

Looking Toward A Stronger Future

Melvin Jules Bukiet

First thought seconds after being woken by a phone call on the morning of September 11, 2001: are my daughters alive?

Last thought before going to bed many bad hours later: will my daughters ever be OK?

Obviously, the answer to the first question was affirmative, but I believe that the answer to the second, trickier

question must also be a powerful "Yes." That day, standing three blocks away from the greatest catastrophe ever to befall this city, Madelaine, a Stuyvesant senior, and Louisa, a sophomore, saw things that no child—and, indeed, no adult—should ever see. Yet when bells



I'm not looking for a silver lining here, because I don't believe in them, but my kids' immediate response, and the equivalent responses of their friends and peers who did what they had to—helping friends and strangers, volunteering to give blood, organizing a mural, publishing *The Spectator* and, mostly, returning

to school—gives me hope.

Yet hope is a frail reed and the fact is that the people who did this did not merely want to kill the passengers in the planes they hijacked and the workers in the World Trade Center. They wanted to kill my children, and they wanted to kill me, and they wanted—and still want—to kill every person who is reading this. Worse, they succeeded...in part, and they will continue to succeed...in part.

It's not a cheerful prognosis. Ultimately, one hopes that one has the personal strength to reckon with whatever future fate deals us. Covered in ash, debris and human molecules, the school has had no choice but to dust itself off and reopen its doors, yet, visiting for the first time on parent-teacher conference day a few weeks ago, I saw what our kids pass through every day of their school lives.

It's still a military encampment. The only vehicles that pass below Chambers Street are police cars and fire trucks and municipal vans and large trailers that carry hunks of twisted metal to be loaded onto barges in

continued on page 2

We thank Faculty Advisor Holly Epstein Ojalvo, Editor-in-Chief Jeff Orlovski, and their colleagues on The Stuyvesant High School Newspaper, *The Spectator*—stuyspec@hotmail.com—for the quotations used here. They were first published in *The Spectator*, Special Stuyvesant Edition, Fall 2001, available upon request.

—Jesse Kimball, Development Dir.
The Campaign for Stuyvesant

"I felt guilty after running from the dust of the second World Trade Center tower collapsing, guilty that on top of being so lucky as to escape with my life, I had the nerve to shoot pictures of the demise of thousands. I spoke with my father's friend who is a photographer for Con Ed...I told him that I was ashamed to be taking pictures, but he said that it was our responsibility...that through our photographs, the world would remember what happened on September 11, 2001."

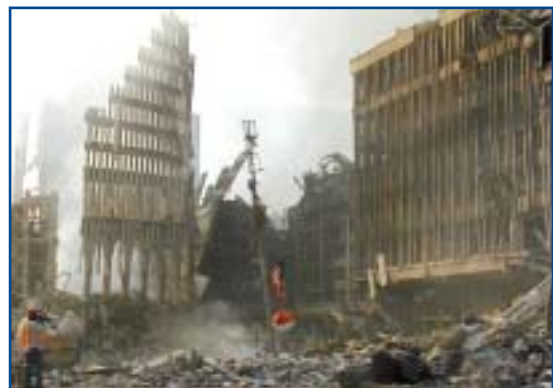
—Ethan Moses '02

"I couldn't think anything, I was so upset. I saw red. My friends couldn't calm me down, I wasn't crying like most, I was enraged. The anger came from the helplessness—I was so close, but I couldn't do ANYTHING."

—Meg Kuczynski '03

"We walked briskly in the halls, looking for people we knew to walk with, watching all the people in hysterics holding each other, everyone was terrified, a lot of people had family in those buildings. God. My friends had family in there."

—Meghan O'Halloran '03



rang and they were told to return to their homeroom, both of them defied instructions. Instead, they headed to each other's homeroom and found each other in the staircase between, the same way that many New Yorkers found each other that day, even if they had never known each other before. Good for them.



"My mom, who works on Canal Street, had gotten an urgent call from my dad telling her that one of the World Trade Center buildings had been accidentally hit by a small plane...Her first thoughts were immediately of me. She ran down to Stuy in under four minutes flat."

—Manny Bierman '05

"I learned that it is easy to tell a falling body from a falling piece of debris because bodies fall much faster. We stood in the chemistry lab for almost an hour, shocked by the sight of men and women in expensive clothes glancing back into what was their office, before throwing themselves toward the chaotic sidewalk hundreds of feet below...two teachers noticed us in the vacant lab and began to reprimand us for being in an unsupervised room. Without a word, we pointed to the window, and the teachers' authority disappeared as each burst into hysterical tears."

—Dylan Tatz '02

"It was frightening and horrific. My seniors were terrified because we were up on the tenth floor and we had seen this catastrophe next door...We could see hordes and streams of people fleeing north."

—Fee Soohoo, art teacher

"I felt the building shake, but I couldn't tell if it was the building shaking because I was shaking."

—Kameli Chow '02

"Walking closer to the World Trade Center complex, we were searching for a better view. We found, literally, more than we could handle."

—Laurence Wooster '02

the Hudson River next to Stuyvesant. It's a zone.

The children have learned and continue to learn astonishing lessons. In a kinder world, those lessons wouldn't be necessary, but for now they are as terribly precious as they are terrible. The children's proximity to the worst the world has to deliver will mark them forever, and will make them stronger.

Stronger is not necessarily better. Evil is strong, too. Knowledge makes one better. That's education's job, and no place does that job as well as Stuyvesant, and no city does it as well as New York. I can honestly say that, especially now, I would not have wanted my children to have been anywhere else on earth during the worst day of the new century.

Whatever others love, they may or may not love. Whatever others hate, they may or may not hate. Whatever others fear, they know. ♦

Melvin Bukiet is a good friend of The Campaign for Stuyvesant. He teaches at Sarah Lawrence and is the author of "Strange Fire," a novel, and editor of the forthcoming "Nothing Makes You Free: Writings by Descendants of Jewish Holocaust Survivors."

CLASSMATES

Richard Rabinowitz

Brothers: We've been without email and long distance phone since the WTC catastrophe, so it's only tonight, eight days later, that I've been able to pick up the eloquent and "mensch-lich" messages left by our classmates.

They are a powerful testament of how much

we shared in our growing up, a commitment to thought and caring and a generosity of spirit.

Thankfully, Lynda and I were spared losses closer than a few degrees of separation, although I thought my son Jonathan (SHS '88), who is now driving an ambulance, would be in the thick of things. But he was stuck in Staten Island and couldn't get to the scene.

Our local firehouse in Brooklyn lost twelve men of its complement of thirty, which has devastated the spirit of this neighborhood.

Memorials are everywhere, vigils are continuous. I've spent the days in the company of close friends almost constantly—in synagogue, around lunch and dinner tables. None of us can stand to be alone at home with the television.

Except for Friday, the weather has been sparkling and bright, in fierce contrast to the smoldering horror just three miles away. In walking through the streets, one now notices many new things, like the bold shadows of a fire escape on a sunlit wall in the early morning, the illusion but not the practical way to escape from danger—a kind of metaphor for the uncertain comforts with which we are surrounded.

We historians are always denying that anything has changed, when the world screams out the word "new",



except when we announce that in fact everything has altered when most sensible people can't see anything different. I was born in the last days of World War II, and my father reports that his first thought on hearing of my birth (he was at work at the Brooklyn Navy Yard) was a prayer that I would never have to live through such a war. Despite Vietnam and other nightmares, and despite our personal brushes with mayhem and horror, we have been a lucky generation, privileged to be boys when the country loved its boys and supported in many ways as we grew to manhood responsibilities. Will we be so lucky, so invulnerable, in the future?

We live closer to the edge than anytime that I can remember, except perhaps during the Cuban missile crisis days.

One thing is certain. Those of us who have been spared have no excuse but to use our remaining time, our strength, our connectedness wisely. ♦ *Richard Rabinowitz is the leader of American History Workshop, Brooklyn, NY, and the SHS Class of '62 President of ARISTA.*





THE WONDER YEARS

Frank McCourt

You have teachers verging on middle age, dealing with this explosive adolescence. I was going through mine, and they were going through theirs. It's only when I look back that I realize how explosive a time it was."

Frank McCourt's *Angela's Ashes* shows that it is quite something that McCourt survived his adolescence. This tenacity made him a match for the intense students of Stuyvesant, where he taught English and creative writing, 1972-87. His own struggle also attuned him to our growing pains. And McCourt found students who were equally adept at detecting his ghosts.

"I think half my kids were in therapy and suggested that I go and do likewise," he laughs. McCourt taught students to recognize the significance of their own experiences and talent. He actualized this idea in *Angela's Ashes*, which won the Pulitzer Prize in 1997, and *'Tis*, about his life after Ireland. Frank says he honed the skills that led to his literary success by teaching at Stuyvesant.

"All those years in Room 205," he recalls. "I learned more there than I learned anywhere else. It was like being on the front lines every day, five classes a day, five days a week."

McCourt encouraged students to create their own stories. Students read their writings to the class, and McCourt saw into their lives outside of school.

"You'd hear a lot of our black kids who'd have to go home and put up with a lot of jeering. Stuyvesant students had to show the face of humility, while knowing at the same time that they were competing like hell to get into the top colleges."

Their story reverberates with one of the struggles in *Angela's Ashes*: the young McCourt's search for environments in which he was safe to be himself and show his talent.

"When you're a teacher," Frank says, "you're seeing young people growing and they're innocent and they can be hilarious. You have to keep a straight face. You have to go along with them so they live with a sense of wonder and reverence."

It is remarkable to hear a person who lived through the death of multiple siblings and the dreary poverty of the Irish lanes retain a sense of marvel in this world. McCourt feels that the students at Stuyvesant now have a similar challenge: to understand and rise out of the death, destruction and smoldering ruins of September 11th, a few blocks away.

"In a way it's like being a kid in England in '41, '42, and this stuff is raining down from the skies. You hear the bombs going off. You look out the window and the house across the street is gone; you look out the window at



Stuyvesant and the Twin Towers are gone. But here it happened all in one moment, whereas for the English kids it was drawn out over five years. This is the shock of this generation."

In the wake of the tragedy, Stuyvesantians, like McCourt, also witnessed the enormous compassion overflowing the city. That experience may be the most transformative memory of all.

"This tragedy released a tremendous Niagara of love, which you see in the shrines at the firehouses and the precinct houses. A lot of us expressed our love for the city and the country, which we wouldn't do before because we're tough New Yorkers. We're not usually going to wave a flag or sing God Bless America, but now we're doing it. And though I haven't waved a flag

yet, I will wave it, in my own way." ♦
Frank McCourt is writing a novel about teaching and a book for National Geographic on New York. We are grateful for his membership on the National Advisory Board of The Campaign for Stuyvesant/SHS Alumni & Friends Endowment Fund, Inc.

AN AMAZING THING

Neil Coffina

Imagine 3,000 students evacuating a building through one door. Three blocks away the Twin Towers are collapsing. Imagine it's your job to get 27 severely disabled students down multiple flights of stairs to that one door, through the throngs, secret service, and scalded firemen, and up the island before a roiling cloud of smoke engulfs you.

Meet Neil Coffina. Coffina runs the special program in Stuyvesant High School for District 75, which serves the city's disabled children. Although his students might sit in on a gym or an art class, they are too disabled to participate. Instead, with three classrooms and shared use of the cafeteria, they benefit from being part of the Stuyvesant community.

On September 11th, Coffina's students and all Stuyvesantians were hit by the trauma.

"The original announcement was to

continued on page 6



"I roamed downtown trying to find a place where I could be put to use. I found the volunteer triage center in the square at Centre and Worth. In the square, the wounded were being seen to while volunteers were asked to give their blood...I gave my shirt to be used as a tourniquet. The whole experience felt surreal, the dust blocking out the sun and the sound of buildings collapsing in the distance...I stayed around through the night as they trained me in rescue procedures...I will always remember the moment I mentally prepared myself to write the word 'DEAD' legibly on foreheads of the victims I would find in black marker."
—Anonymous student





"I really kept my head in the sand. I tried not to look out the windows. I went outside and had a cigarette. I could see the whole tower set against the deep blue sky. It was stunning to see the holes and the fire against such a rich blue background. It was incongruous, almost like it wasn't real. It was actually beautiful. I had a hard time coping with my initial reaction. I felt guilty about it, smoking my cigarette in awe of this spectacle while people were dying. I went back into the building, and I finally went to look out the window...and saw this dark, rolling cloud of smoke and debris coming at us. We'd been waiting for further instructions, but it seemed that there wouldn't be any further instructions. My thought was just, Let's get the hell out of here."
—Robert Floersch, social studies teacher





"Anger first: mine is at the governments of the Arab world who take our money, become our allies, but allow their children to be educated in the terrible panoply of hate for America and Israel. It is a crime against humanity—that education of children to hate—that allowed this assault.

And, as my anger dies down, I reflect: as a people, we have to consider carefully how many of our liberties we are willing to abrogate or give up in order to ensure our safety. Would we be willing to restrict our freedom to move by quarantining a city or neighborhood? Moving Stuyvesant to bucolic Ithaca? Would we give up the institution of unopened private mail?

Here's what I think: the goal of perfect security is illusory, and it's not worth giving up cherished freedoms and privacy."

—Roald Hoffman '55, Nobel Prize winner and Professor at Cornell. He will be the subject of a feature article in our next Stuyvestant Newsletter.



continued from page 3

stay put," Coffina says. "The assumption was that it was safer in the building, in case of flying debris or whatever else. No one conceived that the towers would collapse."

An emergency meeting was called for ten o'clock, but Coffina was unable to get there on time, as he was already fielding a barrage of phone calls from worried parents. By the time he got downstairs, the meeting was over.

"That's when the first collapse occurred," he recalls. "The building shook and the lights flickered. I knew we would have to get out. I knew I had students in wheelchairs who could not use the stairs."

Making his way to his classrooms as fast as he could, Coffina caught a glimpse through a window of the great smoke cloud billowing towards them. The lights flickered again.



"I decided I had to get my students to the first floor," he says, "and I knew that even in the best of circumstances, it was going to be difficult."

Six students use wheelchairs, but the others, although disabled, can walk. He called the Principal's office.

"My students are going to be taking the service elevator in the next five minutes," he told him. "If the electricity goes out, they will need to be rescued."

Coffina told his staff that all ambulatory students should walk downstairs and the rest should take the elevator. Then he went to his office and grabbed his students' emergency cards.

"While I was there," he continues, "the announcement came to immediately evacuate. Fortunately, I got down quickly

by running down the escalators because students are not allowed to use them in an emergency."

While he worried about loss of electricity trapping students in the elevator, he made his way to the theater to look for the others. They were gone.

"It turns out that Renee Levine and several students had assisted my kids to get out,"



he later learned.

"One of the assistant principals and her students also helped carry one of the wheelchair students down three flights of stairs to the first floor."

Coffina, separated from his students, found he was in the sea of people trying to get through one door.

"I saw the rescue effort coming



in," he says. "People covered in ash and soot, and firemen in particular, gasping for breath, unable to breathe. I remember seeing one individual on all fours trying to catch his breath."

Finally, as smoke began seeping into the building, Coffina got out, and, he saw a magnificently sunny day. But he had to find his students.

Approaching West Houston Street, he spotted them. He directed them to the Occupational Training Center. They were all there except one.

"Ben doesn't use a wheelchair," Coffina explains, "but he isn't able to walk more than a block or two. It turned out that he just couldn't walk any further. He was actually carried to safety."

"In he comes with his paraprofessional and Dr. Steven Shapiro of the English Department."

"It was amazing. When he walked in, everyone applauded; they made him a hero. He was rescued by Stuyvesant staff. My staff really came through."

Three thousand people, one entrance, not one person hurt or lost.

"That's an amazing thing," Coffina says. "An amazing accomplishment." ♦



When Stuyvesant was still a triage center, Levine told her story of 9/11, a day when the staff and students showed their courage and resolve.

"I heard the bang," she says. "That's how it started. I thought it was a car or a truck. I looked down because we have a school playground across the street. I saw people running and I said, 'Oh my, a truck has rammed into the school!'"

Then I heard somebody scream. I went out and saw the tower with this huge gash and the flames.

When the second plane hit, we heard it. We saw it. The kids on the south side of Stuyvesant saw it happen!

They announced, 'Everybody to homeroom.' That way we knew all the kids were with an adult. My home room came down to the school theater.

I remembered, since I was there in '93, that we were designated as a triage center. So I was expecting the secret service to come in and commandeer the building, and when they did arrive, they ordered us out of the theater to set up an emergency room.

Now I had eight or nine women with baby carriages and my home room and people who had fled into the school.

One woman said, 'Do you need any help? I'm a nurse.' Another woman said, 'I'm an Israeli, I've been through this.' One of the women with a baby said, 'I

need milk.' One of the boys heard this and said 'I'll go up the cafeteria and get milk for the baby.'

Then the first tower came down—the lights started to flicker and the building shook. The announcement was, 'Please escort your classes out the north entrance'—to the West Side Highway, along the Hudson River esplanade.

There are steps going out. A couple of my homeroom football players, who are usually very rambunctious, said, 'Wait a minute.' They picked up the baby carriages and carried them out. Our kids waited until all the mothers and children were safely out of the building before they went out.

Then we were walking away along the highway. Suddenly, police appeared and yelled 'Run!'

'Look,' I said to the kids, 'I'm an old lady. If I can run this fast, you can run this fast. Hold hands with somebody. Just look north. Just keep going!'

We got to Chelsea Piers and we said to the students, 'Where do you live? You live in Manhattan? You know somebody in Manhattan? Go there. You're going to have to walk. And take somebody with you who lives in the Bronx, or Brooklyn or Queens.'

Some of the teachers then formed groups and walked them over the Brooklyn Bridge, some over the 59th Street Bridge. Some of the teachers even took kids home with them.

I cannot begin to describe how much admiration I have for the entire Stuyvesant community." ♦

"One kid walked into our class late and said that they were making a movie outside; we all laughed at the time because we hadn't realized what had happened."

—Rene Kessler '04

"I can honestly say I was not in the least bit afraid. It was a feeling of great excitement instead, as if it was *Die Hard 4* or *Godzilla 2* or something. I was just thinking of how insane it was, not how many thousands of people were dying as I was watching."

—Paul Banec '05

"I think the most vivid image I had was before the towers collapsed and still had a thick stream of smoke coming out. It was just so amazing to see something so grand and magnificent just go up in smoke like that."

—Justin Ma '03

"I saw the cloud of smoke and dust rush the school. You could not see out the windows. All the teachers I interacted with were calm and tried to console the students. It makes all of us appreciate our school much more than we did."

—Jukay Hsu '02

"I watched as I saw what I first thought was rubble, but then realized was people jumping...I saw the thousands of people on the street screaming and running and ambulances and fire engines begin to be engulfed in a pile of debris and ash. I was motionless as I realized the cloud was moving towards the school and the lights flickered and the building shook."

—Sasha Gsovski '02

STUY MOM

Renee Levine

After the planes hit, people were coming in from South End Avenue, Battery Park City, the Highway. They ran into Stuyvesant as a safe refuge. A number were women with baby carriages."

Known as "The Mother of Stuyvesant," Renee Levine—her daughters graduated in '84 and '86—was instrumental in working with the Parents' Association to build the current Stuyvesant High School facility at 345 Chambers Street.

Now the building coordinator, Renee shows off our school to visitors from around the world who come to see the flagship of New York's public high schools.



Maurita Tam '97



"She was always, happy and sunny. She was someone to go to when you needed joy and love," Maurita Tam's friends recall. A second generation Cantonese-American, Maurita, 22, was in her first job, at AON, on the 99th floor of Tower 2.

At Stuyvesant, she excelled and won a prize in Chinese storytelling. She graduated from Amherst with a degree in Economics. A soprano, she was in several Amherst choirs and loved singing.

Her mother called her "my nightingale; Maurita would have the most beautiful look on her face when she sang." A memorial—including Randall Thompson's "Alleluia"—was held for her at the United Nations Chapel. Maurita's uncle also died 9/11.

Michael Warchola '68



A 24-year veteran two shifts from retirement, Ladder Co. 5 Fire Dept. Lt. Michael Warchola was

planning his trip to Australia, but died on the 37th floor as he tried to save a woman; their bodies were found together later. In his last hours, before he died, Warchola, 51, had saved the life of a rookie firefighter.

Father of Aaron, 19, and Amy, 16, and brother of Denis, Michael graduated SUNY Buffalo, was a history buff, loved novels, and traveled often. He was a "loving regular guy," says Michael, his father.

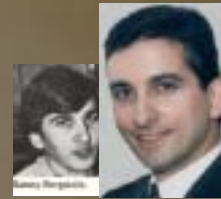
David Shufee Lee '82



Senior Vice President, Fiduciary Trust International, David was from Brooklyn, the eldest of three sons of Watson and Siu Lan Lee. He graduated from the University of Pennsylvania in Economics and earned his MBA at Northwestern in Finance.

David's favorite activities included golf, skiing, keeping up with the Yankee games and tending daily to his fish tank. He married Angela Kuo, whom he loved dearly, last year. They shared a home in West Orange, New Jersey and she is expecting their first child, a son, in February.

Dan Bergstein '80



In '93, Dan descended 64 flights to safety when the Towers were bombed. Warm-natured, steadfast and trustworthy, he was an exceptionally devoted husband and adoring father.

Dan wrote last year in the Class of '80 20th Reunion virtual yearbook: "I went to Columbia Engineering. I hated classes and vowed never to go back to school. I jumped at the first chance to earn a living and ended up at the Port Authority of NY and NJ, a move I've never regretted. I was appointed Board Secretary in '97. I went back to school. After five LONG years of night classes, I added an MBA to my resume.

I met my wife, Alicia, at Columbia in 1982 and we've been inseparable ever since. We got hitched in 1986, and I moved to Jersey for good. We had a lot of fun, traveling, etc., before finally deciding to 'settle in' and start a family. We live in Teaneck with our two kids, Devin (6) and Adrianna (4)."

Our warmest thoughts and deepest sympathy for the families, friends and classmates of these beloved Stuyvesantians lost on 9/11.

Aaron J. Horwitz '94



"Aaron was a natural showman and entertainer. He loved making people smile and laugh. He loved life and he lived it to the most", say his parents, Allan and Liz. Over 800 people attended Aaron's memorial, sharing stories with his younger siblings, Tara, Robbie, and Blake, friends from Raquette Lake camp, Stuyvesant, and the University of Wisconsin at Madison, where Aaron earned a degree in Finance and a Certificate in International Business.

With his zest for life, Aaron, 24, was a bond trader for Cantor Fitzgerald and his friends knew him for his famous Michael Jackson dance routine to "Billy Jean," moonwalk and all.

Marina Gertsberg '93



Marina was the only child of Roman and Anna, who left Odessa for Howard Beach, Queens, when she was 4.

Marina kept up her Russian so she could write her grandmother in the Ukraine. Marina, 25, joined Cantor Fitzgerald September 4th and was studying for her Master's degree at Baruch.

Marina was a graduate of SUNY Binghamton. Bright and athletic, "she was a queen," said Anna, who spoke to her daughter several times daily. She was living a full life, close to marriage with Henry Kravchenko, and creating great happiness for her family and friends.