

*TERRORISTS DESTROY WORLD TRADE CENTER,  
HIT PENTAGON IN RAID WITH HIJACKED JETS*

*Nation Stands  
In Disbelief*

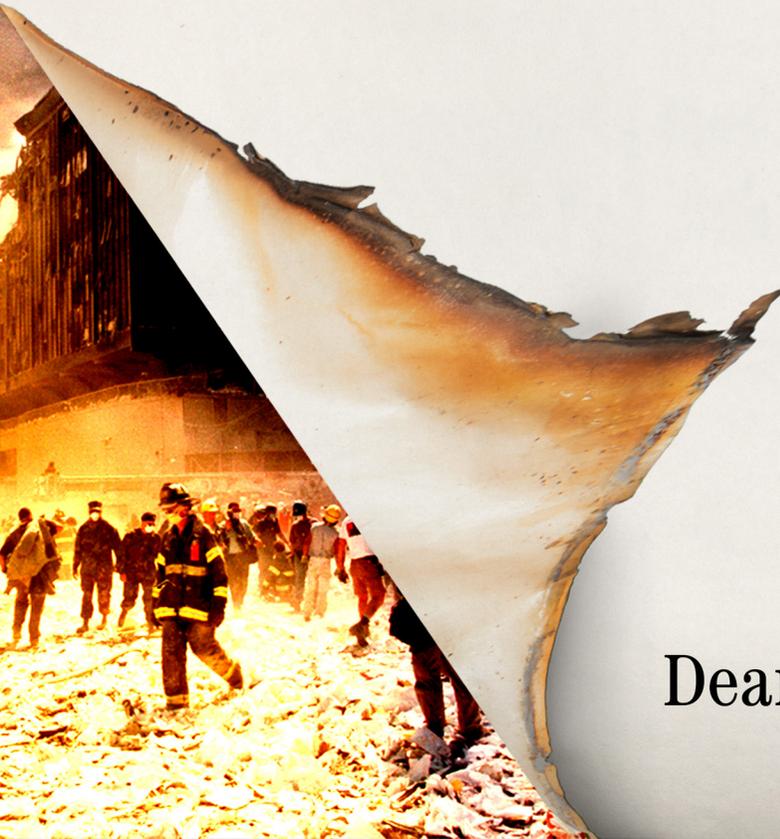
*What's News—*

*Death Toll, Source of Devastating Attacks Remain Unclear;  
U.S. Vows Retaliation as Attention Focuses on bin Laden*

Ground Zero On 9/11 with  
**THE WALL STREET JOURNAL**

# September Twelfth

An American  
Comeback Story



Dean Rotbart

Ground Zero On 9/11 with  
THE WALL STREET JOURNAL

# September Twelfth

An American  
Comeback Story

Dean Rotbart



TJFR Press  
Denver, Colorado

Copyright ©2021 TJFR Press

• Chapter Three •

## Baptism By Fire

**Robert “Bob” Bartley**, one of the nation’s most influential conservative voices, served as *The Wall Street Journal’s* peerless editorial page editor for 29 years before passing the leadership mantle to Paul Gigot.

Gigot, a Pulitzer Prize-winning Washington-based opinion columnist, was scheduled to assume his new post in New York on Monday, September 17, 2001. In search of a place to live and aiming to grab lunch with some of his colleagues, Gigot caught the 6:00 a.m. shuttle from Reagan National Airport to LaGuardia on September 11. Thanks to exceptionally sparse vehicular traffic, he arrived by about 7:35 a.m. at what was to be his new office on the ninth floor of the *Journal’s* headquarters in lower Manhattan.

He would spend 45 minutes there and never again occupy the space.

Mary Anastasia O’Grady, who edited the paper’s *Americas* column, was the only other editorial page staffer around at that early hour. By the water cooler, the two greeted one another and remarked about the splendid weather that morning.

Rushing to meet his apartment broker for a 9:00 a.m. showing, Gigot caught a taxi just outside the paper’s World Financial Center headquarters and headed north to Greenwich Village. As his taxi slogged its way up Church Street, east of the World Trade Center towers, Gigot heard a massive explosion.

*Ok, well, this is New York City. Right? Weird things happen.*

Back at the office, O’Grady — whose desk looked directly across at the World Trade Center — felt the entire building shake. Having lived through the 1994 Northridge

earthquake, she was super-sensitive to the shaking building.

*I raced down to Paul's [new] office wondering if he had returned, but he was gone. I was alone. Sprinting back to my office and shaking, I grabbed my jacket and purse and took off for the elevators.*

Gigot's cab driver, perhaps having spotted the smoking North Tower in his rearview mirror, pulled to the curb, shouting.

*Oh, my God, oh my God, oh.*

Abandoned to the sidewalk, Gigot joined dozens of others gazing up at the smoke and flames bursting out of the North Tower. He was puzzled by what he was witnessing.

*What happened? It's such a clear day; it couldn't have been a plane. Must have been an explosion.*

A student of history and a former White House Fellow during President Ronald Reagan's second term, Gigot recalled reading about a foggy day 56 years earlier when a B-25 Mitchell bomber on a routine mission slammed into the Empire State Building near the 79th floor.

Fourteen people were killed, including the two pilots, as aviation fuel ignited four floors and hurling plane parts snapped an elevator cable, sending one terrified passenger into a freefall. Fortunately for her, the plunge was halted by the emergency auto brake.

Unlike the World Trade Center towers, the structural integrity of the 102-story midtown Art Deco skyscraper was not affected, and the Empire State Building reopened two days later.

By chance, in the crowd staring open-mouthed at the burning towers, Gigot spotted the apartment broker he was scheduled to meet at 9:00 a.m. The two men agreed to go ahead with the showing. When they got to the building, they ascended to the roof, where it was clear that both towers were aflame. With no access to television or radio, Gigot couldn't quite process what he was seeing.

*Something is really weird.*

Gigot wavered, trying to decide whether to return to the *Journal's* offices. He didn't know that the evacuation of 200 Liberty was already well underway.

*I have no idea what I should do.*

Gigot had a mobile phone with him, but like almost everyone else in lower Manhattan

that morning, he had difficulty trying to get a call through.

Eventually, he reached Bob Bartley, who was already making plans for the editorial page's next-day coverage and coordinating personnel from his home in Brooklyn Heights.

---

**Robert Leroy Bartley**, who turned 64-years old a month after 9/11, most certainly would have continued heading the *Journal's* editorial pages for years were he not preparing to undergo chemotherapy after receiving a grave cancer diagnosis earlier in 2001. A Midwesterner and inveterate optimist, he, like Gigot, began his career with the *Journal* as a news reporter in its Chicago bureau.

Bartley, who became an editorialist in 1965 and was appointed editor of the editorial pages in 1972, was known for his devotion to free markets, individual liberty, supply-side economics, legal immigration, school choice, welfare reform, and bashing most things related to President Bill Clinton and his administration.

To conservatives, the *Wall Street Journal's* editorial section under Bartley was the bible, and he their Moses. While many Democrats disdained Bartley and his journalistic disciples, the loyal opposition could not deny the editor's vast influence in D.C. and on Main Street.

"For his distinguished editorial writing, the test of excellence being clearness of style, moral purpose, sound reasoning and power to influence public opinion..." Bartley was awarded a Pulitzer Prize in 1980.

Daniel Henninger, who Bartley hired a writer in 1977 and was deputy editor of the editorial page of the *Journal* on 9/11, knew the more-private Bob Bartley; the soft-spoken, Obi-Wan Kenobi-style editor whose quiet leadership sent a loud message to his team: He wouldn't do their thinking for them. He expected them to think.

Eulogizing his boss and friend, who succumbed to his cancer in December 2003, Henninger wrote that while daily newspapering is relentless and can beat a person down, Bartley drew physical energy from the news.

*Over the years I watched Bob go through periods of great personal strain, and every time he'd find new energy inside the ink pots of the news, something worth fighting for — or with. Those weekly columns Bob wrote the past six months were often done amid trips, medical treatment and pain that would have worn down any normal person. For Bob, the columns were like a portable generator — pull cord, plug in, come alive.*

Unbeknownst to most people, Bartley was also a tech geek, which would prove to be an essential element of the *Journal's* ability to publish a two-page editorial section on

September 11.

Bartley was fastidious when it came to maintaining the total detachment of editorial page staffers from news personnel. Like his predecessors and successors, he reported directly to the *Journal's* publisher, not to its news-side managing editor.

Although the editorial page team was located on the 9th Floor at 200 Liberty, just down the way from the offices of Paul E. Steiger, managing editor, and Mike Miller, Page One editor, the Bartley crew were stationed behind a set of secured doors. The locks were mostly a symbolic feature that reinforced the independence of the two workforces.

Bartley took his section's autonomy so far as to maintain separate software, hardware, and even tech and page-design personnel. He personally fashioned and perfected the production and pagination systems used to create the daily editorial and *Leisure & Arts* sections. In the spacious basement den of his brownstone, he ran a high-speed internet line and kept multiple computers, all of which came in handy when several of his editorial page colleagues showed up at his home on 9/11, anxious to help out.

Bartley did not sound angry or panicked over the terrorist attacks when Gigot finally reached him by phone. As much as Bartley must have been seething on the inside, it simply wasn't in his nature to let his emotions show. He instructed Gigot to head for South Brunswick and handed him most of the responsibility for selecting and editing the editorial page content for the September 12 paper.

Bartley elected to write the lead, unsigned editorial — “*A Terrorist Pearl Harbor*” — for the next day's edition.

*The world is a different place after the massive terrorist attacks on the United States yesterday, much as it was after the bombing of Pearl Harbor nearly 60 years ago; a new kind of war has been declared on the world's democracies. Just as Munich led to World War II, so attempts to buy peace in the Middle East are surely behind this attack.*

—

*For the dead we can only grieve, and repairing the physical damage will take many years. But even within sight of the World Trade Center, life went on, albeit fitfully, yesterday. The airlines will fly again, albeit not quite as before, and new buildings will be built. Modern industrial society, for all the talk of its vulnerabilities, has a certain resilience. Returning to our normal way of life as quickly and as completely as possible is one part of the answer to the monsters who plan and perpetrate such ghastly events.*

—

*The upshot of this is likely to be a serious turn on a number of fronts. Intelligence, for exam-*

*ple; how could the CIA and FBI have no advance indication of so large an event? Homeland defense, for another; can anyone now continue to doubt that someday people like those who conducted yesterday's events will have missiles that can threaten U.S. cities at 30 minutes warnings?*

*What most needs to be recognized, though, is that the terrorism has a political purpose. It is intended to intimidate America into standing aside humiliated while the Arab despots and fanatics destroy Israel and thereby prove that freedom and democracy are not after all the wave of the future. We can honor yesterday's dead by rallying our diplomatic, moral, financial and as necessary military resources to insure that that purpose is convincingly defeated.*

---

**Dan Henninger** arrived at 200 Liberty by train and ferry from his home in Ridgewood, New Jersey, a little earlier than usual. His mission: buy a new cummerbund at a nearby retailer to wear that weekend at his son's wedding on the West Coast.

There was time to walk from the South Tower of the World Financial Center, where the *Journal* was headquartered, past the Winter Garden Atrium to a coffee shop situated down a marbled hallway in the complex's North Tower. The cinnamon-raisin croissants were worth the detour.

Henninger never got his sweet indulgence.

*I just saw the wing of an airliner below the top of the Trade Center. My God, it hit it.*

The plane seemed to Henninger to have vaporized. Floating down from the tower were little, shining particles which other witnesses have likened to the fine powder propelled aloft when skiers and snowboarders schuss through fresh snow.

Henninger's first-person account ran in the editorial section on Page A-18 on September 12. It would be one of ten articles that the *Journal* submitted for the 2002 Pulitzer Prize for Breaking News Reporting.

Henninger expressed the sentiments of virtually every *Wall Street Journal* reporter and editor who, involuntarily, became a battlefield correspondent that day.

*I think that in the next few days I am going to wish that I had not seen any of this. There is no benefit in being able to watch two 108-story office buildings fall to the ground after two airliners have been forced to fly into them. It all seems very compelling now, and when you are in this business and you are on the scene, it is your job to provide an account. So this is just such an account, because there is something about us that demands that we provide this detail for the record.*

To avoid the massive wall of smoke barreling toward them, some Dow Jones and *Journal* staffers who had evacuated ran toward the southern tip of Manhattan, while Henninger and others joined the thousands of frightened escapees headed north up the West Side Highway.

*I decided that if the other tower had collapsed, then this one would too, and I was going to watch it fall.*

*I was going to bear witness. Let's be a little more precise about this statement. I loved the World Trade Center towers. I have worked in their shadow for almost 25 years. I came to see them the way I saw the Statue of Liberty. At night, in the fall, as I noted earlier, when they and all the rest of Manhattan's buildings were alight against a dark sky, the World Trade Center's towers were just joyous. They shouted out on behalf of everyone in this city, where everyone seems to take pride in working long, hard hours. No matter what, those long, hard silver towers were always there. Way up there.*

*Of course it fell. It was the most awful, humbling, disgusting sight. All of a sudden, it was just a 100-floor shaft of smoke. As it fell, as it was hitting the ground, the smoke and crap flew upward, I guess along the sides still standing, and the smoke arced away from the building in a series of neat, repulsively identical plumes. I looked at the center of the building and all I could see were a few scraggly black twisted girders pointing upward. Then they fell and it was all gone.*

Henninger was not the only editorial page staffer who chronicled the scene on September 11.

O'Grady, who, after searching for Gigot early that morning in the office, made her way to the lobby of 200 Liberty, only to be assured by a security guard that there was no reason to panic. Almost simultaneously, John Bussey, the paper's foreign editor who had been downstairs heading for the gym, corralled O'Grady.

*Walk with me.*

So she did, joining Bussey back in an elevator and back to her ninth-floor office, where she phoned her parents to let them know she was OK.

*They had not heard the news. My second call went to a brother in New Hampshire who works for a small local newspaper. My voice quivered and my heart was racing, but I told him that I was fine. Not two minutes into that conversation, a second, much louder boom shook my offices. I cursed loudly, shouted "I'm getting outta here," threw down the phone and ran for the exit. Only two elevators were working. "C'mon elevator." I said a prayer, then another.*

Only much later would O'Grady learn that her prayers had been answered. The window

of her office, along with those of all the other ninth-floor offices facing the World Trade Center, was blown in, leaving only shards of glass clinging to the window frames. Her workspace had been crushed by falling debris. Foul-smelling ash and debris cloaked everything: desks, chairs, computers, phones, and potted plants.

Jason L. Riley, a senior editorial page writer, was at Broadway and Liberty on his way from his Park Slope home into the office when the South Tower seemed to him to fall in slow motion.

*I kept looking over my shoulder, and it was clear I could not outrun the cloud, so I started looking for cover. I saw a van and slid underneath, hoping it would shield me from the debris. It didn't. I was having difficulty breathing. Every time I inhaled, more smoke and debris. My eyes were burning and it was completely dark.*

*Then I started to worry that the van would move, and I would get crushed.*

Riley's 447-word email chronicle made it into the September 12 edition of the paper, filling a space intended for a graphic that proved unavailable.

---

**The** challenge Gigot faced trying to make his way to the *Journal's* administrative offices and South Brunswick printing plant was formidable.

By the time he connected with Bartley, the trains, tunnels, and bridges out of Manhattan had been shut down. Thinking that he might escape the city by heading north toward Westchester County, Gigot walked from Greenwich Village to Grand Central station.

Around noon, service north resumed, and he rode the Metro-North Railroad to Yonkers, New York, where he exited, thinking he would rent a car there and wend his way to New Jersey and then south to the paper's makeshift newsroom not far from Princeton.

Yonkers is home to a number of enchanting parks and gardens, a harness racing track, and the Philipse Manor Hall State Historic Site, which in November 1776 served as the gathering place of more than 200 colonial New Yorkers who declared in writing their loyalty to King George III.

But on 9/11, Gigot had no luck finding a rental car agency in the city on the eastern bank of the Hudson River. So he hailed a taxi and headed to Westchester Airport, 20 miles further north.

*I know I can always get a car at the airport.*

Except, due to concerns about possible additional terrorist attacks, access to the airport

was shut off.

Still in the taxi, fortune turned in Gigot's favor when he called the Hertz rental office in White Plains and nabbed the last car on the lot. Gigot navigated to the Tappan Zee Bridge, now known as the Governor Mario M. Cuomo Bridge, 26 miles north of Manhattan, then drove the 80-plus miles down the Garden State Parkway to South Brunswick.

When he finally arrived, about 2:10 pm, *Journal* staff were still assembling from their homes and the 200 Liberty displacement. From that point on, Gigot took charge of the editorial section, joined in South Brunswick by editorial writer William McGurn and Ken De Witt, a 30-year *Journal* veteran who oversaw the daily production of the editorial, op-ed, and *Leisure & Arts* pages.

Conversing with Bartley by phone, Gigot also assigned himself responsibility for writing the day's secondary editorial, *Civility Amid Chaos*.

*Terrorists may have thought they were striking at the heart of selfish Western capitalism in Manhattan's financial district yesterday. But what they unleashed instead was a show of democratic civility and resilience.*

Gigot may well have been describing his newsroom; intense, facing onrushing deadlines, displaced, and traumatized, but civil and undoubtedly resilient.

*This is what makes yesterday's anecdotes from New York and Washington more than just individual acts of compassion or heroism. They are all of that. But above all these acts of civility are validations of our own democratic civilization, what we sometimes call Western civilization. This is what the terrorists hope to steal from us, and yesterday Americans showed that the terrorists had failed.*

---

**Philip J. Connors** was a 28-year-old copy editor working under Bob Bartley on *The Wall Street Journal's Leisure & Arts* page. Coverage of breaking news would be found nowhere in his job description.

*The job was so leisurely that I didn't even show up at the office until 10:00 or 10:30 most mornings.*

Yet early on September 11, Connors acted like an amalgam of a war correspondent and a Navy SEAL.

His extraordinary adventure was captured in a 2,950-word annal that was included in an extensive compilation of staff reminiscences that Dow Jones provided to the National September 11 Memorial & Museum on the first anniversary of the attacks.

Connors's account displayed the type of journalistic pluck that gives rise to legends.

One characteristic of *The Wall Street Journal's* editorial page that predated Bartley and his mentor and predecessor, Vermont C. Royster, is that the paper's opinion writers consider themselves reporters — not ivory-tower essayists — who enjoy the luxury of offering a point of view. Many times, the editorial section's staff, relying on their own sources, apply the same reportorial techniques of their news-side colleagues to break scoops and trump their rivals.

That Royster-Bartley-Gigot “force” was strong with Connors on September 11.

On his commute to work, Connors was aboard an elevated train in Queens when all the passengers took notice of the distant World Trade Towers, which looked like giant industrial smokestacks.

*I have to get to work. It's going to be chaos, and they'll need all hands on deck.*

Connors took the Astoria “N” train to 59th Street in Manhattan and then transferred to the downtown express. At 28th Street, his train halted and remained motionless for 45 minutes. All the passengers were tossed off at the Union Square station at Fourth Avenue and 14th Street.

*The sidewalks teemed with people. Nearly everyone moved north, away from the awful cloud of smoke that was now visible down the canyon streets to the south. I worked my way against the flow of pedestrians. Desperate people held their arms aloft for taxis that never came. I scooted out into the bus lane to avoid the oncoming throng.*

Connors hoofed it the mile-plus to Canal Street before he was stopped at a police barricade. On any other day, his explanation that he worked for *The Wall Street Journal* and needed to get to his office to cover the breaking story would likely have been sufficient to be allowed to pass. But the New York City cop he encountered was having none of it.

*I don't care who you are or where you work. I don't care if you're the President of the United States. No one gets beyond this spot, and if you insist on trying, I'll have your ass arrested.*

Rebuffed, Connors headed west one block before running into another blockade. After sneaking past the second one, he encountered yet a third roadblock and a stern police officer who commanded him to turn back.

He didn't.

*I'm not going to get any closer without resorting to extreme measures.*

On Franklin Street, just above a shuttered subway station strung with police tape,

Connors darted past the yellow bands and down the stairs. He was alone in the station, where an empty train sat halfway adjacent to the platform and halfway in the tunnel headed south.

*I flattened myself against the wall next to it and entered the mouth of the tunnel, stepping gingerly along a narrow platform a few feet above the tracks. In my left hand I held my briefcase. With my right I gripped a yellow iron railing. Just beyond the nose of the train the tunnel became pitch black. The only sound was a steady drip of water from somewhere ahead.*

Moving through the dark, taking baby steps along the center of the trackbed so as to avoid the electrified third rail, Connors progressed until after a while, he found himself beneath the halo of a street-level grill. He heard the sound of police walkie-talkies overhead and picked up a strap-on dust mask that he spotted on a ledge beneath the shaft.

At the Chambers Street station, still alone, he climbed up to the passenger platform. His hands were black with dirt from the railing he had used as his guide.

*I walked the length of the station to the mouth of the tunnel at its southern end. I cocked my ear toward the darkness ahead and heard a torrent of water as if from a waterfall. Clearly it would be madness to go further; perhaps it was some kind of madness to have come this far. For the first time I felt fear: fear of something menacing emerging from the void, fear of an explosion, a wall of water, a cloud of poison gas. I was alone in the bowels of the city, and if somehow I became injured or sick, I could quite plausibly die here alone, writhing in agony, where no one would ever think to search for me.*

Connors surfaced, strapping on the dust mask he found in the subway tunnel. He remained determined to reach his colleagues in the paper's newsroom, unaware that no one was left there.

Avoiding the police and firefighters, who this close to the World Trade Center's cadaver were too preoccupied to take notice of a nomadic civilian, Connors reached the freight entrance at the rear of 200 Liberty and ascended the fire stairs to the ninth floor.

The lights and computers were still on, but no one else was present. He walked over to Paul Steiger's office. No one. He walked to where the Page One staff sat. Still no one. His own section, where the editorial writers and *Leisure & Arts* crew were based, was layered in ash an inch or thicker.

With no intact windows on the east side of the building, the wind — reeking of burnt rubber, metal, and fuel — blew freely into the newsroom and forced Connors to retreat inward toward the west side of the *Journal's* offices.

*I went to my cubicle and blew the ash from my telephone and computer keyboard. I picked up the receiver to check the messages signaled by the blinking red light: frantic calls from friends*

*and family, making sure I was safe and urging me to call them as soon as I could. I took a section of the Times from my briefcase and spread it over the ash on my chair so I could sit down. I logged onto my computer and found colleagues sending email updates almost every minute.*

Connors tried calling Bartley at his Brooklyn Heights home to see if he or anyone else needed him to retrieve items from their desks. One of Bartley's crew, who was screening his calls, was flabbergasted that two-plus hours after 200 Liberty was evacuated, Connors had somehow managed to return to the office.

All of Connors's intrepid efforts to be of service proved for naught. Bartley's deputy, no doubt stupefied by what Connors had done, could think of nothing anyone needed, although undoubtedly in the days to come that proved to be a missed opportunity for many of Connors's peers, especially those — including Gigot — who had left their laptops behind. A department-wide email that he sent from his desk to his scattered colleagues, asking them what he might retrieve for them, mostly got return emails urging him to hightail it out of there.

As Connors was headed back to the stairwell exit, he heard the insistent ring of a phone echoing through the newsroom. He darted back to his cubicle to discover it was his phone receiving an incoming call.

*"Phil?" a shaky voice said. I recognized it as my mother's. "We've been so worried about you," she said. "We've been watching the news all morning."*

After calmly reassuring his mother that he was fine, the adrenaline-fueled fog that Connors had inhabited since exiting the train at 59th Street began to clear.

*For the first time I was able to stand slightly outside of myself and judge the danger of the situation. The building may have sustained structural damage and could begin to list or buckle. Further attacks might still be on the way. Gas might pool amid the wreckage and detonate like a bomb. Something unforeseen and unimaginable could happen and trap me in the building for hours or days.*

Connors's trek down the emergency stairs seemed to him to take even longer than the trip up. With a digital camera he appropriated from the paper's production department, he snapped photos of the street scene until his film disk ran out of space. And soon, his day's exploits were over.

*When my film ran out I returned to the edge of the debris and simply stared. The magnitude of the destruction was unfathomable, although it lay directly in front of me. Only smaller things that put it in some kind of proportion made any sense: water spouting aimlessly from a pump on the side of a ruined fire truck, cars half-buried in the rubble, their tires nowhere in evidence --either melted or blown to bits -- and their paint sheared off as if it had been*

September Twelfth

*the skin on a butchered animal. My lungs started to constrict and burn, even with the dust mask on, and in the sunlight I could see tiny particles of glass undulating like anemones on the breeze. The last thing I heard before I turned away for good was one firefighter yelling to another: "Jimmy, have you seen my brother? Any word on my brother?"*

*Later, on a bus headed uptown, a man who'd been on the 78th floor of the South Tower told me how, as he and thousands of his colleagues made their long way down to safety by stairs, they'd encountered hundreds of firefighters rushing bravely upward to fight the fire that had ultimately swallowed them.*

*Only then did it sink in that thousands had likely died; only then did I finally allow myself to cry.*

---