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Grand Illusion

THE UNTOLD STORY
OF RUDY GIULIANI AND 9/11

Wayne Barrett and Dan Collins

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**THE UNTOLD STORY
OF RUDY GIULIANI AND 9/11**

**WAYNE BARRETT AND
DAN COLLINS**

**Research Assistance by
ANNA LENZER**

 HarperCollins e-books

For Jack Newfield, who loved his city and his craft.

WAYNE BARRETT

For the men and women who sacrificed so much
in the rescue and recovery effort at Ground Zero.

DAN COLLINS

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PART ONE
SEPTEMBER 11

CHAPTER 1

THE WORLD TRADE CENTER ATTACKED

FIVES, A RESTAURANT in Manhattan's Peninsula Hotel, was one of Rudy Giuliani's regular places, and when New York City's mayor arrived there for breakfast on September 11, 2001, his favorite table was waiting for him. It was large, round, and located in a nook beneath a bay window. As always, the tables in front of and behind him were left open. The seat Giuliani selected gave him a view of Fifth Avenue, the entryway, and a good portion of the restaurant itself. Although he didn't like to be disturbed while dining, Giuliani always seemed to have an eye on what was going on around him.

His breakfast companions were Denny Young, a top aide, and a friend, Bill Simon, who was hoping to run for governor of California with Giuliani's endorsement. Entering the restaurant, Giuliani worked the room, smiling and shaking hands before taking a seat at his table. The mayor's security detail split up as he sat down. All modern New York mayors have traveled with a retinue, and Giuliani's concern for physical protection was long-standing, the product of an earlier career spent prosecuting Mafia cases. One bodyguard took up position at the hostess station at the head of the stairway leading into Fives. The other stood in front of the wall behind the mayor's table.

Zack Zahran, the restaurant manager, watched his celebrity guest as the three men ordered coffee and began discussing Simon's gu-

bernatorial campaign. At around 8:50 A.M., he saw one of Giuliani's bodyguards leave her post near the mayor's table and come forward to whisper in the mayor's ear. Zahran saw no change in Giuliani's expression or sense of emergency in his demeanor. As he recalled it, the mayor chatted with Young and Simon for another minute or so before exiting the same way he arrived—moving through the restaurant for another round of smiles and handshakes.

Denny Young followed his boss. Left behind was Bill Simon. According to a Simon aide, Giuliani told his friend, "A plane hit the World Trade Center. I've got to go," and Simon replied, "All right." In Giuliani's subsequent account of his departure, Simon came out looking more prescient. "Without knowing the enormity of what had happened," the mayor recalled, "Bill said to me, 'God bless you.'"¹

Also left behind on the table were three unopened menus. As the day unfolded and images of the crashing towers and a soot- and ash-covered Giuliani flashed on TV screens, manager Zahran had the same thought over and over again: "Oh my God, the man didn't have breakfast!"²

It was the beginning of the most important day in many American lives, Rudy Giuliani's included. Later, when the chorus of praise for Giuliani's performance would swell so loud the mayor of New York City began to sound like a combination of Winston Churchill and Spiderman, his political peers began to grumble that he had only done what any responsible elected official would have done in his shoes. Mark Green, the leading Democratic candidate to replace Giuliani in the 2001 election, said as much at the time. "I actually believe that if, God forbid, I had been the mayor during such a calamity, I would have done as well or better than Rudy Giuliani," he said, and was hit with a wave of outrage from New Yorkers who wanted to believe that Giuliani was every bit the unique hero he had seemed that day.

We will never know how Green would have behaved as mayor under any circumstances—he lost the election to Michael Bloomberg that November. But on September 11, no other public figure rose to the occasion the way Giuliani did. It took George W. Bush more than a day to completely digest what was going on and to craft an ap-

appropriate response. The president was, of course, operating in a different environment. Bush had trouble getting a full picture of what was happening—the high-tech Air Force One kept losing telephone and television reception.

Giuliani, on the other hand, began to understand that things were very, very bad a few minutes after he left the restaurant. He, Young, and two police bodyguards sped downtown in a Chevrolet Suburban, and as the SUV passed through Greenwich Village, the mayor observed doctors and nurses in operating gowns standing on the street, outside St. Vincent's Hospital. He knew then, he said later, that it "had to be even worse than I thought." And it was getting far more disastrous by the moment. A little more than 16 minutes after the first jet hit the North Tower, a second plane, United Airlines Flight 175, struck the 78th through 84th floors of the South Tower.

Giuliani, whose car was about a mile away from the World Trade Center when Flight 175 hit, saw the explosion but assumed it was coming from the wreck in the first building. "And then I was informed within about 30 seconds that a second plane had hit the World Trade Center," he said. "At that point, we knew there was a terrorist attack going on."

Inside the North Tower of the World Trade Center, above the floors where a jet plane filled with fuel had just crashed, brokers and secretaries and other workers were calling their families worriedly, still sitting at their desks and totally unable to comprehend what was happening to them. Mike Pelletier, a commodities broker who worked on the 105th floor, called his wife, Sophie, in Connecticut. "He just said, 'Soph, an airplane just went through the building. I don't know what we're going to do.' He said he loved me," she recalled later. "And it took me a second to just realize what was happening. I said, 'Oh my God, is there help?' He said, 'We don't know. We don't know. We can't tell.'" Mrs. Pelletier called 9-1-1 and got emergency response in Connecticut, where the operator laughed, unbelieving. There would be no help for those above the impact of either plane, except for 18 people in the South Tower who found a passageway down.

Workers on the buildings' lower floors were taking control of their

own fate and heading for the stairway. Eric Levine, a Morgan Stanley employee whose office was on the 64th floor of the South Tower, fled immediately after the first plane struck the North Tower. He had reached the 50th or 51st floor when his own building was hit. A tremendous explosion knocked him down a flight of steps. “I then tried to stand up but the building was still shaking and the lights were flickering on and off. It was terrifying! Then the building began to sink. That’s the only way I can describe it. The floor began to lower under my feet and all I could think about was that it would crack open and I would fall hundreds of feet to my death,” he recalled.³ Out of the darkness came screams, shouts, and prayers. Finally, the building settled and the evacuation resumed with the panicked flight of people down the stairway. Levine waited against the stairwell wall for the crowd to calm down and then resumed his own descent. Just before he made his escape from the building, he looked through a window into the plaza between the two towers. There were bodies scattered everywhere, some still smoldering.

No one knew it at the time, but of the 17,400 occupants of the building that morning, roughly 15,000 would survive. Only 118 of the approximately 2,150 who died were occupants of floors below the impact of the planes.⁴ Survival was mostly a matter of place and time, and was determined more by what floor you were on when your 110-story building was struck than by any other factor.

THE EMERGENCY PERSONNEL racing to the World Trade Center from all around the city had no way of knowing that their heroism would, in many cases, end not in saving civilian lives but simply in placing themselves in mortal danger. They knew only that their job was to run toward the things normal people fled—fires, shootings, collapsing buildings. And so they came, racing to the trembling towers and the falling debris. And with them came Rudy Giuliani.

The mayor’s original destination was the much-ballyhooed command center he had built in the shadow of the Twin Towers. But the elaborate bunker—constructed to deal with just such an emergency—was almost empty when he arrived. Giuliani then began a harrowing

trek to find a temporary headquarters where the city could manage the unfolding disaster. It was a march that would help to transform him into a national hero. Dodging debris, walking calmly uptown through air so filled with dust and ash that people could not see the pavement at their feet, he was the father figure the city needed on a day when every New Yorker felt a little lost and frightened.

GEORGE BUSH RECEIVED word at around 8:55 A.M. that a plane had hit the World Trade Center. He had already arrived at an elementary school in Sarasota, Florida, to watch a group of second-graders read, and he decided to go ahead with the photo op. "I thought it was an accident," Bush later recalled. "I thought it was a pilot error. I thought that some foolish soul had gotten lost and—and made a terrible mistake." He continued with the planned event, and was listening to the children read a story about a pet goat when his chief of staff, Andrew Card, stepped into the classroom around 9:05 A.M. "A second plane hit the second tower. America is under attack," Card whispered in Bush's ear. A look of panic crossed the president's face. Later, he remembered thinking, "I have nobody to talk to. My God, I'm Commander-in-Chief and the country has just come under attack!"⁵

Nevertheless, Bush remained in the classroom for another seven or eight minutes after learning that a second plane had plowed into the South Tower. As a sympathetic writer later described the scene in Sarasota: "...Without all the facts at hand, George Bush had no intention of upsetting the schoolchildren who had come to read for him. The rest of the children's story about the goat did not register with him at all, but the president, raising his eyebrows and nodding, interrupted the second graders to praise them. 'Really good readers, whew!' Bush told the class. 'This must be sixth grade.'"⁶

WHEN RUDY GIULIANI got word of the crash, shortly before Bush, he left the restaurant far faster than the president left the classroom. On the northern edge of the 16-acre World Trade Center, Giuliani met his police commissioner, Bernard Kerik, and other top city officials at about 9:07. They decided to walk south from Barclay Street to a command post

set up by the Fire Department near the burning buildings. Looking up, Giuliani saw a man lean out of a window “about the 102nd floor of the Tower,” and leap into the air. “I saw him jump and followed his whole trajectory as he plummeted onto the roof of 6 World Trade Center,” Giuliani recalled. “I looked up again and saw other people jumping. Some appeared to be holding hands as they plummeted. They were not blown out of the building. They made a conscious decision that it was better to die that way than to face the 2,000-degree heat of the blazing jet fuel.”

NO OTHER ASPECT of the unfolding tragedy was more disturbing than the sight—and sound—of people jumping to their death from the Twin Towers. To Stephen King, one of the fire chiefs supervising the evacuation of the North Tower, the bodies crashing into the roof over the lobby of the tower came with the rhythm of bursting popcorn kernels. The thudding noises were utterly unnerving to the chiefs in the lobby and made it difficult for them to think clearly as they formulated a plan of action. “It was unlike anything I had ever witnessed in my life, or even thought was possible,” King recalled. “Every time I heard a body hit that roof, it sent chills through my body.”

September 11 was King’s first day back on the job after a long leave he had taken to be with his wife, who had contracted a rare and deadly form of breast cancer. His office at the Brooklyn Navy Yard had a great view of the World Trade Center. King didn’t actually see Flight 11 plow into the North Tower at 8:46 A.M., but within a minute of the collision, he and his driver were headed for the WTC. Like hundreds of other firefighters around the city, King didn’t wait for a “ticket,” or formal order, to race to the burning building. Within eight minutes, his car pulled up next to the burning tower. Too close, as it turned out. Falling bodies and debris rained down. The bodies, traveling at well over 100 miles per hour, exploded all around them. King’s driver jammed the car into reverse. The two men took shelter under a scaffold and then looked up at the tower in order to time their dash into the lobby.

RUDY GIULIANI'S SMALL party was walking through the falling ash like characters in some ancient epic. They reached the Fire Department's command post at West and Vesey Streets, which was under a shower of debris falling from the flaming towers. There, the mayor was briefed by the brass. Chief of Department Pete Ganci told him that firemen were ascending the staircases in both towers to assist workers fleeing the buildings.

"We can save everybody below the fire. Our guys are in the building, about halfway up the first tower," Ganci said. The mayor realized that Ganci was also sending a second sobering message: everybody above the fire was doomed. The important thing, Ganci told the mayor, was for all of the survivors to head north, away from the towers, as quickly as possible. That message became Giuliani's mantra, which he would repeat again and again. The mayor decided to push north himself, walking back toward Barclay Street to try to set up a command location in an office building selected by Kerik. Before leaving, he bid goodbye to Ganci, Chief of Special Operations Ray Downey, First Deputy Commissioner William Feehan, and the Fire Department chaplain, Father Mychal Judge. All four would die that day.

"IT WAS PRETTY clear to us that there was no way to put out a fire of this magnitude," Stephen King recalled. "Our concern was the need to evacuate the building in an orderly manner." The Fire Department had known for years that extinguishing a major fire in a high-rise building was a practical impossibility. "The best kept secret in America's fire service," wrote Vincent Dunn, the deputy chief of the New York City Fire Department in a 1995 trade magazine article, "is that firefighters cannot extinguish a fire in a 20 or 30,000 square foot open floor area of a high-rise building." The World Trade Center had floors of 40,000 square feet—almost a clear acre apiece.

None of the chiefs gathered in the lobby had discussed a building collapse, but the possibility played in the back of King's mind as he thought about the heat of the fire weakening the steel beams that supported the tower. Nevertheless, he joined the upward surge of

firefighters, hoping to evaluate the progress of the evacuation. King walked up about eight floors and was well pleased with what he found. Office workers were making their way down three sets of stairs in an orderly manner. There was no panic, nor did he see any signs of smoke or fire. Some of the workers rushing down the stairway reached out to touch the shoulders of the firemen racing up the stairs. "They couldn't believe that the firemen were actually going up. It was a memory that will stay with me always," King recalled.

King tried to radio his report to the chiefs in the lobby below, but reception in the high-rise building was poor. He realized he would have to return to the lobby to brief the other chiefs on the evacuation. In his almost unique case, the defects in the Fire Department radio system proved to be a lifesaver. Had King been able to reach the chiefs by radio, he would have continued his climb up the stairs.

GIULIANI HAD BEEN at the scene of the disaster for about 40 minutes when, at around 9:50 A.M., he commandeered a small office building at 75 Barclay Street, where he hoped to establish a temporary command post. Cell phone communication had become nearly impossible, and Giuliani used the landline phones at the Barclay Street building to contact the White House, which was being evacuated.

President Bush had been shepherded into Air Force One, where, surrounded by confused and security-obsessed aides, he wound up circling in the air for about 40 minutes before heading for Barksdale Air Force Base in northern Louisiana. Bush was out of touch with the country, which was waking up to the enormous disaster that was taking place in New York and Washington, and he was unreachable when Mayor Giuliani urgently asked a presidential aide to put him through. The mayor was told that Vice President Dick Cheney would call him back soon on the same phone. It took Giuliani a minute to realize that the phone had gone dead.

At 9:59 A.M., the South Tower collapsed, sending an enormous cloud of smoke, gas, dust, and deadly debris rushing through the streets of Lower Manhattan. The mayor, in his newly established com-

mand post at 75 Barclay, heard a loud roar but had no idea what was happening. Chunks of steel and concrete blew out the south-facing windows and buried the building entrance in debris. Rudy Giuliani rushed to the basement.

IN THE NORTH Tower lobby, Stephen King was reviewing blueprints of the building as the chiefs struggled to get a handle on what systems might still be working on the upper floors. Amid the bedlam and confusion, he overheard a radio transmission: "Oh my God! The tower's coming down!" With no hard information about what was happening, King assumed that the North Tower was coming down on his head. "Oh my God. There is no way I am surviving this one," he thought. In what the 30-year Fire Department veteran believed to be his final moments of life, King worked out an eerily accurate picture of the death suffered by hundreds of his fellow firefighters trapped in the Twin Towers. King had been flabbergasted by the subterranean devastation wrought by the first World Trade Center bombing in 1993, and he now saw himself being driven deep underground through a set of subbasements by forces so violent and powerful that no shred of his body would remain for rescuers to recover.

The roar grew louder and louder. What was left of the massive floor-to-ceiling windows in the lobby exploded inward, sending BB-sized bits of glass flying through the air. Stephen King's world went black.

When he regained consciousness, he was amazed to find himself alive but suffocating. "This is ridiculous," he thought as he gasped and struggled to regain his breath. Despite a badly injured knee, he somehow managed to make it out of the lobby. In a state of shock, King moved from utter blackness into a world of white. Was he walking through a cloud? he wondered. Or was he already dead? In King's ghost world, he could see people running and hear them screaming on the street around him, as bodies and debris continued to fall from the sky. But he felt divorced from the chaos around him: "It was like I was outside looking in."



AT BARCLAY STREET, Giuliani and his party began a search for a way out of the building. A series of locked basement doors prevented escape. The mayor's men were growing more frightened and apprehensive, though everybody tried to put on a brave front. Then a maintenance man appeared out of nowhere. He led the party through a basement door into an adjoining building at 100 Church Street. There, things were not much better, and Giuliani soon concluded that they needed to move again to avoid the possibility of a building collapse.

"If I have to die I'd rather die outside than get trapped in a building," he remembered thinking. He needed to find a place "to re-establish city government." Unlike George Bush, who was stuck, incommunicado, in Air Force One, Giuliani was determined to speak to his frightened city.

Reporters are another first responder breed who tend to race toward situations that rational people run away from, and outside the building Giuliani saw some members of the media, including Andrew Kirtzman, a TV reporter and Giuliani biographer. "I grab Kirtzman by the arm and say, 'We're taking you with us.' Some of them look a little stunned. I begin holding an ad-hoc walking press conference in which I tell people to remain calm and go straight north."

If the reporters were stunned, it was because it had been a long time since Giuliani had solicited their presence anywhere. He simply had no use for the people covering him. The relationship wasn't so much bad as nonexistent. But that was just one of the many things September 11 was changing. The reporters now became an integral part of Giuliani's traveling emergency team. The mayor wanted to demonstrate that he was firmly in control despite the catastrophe. His party moved north up Church Street in search of yet another new headquarters. Many of the men who were with him would come to be regarded as heroes in their own right because of their connection to Giuliani and their part in his march uptown—their pictures leaping out of glossy magazines and newspaper profiles, courted for TV interviews and deluged with offers of speaking engagements or consulting

contracts. Kerik, the police commissioner, Tom Von Essen, the head of the Fire Department, and Richard Sheirer, who ran the Office of Emergency Management, would, in particular, emerge as the mayor's Three Musketeers—almost as identified with the terrible day as Giuliani was.

Giuliani began a series of “walking press conferences” as they marched uptown. Then, at 10:28 A.M., the North Tower collapsed in a terrifying replay. “Fuck!” yelled a mayoral aide. Everyone, including Giuliani, started running away from the second deadly cloud of ash and debris that had been unleashed.

“Just keep going north,” Giuliani shouted.

AIR FORCE ONE did not touch down at Barksdale until 11:45 A.M., bearing the president of the United States. He had been out of sight since making a one-minute statement at the Sarasota elementary school. In the interim, both World Trade Center towers had collapsed and the Pentagon had been attacked. “The American people want to know where their dang president is,” Bush complained.

BY THAT TIME, Rudy Giuliani was already a legend in the making. After rejecting several buildings as temporary headquarters because they were close to structures that might themselves become terrorist targets, the mayor and his party broke into a firehouse on Houston Street. There, around 10:57, Giuliani found a phone and spoke to the people of New York City. Pleading for calm, he said, “My heart goes out to all of you. I’ve never seen anything like this. . . . It’s a horrible, horrible situation, and all that I can tell you is that every resource that we have is attempting to rescue as many people as possible. The end result is going to be some horrendous number of lives lost.”

Giuliani then went about the business of reestablishing his government. He finally settled in around noon at the police academy on East 20th Street as a headquarters and began to plan for the immediate future. His first concerns turned out to be unfounded. Like almost everyone else in New York, Giuliani expected thousands of injured people to jam city hospitals, but, in fact, the circumstances of the disaster

had drawn a fairly clean line between the survivors, who were mainly unharmed, and the victims, who never emerged from the building. In addition to the 2,150 occupants killed in the Twin Towers, the other nearly 600 who died were mainly police, firefighters, and plane passengers, including the hijackers.

AT BARKSDALE, BUSH conferred with Cheney on the phone and issued a two-minute videotaped statement in which he pledged that the U.S. “will hunt down and punish those responsible for these cowardly acts.” The president looked nervous and vaguely confused, and the appearance did little to soothe a troubled nation. Bush wanted to return to Washington, but was dissuaded by aides. “We still think it’s unstable, Mr. President,” said Cheney. At 1:25 P.M., Air Force One took off again, headed for Offutt Air Force Base in Omaha, Nebraska. Once airborne, the president’s talk turned tough, according to notes taken by his press secretary, Ari Fleischer. “We’re not going to have any slap-on-the-wrist crap this time,” Bush said at one point. To the vice president, Bush said, “We’re at war, Dick. We’re going to find out who did this and kick their ass.”

WHILE GEORGE BUSH was making America wonder who was watching the store, Giuliani led a televised news conference at the police academy at 2:50 P.M.. It was a masterful performance that left no one in doubt that New York City, at least, was in strong hands. In response to a question about the number of deaths, he said, “The number of casualties will be more than any of us can bear.” It was a quote that would echo for years to come.

Giuliani was working under enormous personal strain. As mayor, he had always been exceedingly close to the police and firefighters. No matter what the hour, if a police officer was seriously injured or a firefighter killed in the line of duty, the mayor was among the first at the hospital, comforting the family members, visiting the wounded. If the worst occurred, he was always present for the funeral, and now it was becoming clear that the number of funerals would be unimaginable. The mayor also continued to get reports that friends and colleagues