

"FALLING TOGETHER"

By Elia Zedeño

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In recent months, I've had a sense of re-awakening to a familiar, yet new level of consciousness. Books that had collected dust on my shelves have finally served their purpose. I've become more conscious of my surroundings and am willing to stop and listen to others as well as listen to myself. The usage of my language is more proactive and once again I find joy in writing.

Upon finally re-opening my journal, I found an anecdote I wrote on the morning of September 25, 1999 while sitting on the rear deck of my home. With my eyes closed, I experienced a sense of oneness with the environment. One that is quite difficult to explain. Humanity may not have yet attained the vocabulary to describe such an event. This day reminded me of the 1970 film and soundtrack title "On a Clear Day You Can See Forever". I wrote:

Oh! What a beautiful, sunny day God made for us. In my mind, I imagine God standing at the top of a mountain directing, no, instructing, no, creating this day for us to enjoy. Everyone is happy. Birds are singing. The leaves on the trees are dancing. Even the insects are crawling and flying with newly found stride. I can't imagine anyone not being happy this day.

For a moment I think perhaps the rain might not be happy. However, something tells me it is. I think the rain has stopped to gather its thoughts, its strength, and is regrouping just as we must do at times in order to refill ourselves with the Grace of God.

I marvel at the things I am able to see, feel, hear and love. Amazing Grace surrounds me like a warm blanket on a cold winter day.

Thank you Lord for allowing me the privilege to take a glimpse at You, for placing me always in the right place at the right time, and for loving me even when I still struggle to love and to know what love is.

I'm on my way, God. Sometimes I'll run and sometimes I'll crawl. Sometimes I might even take a few steps backward and sometimes I might just be standing still, but I'll be there. This I promise you. From whence I came I shall return.

Such was my state of mind prior to the September 11, 2001 tragedy at the World Trade Center. It's ironic that two years later, on another 'clear day', I stopped 'seeing forever'.

Directly after 9/11 I spent many days crying in front of the television set, watching in disbelief what had become of a place I called home. My phone only stopped ringing when it was busy. My house never emptied. Yet, don't be fooled, I felt very much alone.

I finally felt rescued by my job. This was my opportunity to be of service during the crisis. I concentrated on seeing to it that the companies who had contracted with us would continue to receive compensation for their work; thus, helping to maintain the financial stability of our country.

While undertaking the task of developing a game plan to get us back on our feet, I developed strategies and scenarios in order to maintain the integrity of the work. In less than two weeks after the tragedy, we were running full speed ahead. Although I still cried and had panic incidents at work and while riding public transportation, I thought time alone would heal me.

By early February of 2002, I was fully engrossed (buried) in my work. I believed there was no time for tears and fearful thoughts. There was also no time for, or thoughts of, God. It was right around that time, I developed an increasingly serious sore throat and symptoms of a cold including a high fever and throat infection for which I was taken from work to the hospital by ambulance in April. The symptoms lasted through May of 2002.

One week earlier, I had visited the medical department at my job because I had chest pains. In addition, I felt edgy and was engulfed by sadness. Upon physical examination, an electro cardiogram and some laboratory work, the doctor referred me to a counselor on staff.

In speaking with the counselor, it became evident I was experiencing difficulties in expressing my true self. At her advice and realizing a strong sense of despair, I sought outside counseling.

During my first visit with Dr. Jacob Kind my main objective was to arrive at a point where I could recall the experience of 9/11 without getting emotional. At the time, I felt helpless and out of control. The following symptoms also plagued my existence:

Spiritual Level

- Questioned the purpose of my being and my survival
- Could not bring myself to read spiritual books, pray, or write in my journal
- Could not offer sincere words of comfort to others
- Missed my previous life and struggled to return to who I was prior to the tragedy
- Felt a sense of hopelessness and meaninglessness
- Questioned why people had to die such horrible deaths
- Felt my questions were not getting answered
- Felt sad because I had lost faith in myself and in my connection to the Universe
- Felt cut off from the Source while total disbelief set in
- Lost trust in myself and in God

Psychological Level

- Overwhelmed by sadness, despair and foreboding
- Felt sorry for myself
- Felt lonely and depressed
- Wished I was among the ones who perished as a desperate attempt to escape from the agony of remembering
- Felt guilty for having survived
- Felt tortured by my thoughts and memories
- Felt tortured by my imagination (imagined how certain people died; their horrible experience)
- Felt lost and disoriented
- Felt a sense of peril for the future
- Felt safe only inside my home (mostly in my bedroom with the door closed)

Felt desperate to be able to organize my thoughts
Felt time had betrayed me as it did not bring about forgetfulness
Hated myself for not being strong enough to overcome

Social Level

Systematic and increasing alienation from friends, family and pets
Locked myself in my room on weekends
Was 'sick and tired' of being told I was strong
Lost control over my actions and thoughts
Wanted to disappear
Missed my co-workers who perished
Missed the buildings

Professional Level

- Negative and irrational reaction to issues at work
- Could not foresee or predict possible outcomes that affected my professional status
Could not confront supervisors
Took things personal and saw others as aggressors
- Wanted to go back in time
- Cried on and off at work

Finally, I was angry in myself for feeling all of the symptoms and for having returned to the towers after the 1993 ordeal. After all, I regarded myself as intelligent enough to know better and resilient enough to overcome on my own. Since I was set in believing I alone could prevail, it stressed me to think I was struggling. At the time I failed to see that God had not forsaken me, for it was at the time I was at my worst, that I was delivered unto the hands of an angel disguised as a therapist. Marianne Williamson, author of thought-provoking books such as "A Return to Love," said, "Therapists are the ministers of today. They are gifts from God. They are profound ministers."

On May 10, 2002, I felt the urge to pick up my journal and write. However, all I wrote was "Sadness Befriends Me." On the other hand, on the one-year anniversary of the attack, I attended a memorial service. There, I confronted the New York skyline and learned a little about myself. Upon returning home, I wrote the following:

One September morning they left without warning. On the wings of war my beloved twins departed. Their flight was difficult.

My twins invited me on their journey. They told me many would join them but I declined. I still hear them beaconing me to follow them, but still I decline.

One year later I say good-bye to my tall friends and I bid farewell to all who traveled with them.

Although I did not write again until January of 2003, I noticed a positive change in my thinking and my general behavior. The Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing (EMDR) therapy sessions with Dr. Kind helped me to overcome the traumatic fears locked inside my mind. The pain was alleviated and

replaced with positive thoughts about my experiences and about myself. A form of clarity began to emerge and freedom to choose became a reality.

Practicing meditation techniques, positive thought phrases, and envisioning a safe place during therapy sessions also helped to clear my mind by allowing me to sit in stillness. Thoughts flowed easily and turned positive once I identified and dealt with the negative feelings I had about myself. Further, in talking about myself, I discovered who I am and identified experiences from my childhood that affect my behavior in adulthood.

Today I find myself asking who I am in comparison to an experience. Then I ask myself, whom do I choose to be in the moment. Upon recalling my desperate attempts to forget the past, I see now the point is not in forgetting but accepting the event as part of my history. The experience itself is not who I am but what made me, as it is not the 'crucifixion' that counts, but the 'resurrection'.

Eight months ago I had joined the Gateway 2 Toastmasters Club. The Club is chartered through Toastmasters International. It is a support group designed to enhance public speaking abilities, organize ideas, and think clearly when confronted with on-the-spot situations. In addition, the Club has also propelled me to write again as I prepare my scheduled speeches.

This month I was nominated and elected to the position of Vice President of Public Relations at our Toastmasters Club. This is the first time in my life I have become an active member of anything, as I realize I have spent my entire life 'living in the background'.

I have also made the decision to apply for graduate school. This is a stepping-stone for eligibility for higher-level positions at my workplace, as well as a step closer to fulfilling my dream of teaching at a college.

This week my dear confidant and co-worker, Teri Demarest, and I, decided to form a meditation group at work. We plan to meet once a week at lunchtime. I'd like to see this expand into a book study group where all are welcome to attend. Teri is also a 9/11 survivor. She has summed up our 9/11 experience as "we did not have a breakdown, we had a break-through."

Today I can clearly see my original objective 'to arrive at a point where I could recall the experience of 9/11 without getting emotional' has been met. Additionally, all the symptoms I listed above no longer exist in me. What is left is pure tranquility and openness to All That Is. Where I once felt out of control, I no longer feel the need to be in control. In fact, the less I push myself to be in control, the more in control I actually feel. Where I felt helpless, I now feel empowered and useful. Where I once searched for answers, I now know the answers were always there, long before I even asked them. All I need do is listen. I now know that the Power is inside me. I am One with the Power. I AM THE POWER.

Presently, I welcome and enjoy spending time with friends, family, co-workers and pets. I have chosen to take responsibility for every chapter in my life on a personal and professional level. Where once I saw misfortune, today I see only opportunities for growth in me. Anger has turned to thankfulness that has moved me to a new level of understanding.

Once I struggled to return to a time and place prior to 9/11. I even struggled to be who I was then. Yet, one morning I awoke to find myself leaving behind whom I once was and welcoming an entirely new person. The uplifting sensation is alive in me even now upon recalling the moment.

I see illness as a product of my thoughts. If and when I feel the slightest discomfort, I examine my thoughts and re-write them. Once I've changed my mind, the discomfort is lifted.

Unfavorable behavior by others is God's gift to me so I may experience what not to do, what not to say, and who not to be. There are choices to be made in every situation. The possibilities are endless. Let us choose wisely and do our-selves a favor. After all, the only difference between myself and those 'who trespass against' me, is that I have chosen to bring this knowledge to my consciousness. Amen and Amen.

Retrospectively, Neale Donald Walsch, author of the "Conversations with God" book series, said it best during an interview at Carolyn Craft's Inner Wisdom program available at www.wisdommedia.com. He stated, "When your life feels as if it's falling apart, it may just be falling together for the first time."

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