



## SEPTEMBER 11<sup>TH</sup> TWO YEARS LATER

*Audrey Uong was a sophomore at Stuyvesant High School in lower Manhattan on Sept. 11, 2001. She reflects on the tragedy two years later.*

As Sept. 11 approaches, I feel it sneaking up on me more than it did last year. I am a senior, and somehow, the second anniversary of 9/11 fades in the background compared to my anxieties over college admissions.

I feel guilty that I haven't thought of it more, reflected on the second year of its passing. In some ways, I feel like it should be more than two years that have passed, because I have seen those towers fall and fall over and over again on the TV screen for the past two years and have grown so desensitized to it.

### **New York City Now**

And everything in New York is back to normal now. After 9/11 we were forced to move to another school for a month. We were lucky -- other schools weren't able to go back to their own buildings for much longer after the towers fell.

But we're back in our school now. We're allowed to go outside to lunch again, and there no longer is that stench of faulty electrical wiring that lingered in the area until December of 2001.

For awhile, the Parents' Association in our school was extremely vocal about the air quality in our school. They were afraid because of the barge next to us, where the fragments of the World Trade Center were brought, bringing dust and mercury and asbestos and who knows what. But they have quieted, as the barge closed and moved away.

The subway stops are mostly fixed now, and the only reference to 9/11 is the small gray square at a corner of the subway map that indicates where the World Trade Center used to be.

The bulletin boards, once filled with posters and pictures of missing people have long since been taken down in Penn Station.

But whenever I walk to school from my subway stop, I can never shake the feeling that something is missing when I look up at the skyline.

There is just a space where the towers used to be. I feel as if someone digitally erased the towers.

## **The weight of history**

I feel strange that I've lived and experienced such an important piece of history. It makes me feel old. I feel like only old people should live through important pieces of history. But I can also imagine, when I'm old, white hair down to my knees and wrinkled all over, my grandchildren climbing on my knee and asking me what it was like to live through 9/11.

And I will tell them that I was in a 9<sup>th</sup> floor classroom when it happened, that I didn't know what was going on, that the people I was with were laughing when they saw the World Trade Center on fire because they didn't realize what had happened. I'll tell them that I was naïve enough to think that maybe it was an accident that two small planes crashed into the Towers on the same day, that it was some mistake with the Air Traffic Control system or something. I didn't think that maybe a pilot would realize he was going the wrong way when he saw the Towers looming in front of him. I didn't think of terrorism, of calculated plans until the principal came over the loudspeaker and a physics teacher told me that a plane had crashed in the Pentagon as well.

## **Understanding it all**

I don't think I really understood anything on that day or the weeks that followed it. I still don't. I didn't understand what terrorism was before 9/11, and I still don't understand how people could be driven to cause so much suffering for so many people. What upset me even more later on is when people take out their anger on Muslims, because I can't bear to think of anyone attacking some of my friends just because one wears a hijab or knows Arabic.

I used to think, weeks after 9/11, that I wanted the Towers to be rebuilt and I wanted it done as soon as possible. I wanted to show the world that New York would rise again and be strong. But I don't anymore. Everyone already knows how strong we are. I just want a memorial, where the people who died can be honored, and everyone else can take a moment to reflect on how lucky we are to be alive.

*-- Audrey Uong is the co-Features editor of the Spectator at Stuyvesant High School*