

The Never Forgotten Face

Chiara Montalto (September 09, 2011)



A reflection on 09/11

I never knew your name, but your face is etched forever in my mind. That cheerful and smiling face that greeted me warmly every afternoon as you brought the mail to our office, on John Street and Broadway, back when lower Manhattan was still lower Manhattan, grey, seedy and industrial but so beautiful, so New York.

I knew everyone on John Street: the coffee cart guy, the token booth clerk, the shoemaker on the corner and the illegal immigrants who would sell their wares until the cops came, and then re-appear twenty minutes later, and everyone knew me. But you were always my favorite. Probably because instead of just dropping the mail, you would take the time to chit-chat, make small talk, before taking whatever mail had to go out. In my circumstance, you knew that I really didn't want that day job; that I had big, lofty ideas and that I wanted, more than anything, to be acting. You would take



whatever submissions my hopeful heart had prepared the night before, and you'd always say 'Fingers crossed for you, kid. Hail Marys said.'" You didn't just carry the mail; you carried my hopes and dreams.

Randomly and strangely, I called out of work that day. I was not sick and there was no excuse. I remember the odd sound my brand new cell phone made when everyone was calling me at the same time. I remember going to Owls Head Park with my grandfather and watching in stunned silence; one of the few times I ever saw tears role down his cheek; I remember the sound of the voice of the woman I reached when I called the Staten Island public high school where my mother taught, telling me her husband worked in the Towers and she couldn't get through; I remember the sound of my own mother's voice when she finally heard mine, she had just walked out of her classroom thinking that I was down there, as I always was, not knowing I'd called out. I remember the sight of the paper that fell like snow in the backyard, I remember the hope that I'd held onto that those I knew who were missing would somehow be found. I remember not wanting to remember.

A few days later, I was back in Lower Manhattan, back to the regular, going on, trudging forward. Walking down John Street, like I always did, only this time the smell of death and the clanks and bangs were inescapable and incomprehensible all at once. And there you were, like you always were, though this time, instead of the usual "Fingers crossed for you kid, Hail Marys said," you just put your arms around me as we both wept. "Thank God, you're ok kid, I was praying for you."

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