exhibits and artifacts in the Memorial and Memorial Museum have been duplicated online at [www.911Memorial.org](http://www.911Memorial.org). This allows people who have

some connection to the events on September 11 but are unable to visit the physical memorial grounds to participate in the remembrances provided by the memorial.

### **The Memorial**

While visitors to the online memorial cannot experience the sheer physical size of the Memorial, a 3D simulation has been developed with Google Maps to provide a sense of the environment. Visitors can take a virtual “walk” around the two pools and read the names engraved on the panels.

A webcam shows the current site of the Memorial and Memorial Museum, and a panoramic camera shows a 3D view of the Memorial in connection with other sites of interest in New York City, like the Empire State Building, Statue of Liberty and other buildings at the World Trade Center.

An interactive Memorial Guide allows online visitors to search for individual names or browse by panel. Each victim has a photo, age and locations where they were born and lived when killed, and any requested affiliations with other victims.

### **The Memorial Museum**

Since the Memorial Museum is currently under construction, it’s unclear what the permanent online portion will look like.

Currently, the website offers a history of the World Trade Center, the planning and construction of the Memorial and Memorial Museum and previews of some of the artifacts that will appear in the Memorial Museum, as well as stories behind those artifacts.

The collections and exhibitions have been discussed previously.

## **Oral Histories**

The online memorial has a collection of more than 500 hours of oral histories from family members of victims, survivors, first responders, recovery workers, residents and other contributors.

Oral histories include that of David Beamer, whose son Todd was heard rallying other passengers on United Airlines Flight 93. “Thanks to the bravery of Todd and the rest of the passengers and crew, Flight 93 never reached its intended target, saving countless lives” (911Memorial, 2013).

Kathleen Santora, sister of New York City firefighter Christopher Santora, tells the story of her brother’s death on September 11 and how she enlisted in the Army in his honor, serving in Iraq and Afghanistan. She tells the story of speaking to her battalion and brigade during a ceremony in Iraq on the second anniversary of September 11.

New York City Firefighter Ed Walsh tells the story of recovery after the collapse and describes personal objects found while searching for missing coworkers in the rubble.

Dianne DeFontes, who worked as a receptionist at a law firm on the 89<sup>th</sup> floor of the North Tower, tells the story of her survival, including calling loved ones after American Airlines Flight 11 crashed into the building, and preparing to evacuate. DeFontes tells the story of how Frank DeMartini and Pablo Ortiz, employees of the Port Authority of New York and New Jersey, helped her and coworkers evacuate to a stairwell, and describes the long descent to safety. DeMartini and Ortiz died when the tower collapsed.

Some of the people who offered oral histories have since died. One of those, Richard Sheirer, led the coordinated rescue and recovery efforts in the aftermath of the

attack. He died in January 2012, but “part of his remarkable legacy will live on through the 9/11 Memorial Museum’s permanent collection. In addition to his oral history, he also donated to the collection the OEM helmet he wore on 9/11” (911Memorial, 2013, “Oral Histories”).

The online Memorial Museum also includes an Artists Registry, a database and gallery of artistic work created in response to the attacks on September 11. “The database, which is not formally curated, is intended to serve as a resource for the artistic community, scholars, journalists and others. The creative works in this online collection range from seasoned professionals to novice” (911Memorial, 2013, “Artists Registry”).

### **Interactivity**

Portions of the online Memorial Museum allow the visitor to interact with artifacts and timelines of the events on September 11.

A pair of interactive timelines show both the events on September 11, 2001, and the rescue and recovery efforts. The timelines include photos, videos and audio recordings (both oral histories and items from the events, like phone calls and dispatches from the planes).

An infographic, called “From Plaza to Bedrock,” shows an interactive history of the Memorial, including information about visitors, costs and artifacts set to be on display at the Memorial Museum.

A replica of the Statue of Liberty that stood outside a Manhattan firehouse and collected spontaneous messages of tribute and became “covered from torch to toe with uniform patches, miniature American flags, money, mass cards, rosary beads, condolence notes, souvenir postcards, angel figurines and other mementos from

mourners and passersby”(911Memorial, 2013, “Lady Liberty”). That replica was donated to the permanent collection at the Memorial Museum, and an interactive 3D Lady Liberty can be explored, with clickable stories about certain pieces of memorabilia attached to the statue.

The online Memorial Museum has a section like that in the WhereWereYou.org or the National September 11 Archive, where individuals can posts stories, photos or videos connected to the attacks. “Make History” has collected more than 1,000 photos and several hundred stories from around the world.

### **Discussion**

The Internet has helped shape how we remember the attacks on September 11, and allows virtual connections for those who cannot be physically present at the site of the Memorial and Memorial Museum in New York City yet whose lives were transformed by the attacks.

This connection is aided by the online National September 11 Memorial and Museum at 911Memorial.org. Visitors can virtually experience artifacts and remembrances by those who survived the attack through interactive online exhibitions. They can listen to the same oral histories that will be heard at the Memorial Museum and read the histories of artifacts found and donated to the exhibits.

An interactive Memorial lists the names and shows photos of the nearly 3,000 people who died on September 11 and in the February 1993 bombing at the World Trade Center, allowing a connection that, while not tangible, still allows a deeper understanding of the substantial loss we experienced in 2001.

**Limitations**

Time and finances prevented me from visiting the physical Memorial and Memorial Museum in New York City, so my understanding of the Memorial is limited to information found online and through the interactive Memorial and Memorial Museum. This, however, was both a blessing and a curse, since my focus was on online memorializing and lessons learned in the online Memorial; I spoke only to the things I could personally experience.

Further, the Memorial Museum has not yet opened so it is hard to analyze both the physical and online artifacts without knowing exactly what they will be. Books and websites show some of the artifacts that will be on display and give renderings of the Memorial Museum, allowing some understanding of what will be shown, but a full analysis of how the online Memorial Museum aids remembering September 11 is not yet possible.

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