A Hero of 9/11

A former firefighter recalls one of America’s darkest days.

BY JOE BUBAR

It was September 11, 2001. The two biggest skyscrapers in New York City, known as the Twin Towers, were in flames. Smoke filled the sky. Huge chunks of metal, glass, and other debris were raining down. Thousands of people were running from the buildings. But firefighter Louie Cacchioli (kach-ee-OH-lee) did the opposite. He and hundreds of other firefighters and rescue workers went into the towers.

“We knew we were going into something really, really bad,” he says. “And our job was to rescue as many people as we could.”

Terrorists had hijacked, or taken over, two airplanes and flown them into the Twin Towers on purpose. Two other planes were also hijacked. One flew into the Pentagon, the headquarters of the U.S. military, in Arlington, Virginia. Another crashed in a field in Shanksville, Pennsylvania.
Fifteen years later, that day, known as 9/11, is remembered as one of the most tragic days in our nation’s history. But the day also brought out the best in Americans like Cacchioli, who risked their lives to save others.

INTO THE TOWER

At about 9:15 a.m., Cacchioli entered Tower 1 and made his way to the 23rd floor. It was pitch-black, and people were panicking. They couldn’t find an emergency exit. Using his flashlight, Cacchioli found about 40 people and led them down the stairs and out of the building. He had no idea that while he was inside, the other tower had collapsed.

Back outside, at 10:28 a.m., Cacchioli heard a huge roar. Tower 1 was crashing down too. As Cacchioli ran for his life, dust and smoke filled his lungs, causing him to pass out. He was soon revived (brought back to consciousness or life) by rescue workers. Later, he joined thousands of others searching the rubble for survivors.

In total, nearly 3,000 people died in the attacks on 9/11. That included more than 400 firefighters, police officers, and paramedics in New York City.

“I was one of the lucky ones,” says Cacchioli.

Today, a memorial is located where the Twin Towers used to stand. Cacchioli, now retired, often volunteers at the 9/11 memorial. There, he tells visitors about the brave heroes who did their duty in the face of terrorism.

“Everyone was helping each other,” he says. “I don’t want that to be forgotten.”

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