

Coping

by John Farrow

Shock. Disbelief. Fear. Anger. Dad, two planes hit the World Trade Center and we can see the smoke from the top of our building! One plane -- maybe a horrible accident. Two planes? No.

My daughter's phone call as I was finishing breakfast on September 11th was the first inkling that something had gone terribly wrong that day. And there was also a bottomless emptiness deep down in my soul that hadn't been there since November 22, 1963, when, as a boy growing up in Texas, I heard Walter Cronkite announce somberly that President Kennedy had died. No doubt that same emptiness visited my mother, too, as she left a movie theater the afternoon of December 7, 1941, and first learned of the day of infamy that had thundered down on Pearl Harbor six time zones away.

What to do? What could I do? Momentarily, I mindlessly wondered if the New York Marathon would go on, all the while knowing that was the farthest thing from anyone's mind that day. My thoughts quickly turned to the families of those whose lives had so quickly and tragically been transformed forever -- the children who had kissed a mommy or a daddy goodbye that morning, others who had kissed a loved one goodbye -- forever.

Later I learned that a cousin had boarded a flight at Boston's Logan Airport that morning bound for the west coast. Only through the grace of God did his plane land in St. Louis.

Work was almost an afterthought even after my daughter called to say that she was back at her apartment. No subways were running and cabs were almost non-existent, so everyone had to walk home. For her it was perhaps three miles, a walk she regularly took in good weather. For a companion co-worker going up to 92nd Street, it was several times that, and she had worn heels that day. Their first stop was a Foot Locker store for another pair of shoes.

Running has always served me well as a refuge of both body and spirit, a place to go and sooth the soul and recharge the psyche. Of course, my dogs are a big part of that and today

was no exception. Their smiling, anxious eyes as I changed clothes for the run were full of boundless excitement. Soon their joyous leaps into the water of the irrigation ditches were perhaps the day's only bits of cheer.

Out along the soothing timelessness of the North Valley ditch-banks, the ducks and geese and their young betrayed not a care, save casting a wary eye at the dogs as we went past. Horses grazed in their pastures while two water turtles soaked up the remaining rays of the evening sun.

It should have been a wonderful, relaxing run. The weather was sunny and mild. The dogs were racing about, splashing in the water, bringing me sticks to throw for them to fetch. The Duke City Marathon, always one of my favorite races, was only a few weeks away. Yes, it should have been a wonderful, relaxing run -- but it wasn't.

My mind was preoccupied with the events of the day and my body was just not responding, obviously reflecting my preoccupation. Finally, I simply sat down on a grassy patch to stare into the water and watch the dogs play, pondering a world drastically different from the one in which I awoke that morning.

A song from the long-running Broadway musical "The Fantasticks" that my college class had used in its freshman musical kept coming back to me. My roommate's clear tenor voice still drifted through the air.

*Try to remember the kind of September
When life was slow and oh so mellow.
Try to remember when life was so tender
That no one wept except the willow.*

Try to remember. But it just got a little harder.

Hard to believe, but it's been five years since the terrorists attacks of September 11, 2001. That year, the monthly September meeting of the Albuquerque Road Runners Club was also on the 11th but there was no meeting. A few members gathered quietly at Monroe's for dinner but our thoughts and prayers were elsewhere. The above article chronicles that day for me and appeared in this newsletter the following month.