



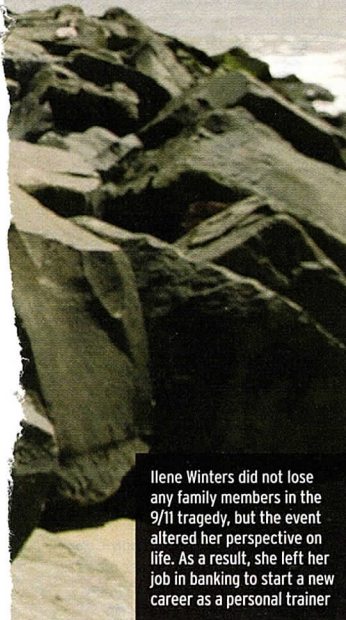
9/11

THE DAY **OUR LIVES** **CHANGED** **FOREVER**

On the fifth anniversary of the Twin Towers terrorist attack, Janine di Giovanni returns to her native New Jersey to see how the women there are coming to terms with the tragedy. Photographs by Gary Fabiano

'That first year, a shadow hung over us. It's still there. Even people who did not lose family were affected'

Ilene Winters, ex Wall Street banker



Ilene Winters did not lose any family members in the 9/11 tragedy, but the event altered her perspective on life. As a result, she left her job in banking to start a new career as a personal trainer



In Two Rivers, the area of New Jersey where I grew up, everyone has a curious reaction to seeing planes in the sky. Two Rivers' towns are on the flight path to Newark airport and, instead of glancing at planes nonchalantly, people here watch them until they are tiny lights in the sky.

This is because on 11 September 2001, thousands of people from this area left for work. For many, this was in the Twin Towers. About 9am, two planes commandeered by terrorists crashed into the towers, and 160 people from Two Rivers never came home.

That same day, United Flight 93 took off from Newark to San Francisco with several locals on board. It was also hijacked, but passengers bravely tried to overpower them. The plane crashed into a field in Pennsylvania. The combination of events has traumatised the area. If it were human, it would have post-traumatic stress disorder.

Community in shock

'It's been five years, and it's not healed, but it's not a raw wound any more,' says Eileen Moon, the editor of local paper *The Two River Times*. 'Everyone divides their life into before and after 9/11.'

'The most terrible thing is the insecurity. After 9/11, there were several security alerts, so people panic. There is still a sense that anything could happen at any time.'

Most of all, there is still a sadness that hangs over these communities of Red Bank, Middletown, Fair Haven, Shrewsbury, Little Silver and Rumson. It's an affluent area. At one end, lies the Atlantic Ocean and the Jersey Shore

made famous by Rumson resident Bruce Springsteen. At the other end lie green sloping hills housing famous horse-breeding farms.

The median income here is about \$100,000 (£55,000) per family. The average house costs \$700,000 (£385,500), and nearly 75 per cent of the people own their own homes.

But it is not the wealth as much as the congeniality when I was a kid that I recall. We spent summers at the Jersey Shore, an innocent world of sand, surf and ice cream. I lived in England most of my adult life, but always returned in August and for Christmas. There were firemen's fairs in the summer, with ferris wheels and candy floss; Fourth of July parades and diners serving meatloaf and mash. People knew each other. Until 9/11, the worst thing that happened here was the hurricane season.

Finding love again

'Growing up, I lived a charmed life – Girl Scouts, cheerleading and fighting with my sisters,' says Trish Straine MacGregor.

We meet at her spacious home outside Little Silver, and Trish, now a 37-year-old mother of three, including a five-month-old, is dressed in pink. She is brunette and petite with an open, kind face.

She is from the area. The eldest of three girls in a tight-knit Irish Catholic family, her father is a respected attorney in Manhattan and her mother, who died of cancer in 2002, was a full-time mum.

After university, Trish worked briefly in Manhattan and lived with her husband Jimmy and their son, Finn, in Hoboken, a town bordering Manhattan. But, while pregnant with her second child, the family moved back to the Jersey Shore.

Trish and Jimmy, who worked in investment banking at Cantor Fitzgerald, were 29 when they married, and were soulmates. Trish remembers that last summer of 2001 being busy: they went to London, moved back to the Shore on 1 August and, on 5 September, Trish gave birth to their second son, Charlie.

On 11 September, Trish heard about the Twin Towers on the radio as she drove Finn to his first day at school. When she got home, she was holding Charlie in her arms as she switched on the TV and saw the plane hit the second tower, where Jimmy worked.

Trish, who still cries at the memory, remembers all the details: the frantic calls to a phone Jimmy would never answer; the sobbing friend in California who 'realised before I did that Jimmy was dead'.

It took her weeks to accept it. She thought he was in a hospital, unable to reach her. The grief, compounded with the exhaustion of being a new mum, was insurmountable. She got through it with help from her family and a church support group. 'There were so many young mothers there and mothers who'd lost their sons.'

The first year was hard. She explained to the boys that 'Daddy had a bad accident and could not come home.' But despite trying to plan ahead and move on, the healing was slow. One night, she went to an annual party, the same party she had once gone to with Jimmy and Finn a week before 9/11. She had a sharp epiphany. 'I was not cut out to be a single mom,' she says. 'Everyone else was in a couple. Jimmy's absence was so palpable.' But she was wary of a new relationship. ▷

Eileen Moon, editor of *The Two River Times*, in a 24-hour diner in Red Bank. Eileen became the chronicler of the effect of 9/11 on the local area to ensure that the dead are not forgotten



◁ Trish and Jimmy had been together for almost eight years. 'Jimmy was my first love,' she says simply.

Trish was not looking, but soon afterwards, she met Stuart MacGregor through friends. He worked in the building industry and was a local guy, from Rumson. He was the kind of man she had grown up with – solid, dependable, Irish Catholic. She made the first move, 'Because I knew he'd be afraid of me, a 9/11 widow,' she says, shuddering at the term. They went on a date and talked. 'It felt like we'd been together for years,' she says.

They married in December 2004. The black-and-white photos show a bride who is composed. But there is not the innocence of a first-time bride going into her marriage

'After 9/11, there were several security alerts. There is still a sense that anything can happen at any time'

Local newspaper editor
Eileen Moon

believing everything good will happen. Trish's face shows something deeper: love, loss and pain, but a determination to go on. And she has. Declan, her son with Stuart, was born last year.

Trish says she never doubted she could love again after Jimmy. She knows he would have wanted that. 'It's like loving your second child,' she says. 'You never think you can ever love someone as much again, but you do.'

Brush with death

Ilene Winters did not lose a family member in the Twin Towers, but her life changed radically that day. A banker for 20 years, she had survived the 1993 Twin Towers attack and had been on the 30th floor of a building in San Francisco in the 1989 earthquake.

So, when the first plane slammed into the towers on 11 September 2001 as she was taking a meeting in a building across the road, she uncharacteristically burst into tears. Then she rushed into her boss's office just as the second tower was hit. Seeing the burning buildings behind her, Winters realised, 'Enough was enough. It was my third brush with death. I was not going to die in an office.' She remembers her boss sitting at his desk calmly working, but she walked out of that

building and into a new life.

Until then, Winters' life was 'always rush, rush, rush'. Every day, she caught the 6.20am ferry from Atlantic Highlands to Wall Street with people she grew to know over the years, who were now trapped in the burning buildings. 'I remember thinking, "I'm not coming back here. This is my last chance to do something different."'

Winters is a tiny, fierce woman who runs marathons and has cycled across the US. She's the type to make up her mind and stick to it. She says 9/11 altered her perception of life. Like many people in Two Rivers, she knew scores of people who had died. She wanted to give back to the community, so she organised a fund-raiser for victims' families at a local restaurant.

A year after 9/11, Winters' mother died of ovarian cancer. She realised there was nothing in the area to support cancer patients, so she threw herself into organising the Monmouth County Wellness Community, which is still her passion. At the same time, she studied for a MA in nutrition. She left her job and worked as a personal trainer, rising at dawn to train bankers who needed to catch the 5.30am ferry to work.

When I meet her, she is relaxed and tanned from her outdoor jogs on the beach. She stresses she is not the same woman who got on the ferry on 11 September 2001; neither is the community.

'That first year, a shadow hung over us. After a while, it partially lifted, but it's still there. Even people who did not lose a family member were affected,' she says. 'When something like that happens, you wake up and say, "I'm going to be a better person."' ▷



Lisa Lockett with the pony she bought her son, Billy, to help his recovery after his father's death in the Twin Towers

◁ nature?' Moon asks. 'It shows the power that all living things possess to get through adversity. To be reborn.'

Rebuilding lives

I wander through the towns, talking to all kinds of people and counting the US flags on front doors. I speak to the postman, priests and the lady who slices ham in the deli. And I spend time with two other women, Lisa Lockett, 45, and Karen Cangialosi, 43. Both lost their husbands and each reacted differently.

Karen, an Italian-American from a close family, still seems riddled with grief five years on. But she's fought hard to fill the role of her husband, Stephen – even to the point of becoming a baseball coach to try to connect with her sons, who are now 12 and 15. Her overwhelming desire was to shelter her children from as much pain as she could.

Karen says the biggest lesson she has learned is how to make decisions alone, as a single mother. She says she has more confidence. 'Since Stephen died, I have become more

'9/11 was a catalyst for opening people up. They are now more aware of caring for others'

Lisa Lockett, widow

determined to survive and committed to my family. I just want to build a nest.'

Lisa, who had a newborn and two other children when her husband Teddy died, went through shock, anger, then acceptance. Now, she is filled with an extraordinary energy and believes that what happened has put her on a different road.

'9/11 was a catalyst for opening people up,' she says. 'They have now become more aware of psychological wellness and caring for others.'

Since 9/11, Lisa has been in intensive psychotherapy. 'Support groups were not enough,' she says. Now, she bounces around her sun-filled kitchen in Fair Haven, talking about new business projects and staying away from the 'sharks' who gravitated towards her after Teddy's death.

'In some ways, I feel 17 again, but with the wisdom of a 45-year-old woman,' she says jokingly, referring to her boundless energy. 'I have found the fountain of youth.'

Outside, she shows me a



A memorial to Karen Cangialosi's husband, Stephen, in Middletown, New Jersey

pony she bought for her son, Billy, to help him with the healing. 'He was very distant,' she says. 'He needed this, and it helped.' When I leave her house, I can not help but feel how strong the pain is.

In my notebook, I have long lists of names of women to contact whose families have been ripped apart by a single day and a single act. Now, the community is categorised by lists – of survivors and the dead. Each town has a remembrance monument and, in Atlantic Highlands, near the ferry that still travels several times a day to New York, there is a county memorial high on a mountain, overlooking the sea and the Manhattan skyline.

One man who commutes daily on the ferry tells me he still looks out for the guys he saw every day who are no longer there. 'They just disappeared one day,' he says. 'It's not normal. You are not meant to die in a terrorist attack.'

Some of the families never recovered remains, while some buried pieces bit by bit. 'You'd bury something, then get a call six months later, saying they found something else,' says one woman. 'And you'd think, "What did I bury before?"'

My town is still beautiful, but it has changed. Sorrow has given way to determination to heal. In another five years, the children who were born in the weeks before or after 9/11 will have no memories of their fathers. They will have the fading pictures and the stories that will be told to them. After all, five years is not nearly long enough to heal such a tremendous blow to the soul of an entire community. As Eileen Moon sombrely told me, 'It is always at the back of our minds.' ■