



Full Film Transcript
Anniversary Digital Learning Experience
Transcript

VAUGHAN DANVERS: On behalf of the 9/11 Memorial & Museum, thank you for joining in our commemoration of the 25th anniversary of 9/11.

25 years ago, on a beautiful September morning, our world changed. On September 11, 2001, nearly 3,000 people were killed when terrorists hijacked four airplanes striking the World Trade Center here in New York City, the Pentagon outside of Washington, D.C., and a field outside of Shanksville, Pennsylvania. The attacks, which became known as "9/11," unfolded in real time before our eyes. For many of us, it's a day we remember not just as history, but as a moment in our own lives that forever shaped who we are and how we see the world.

As a teacher, I'm reminded every year that remembrance isn't only about dates or facts. It's about people. It's about stories. Stories remind us that history happens to ordinary people. In the case of 9/11, ordinary people were killed. Ordinary people stood up to help. Ordinary people did extraordinary things.

The stories you're about to hear honor that idea. It highlights the experiences of six individuals whose lives were forever changed by 9/11. Their extraordinary stories of resilience, service, hope, and courage are testaments to the power of the human spirit. They show us what we're capable of, and in doing so, they continue to inspire us today.

By sharing these voices, we do more than look back. We carry memory forward. We remind ourselves of our responsibility. Our profound responsibility to remember what happened on 9/11 and who it happened to.

You are joining millions of others from around the world as we commemorate this milestone anniversary. Together we commit to never forget, now and for generations to come.

RICHARD EICHEN: It's a very special place. It's, it's amazing. And it's just what it was then. All the debris and how it is now.

In sum, I'm one of five people that got off the 90th floor of the North Tower. Played golf the day before, and life was good. And I lived in New Jersey at the time, and I commuted in like any other day, and it was a beautiful day. I worked on the 90th floor of the World Trade Center, number one, building number one, which we used to call at the time, the North Tower. I was with a company called Pass Consulting Group. I was consulting to them, got in, stopped off at World Coffee, bought as usual, got a bagel and a cup of coffee, badged in and got up to the floor, the 90th floor.

So I'm there, and I'm leaning, my briefcase is on the wall and up against the wall, along with a cup of coffee, and suddenly there was the loudest sound I've ever heard. And this one was a very metallic bang. But the word bang is like, think of it as times a million times. Parts of the ceiling came down, and then in front of me there was a wall on the other side of this T-intersection that I was near, and it looked like it came alive with bubbling fire. The entire wall just came towards me like it was going to consume me. And I remember thinking to myself, I have no idea what's going on. And I went like this just instinctively. And at that point, I could see that I was hurt.

And then I started looking around, and I saw that off in a far corner a office had its glass doors intact, and there was lights. And then I went in, and that's where I met the other four people who survived on that floor. And then there I met a woman that I went down with all the way by the name -- and got her out of the building -- by the name of Luz, but I knew her then by her Americanized name, Lucy.

Chris Egan was the office manager. Neither one of us knew what was going on, and he then picked up the phone to call down to the office, the building office, and they didn't

work. So he used his cell phone and he goes, they want us to stay because they're going to bring someone up here to take-- to take us down. We're in the 90th floor, and we're looking out the window because it was in that corner and we could see large chunks of the building falling.

Lucy goes off into, I guess, their coffee area in the back, and she come-- after a while, and she comes back out and she's white as a sheet, and she goes like this. And we look up and we can see that the ceiling is starting to smolder. So we don't know-- We don't have a choice. We have to get out of there. We tried all leaving at the same time, and we got about three steps and the smoke and the flames beat us back. So we retreated back into the office, and she said, "I'm not going."

And I go, "Lucy, you don't have a choice. You have to go." I said, "Luz, If I'm going to die, I don't want to die alone. Can you come with me?" And she said "yes" because she's a decent human being. And I said, "Okay, put your hands on my shoulders." And she put her hands on my shoulders. And as soon as I did it, I grabbed her, and I wasn't going to let go. And I said, "All right, Luz, we're going down together."

So we went back out, went into the stairwell, and as soon as we got into the stairwell, we got back into civilization. I mean, there was air, lighting. Luz and I went down together. And what I did was I stayed about four steps below her and leaned forward. And basically I carried her weight on my back as I was going down. We finally made it out. At that point, I didn't know what happened, but I knew what happened was big and involved the entire building, not just our floor.

As we're walking, some-- several of the security guards wearing orange jackets, response jackets, and they're brave they could have left and they stayed there for us. I-- tremendous, tremendous respect for them. Yelled "Run! Run!" And at this point I've lost blood. I'm tired. And so I look up, and I can see the antenna on One World Trade start to wobble, and then I can see the whole top of the building start to wobble.

Someone yelled Run! Which I did, and we can hear-- And then the cloud hits. I then looked up like this, and I remember I couldn't see my fingertips. It was that dark. And I

remember thinking to myself, okay, I'm not in pain. It's a little chilly, but it's also very quiet. If this is being dead, I'm okay with it. And then suddenly, you know, it started lightening up.

At that point, I said, okay, I need to get to a hospital. I remember there was a hospital downtown. I walked into the front door, and I immediately got triaged into the employee cafeteria. For whatever reason, I said, I just need to get out of here. So I put on my pants, grabbed a plastic bag with my gear, with my stuff in it, like my shirt and some other stuff that they had put in there, and put my shoes back on and walked out against medical advice. And that's where I met this woman by the name of Pansy, who was doing the same thing.

And I was about halfway through over the bridge when I pulled my mask down and it was warm and it was sunny, and I said, okay, adventure over. Let's-- let's keep on going. Life's going to go on.

So 9/11 really forced me to think about where I wanted my life to go, what I wanted to do with the rest of my life. I said, no, it's a new book. I'm going to really start thinking, what do I want the second volume to be like?

I also realized that life is very random and very fragile, and it affects to this day how I view a lot of things. It's not trepidation, it's just that I don't take any day or any event for granted.

TERRI TOBIN: I read the names of the NYPD folks, and, you know, you just know the story behind each one of them and what they left behind. And how many of them had their children following their footsteps. It's amazing. Absolutely amazing.

On 9/11, 2001, I was a lieutenant in the Public Information office. I joined the NYPD in July of 1983, and I think at that time, approximately 3% of the department was women. When people ask me why I joined the NYPD, I joke and say, "it's in my genes." I'm the youngest of five children, and four out of the five of us followed my dad's footsteps into

law enforcement, and he let my sister off the hook because she married one. Probably my dad was the best advertisement that the NYPD could have had. He never came home complaining about work. He never complained going into work. And you could just see from the way he interacted with the community that it was an enjoyable and fulfilling job. And for me, that's exactly what it panned out to be.

The beginning of that day, I had gotten up early to-- to vote when the polling sites opened in my neighborhood, and I voted and decided instead of going back home, even though it was early, I would go straight in. So I arrived at one Police Plaza at headquarters. I had been assigned to the Public Information Office since January of 2001, and it was a beautiful day. I recall that, and working a fellow sergeant came over and said, "Listen, I just got a call from a member of the media who said a plane went into the World Trade Center." The commanding officer of the Public Information Division, Chief Tom Fahey, called and said that he wanted a lieutenant at the scene and to call him when I got there. I asked another sergeant, Sergeant Jerry Falcon, to come with me, and we were able to get through the Battery Park underpass and park before the second plane went in.

It was a huge boom, and just an explosion of fire. Right away, went into rescue mode, because we were clearly there to help people get out of the building. I ran in to our First Deputy Commissioner, Joe Dunne, who instructed me to get on an Emergency Service truck and get a Kevlar helmet. So I followed his instructions and retrieved a helmet for both myself and my sergeant. And I went to the South Tower, and we were going into the building, and it was surprisingly very calm for the people that were evacuating. It was very orderly.

There was a press photographer taking photos of people as they walked down the escalator. So I said to him, "I understand that you have to get your shots, but I'm going to have the back of your jacket. I need to walk you out of this area. It's a frozen zone, but keep clicking." And when we got to the outside, there was a uniformed police officer, and I asked him to escort him beyond the frozen zone. And I remember thinking, oh, I'm

really close to where we parked the car. I should go, I have a pair of sneakers in the trunk because it's going to be a long day.

And as I was walking towards the car, all of a sudden, people were running towards me, because I heard a rumbling and people were running saying, "Get out of here. It's coming down, it's coming down." And I started to run. The force of that building coming down, pancaking down, was such a force that it created a vacuum. And I was blown across West Street, and I landed on a patch of grass outside of the World Financial Center and just started getting pelted with debris. And it got really, really dark.

My helmet was hit so hard, and all of a sudden it just split off the top of my head. Not far from me, there was a firefighter. He screamed over to me. He said, you know, I'm FDNY. I said, I'm NYPD. And he said, take your shirt and cover your mouth and your nose. We connected then with several EMS officers, and so we started digging around, and we were able to pull several people out. And at this point, I felt very vulnerable, had been blown out of my shoes. There was a chunk of cement lodged in the back of my head, and they couldn't get it out, but they just wrapped my head in a turban to secure it.

People were running towards us again, telling us to go-- that the North Tower was coming down. And then I turned around, and I think everyone is familiar with the footage from 9/11. This rolling cloud just coming towards me, and there was a building and I was able to open the door of the building and go in. I wanted to get away from the glass, and I walked in towards the elevators and slowly the smoke started to come in through the elevator shafts. So I opened up the stairwell, and to my great surprise, it was lined with people in all various forms of dress, like people that look like they were on their way to work. Someone that just finished working out. There was a mother and a really small infant, but I knew that we had to get them out. I said who I was, I instructed them to stay put in the stairwell.

As the smoke began to clear, I walked out the front door, and I saw the back of two guys with-- in PD shirts, and on the back of it was T-A-R-U. It stands for our Technical Assistance Response Unit. And I called out, I said "TARU" and one of them I knew,

Pete Moog. I said, "Listen, you know, I have this building and the staircase is full of people. We need to get them out." He said to me, "You know, maybe, Terry, you should just head down to the Marina yourself." And I said, "Oh, I know about my head. You know, the EMS wrapped it, they can't pull it out." And he said, "No, I'm talking about your back. There's a piece of glass that's straight through the back of your shirt, and it's sticking out six inches." The EMS folks were great, you know, they cut off the shirt, they pulled the shard of glass out and very efficiently and quickly wrapped the wound.

And then I went on to the harbor launch and looking across and just seeing the billowing smoke rising up from-- from here, from Ground Zero, it was-- it was surreal.

So in the aftermath of 9/11, I was asked the question a lot because I was within a year and a half of retiring from the NYPD, and if anything, I think 9/11 made the decision to stay with the NYPD that much easier. I don't think I should have been doing anything other than I was doing that day. I was where I was meant to be, to help where I could. And I think the biggest lesson I learned that day and continue to carry with me, is that not one of us suffers without all of us suffering. And I think 9/11 made that abundantly clear.

PATRICK DOWDELL: That was the last radio transmission:

JAMES DOWDELL: "Ladder 3, we're on 35. We're heading up."

PATRICK: "We're heading up."

JAMES: It was pretty crazy, man.

PATRICK: It's a good, good last transmission.

PATRICK: I'm the son of FDNY Lieutenant Kevin Dowdell, who was killed in the World Trade Center on September 11, 2001.

JAMES: He was one of the 343 firemen killed on September 11.

PATRICK: My dad was, you know, we were very close growing up.

JAMES: A great father and a great fireman.

PATRICK: We used to spend a lot of time going surfing, spending time at the ocean.

JAMES: Used to take my brother and I to the firehouse. Kind of spend time with him there and, you know, hanging out with my father while also watching him, you know, go to fires and be around the guys. The firehouse was just, it was great.

PATRICK: He started his career in Brooklyn at Engine 290, was eventually brought into Squad 1 when that was formed, and then ended up in Rescue Company 2 in Brooklyn for about nine years before he was promoted to lieutenant.

JAMES: Everything about the fire department was what my father loved. The camaraderie, the life of service, the excitement, just showing up for people on their worst day was something that really excited him and made him happy. He was living his dream. He had, you know, he had a great relationship with my mother. You know, he had his two sons.

PATRICK: He used to say, "respect gets respect." He was big on helping our neighbors. You see someone carrying their groceries, you go carry it for them. Those were, you know, lessons that I-- I'm glad that I got to experience and learn over those 18 years, because they've carried me into my adult life.

JAMES: He loved the city. He loved the village and walking around Manhattan. We used to do that a lot.

PATRICK: Get coffee or something like that and walk around and oftentimes go to go to dinner.

JAMES: We'd sit down at one of his favorite restaurants, and he would just sit there and look at us and just say,

PATRICK: "This is what I work all week for."

PATRICK: On 9/11, I was a freshman in college and had just gotten to-- to college. I was at Iona and was in my dorm room. We woke up and just like any other day.

JAMES: It started out like any other day. I was just looking forward to all the-- all the things that seniors in high school looked forward to. Getting a driver's license. Proms. I was sitting first period. All of a sudden the world changed. They made an announcement over the loudspeaker, "We're in lockdown. Lock your windows, the doors. Just stay put."

PATRICK: You know, just a lot of kind of concern, a lot of nervousness in the air. So I called home and asked my mom, "Have you heard from dad? Is he working?" She said, "Yes, he's working. We haven't heard anything yet."

JAMES: I remember just trying to call my mother saying, you know, I need someone to come sign me out.

PATRICK: I called the firehouse. No one was there. We don't really know what's happening.

JAMES: I remember getting a hold of my mom and her saying, "Listen, I'll try to get a hold of dad. We'll figure it out. Just sit tight." He always found time to call. He always checked in. "Hey. It's me. If you see this on the news, I'm good."

PATRICK: It turns out that the next day, we still haven't heard. We never really had the-- you know, the aha moment that he was gone, it really happened gradually over time. And I was at my mom's house, and we still hadn't heard anything, which was really unlike him.

JAMES: You know, we didn't have that. That definitely raised a flag.

PATRICK: We started to assume the worst,

JAMES: But by no means did that mean we were giving up hope. The hardest part of the process was not knowing.

PATRICK: But every time the door opened, we would all look to see if it was him walking in. So a couple days had gone by and and we kind of then were able to reconcile the fact that he wasn't coming home. My mom, being very strong, kept us together.

JAMES: She sat us both down real early and just said, "We don't know the outcome of this. Whatever it is, you're still held to the same standards."

PATRICK: You got to take care of your responsibilities.

JAMES: I remember talking to Pat and he said, you know, I want to start-- I want to go down to the Trade Center and start digging.

PATRICK: I wanted to be down there. I ended up being fortunate enough to go work with the guys from Rescue 4, who were there at the site every day, trying to find the guys that we lost.

JAMES: They kind of welcomed us in, and you know, we were down here with them kind of going through things. They still had to work. They still-- they were digging. They were going to funerals for their friends. They had their own families, like, and then they were also making us a huge priority in their lives.

PATRICK: The balance of school, family, you know, going to the site whenever possible, and then funerals pretty much every weekend became the routine.

JAMES: We tried to just emulate my father, which was to show up and help people and try to, kind of, contribute in any way we could.

PATRICK: And it became what we would do week over week, month after month, you know, that entire next year. So there was sometimes, you know, multiple, multiple funerals on a Saturday and Sunday. So we ended up kind of joining in to try to help and playing with the band.

JAMES: At the end of the day, we never recovered my father. We-- we held his funeral in April of '02. Listening to Patrick play Amazing Grace outside the funeral while I was

holding my mother's arm, I just remember the-- It was a-- it was a tough time, but, you know, very, very proud, I guess, of the way we got to send him off.

When we lost him, it just reinforced the fact that this is what I wanted to do, which was to follow in his footsteps.

PATRICK: My dad was really, you know, proud of the fact that I wanted to try to go to West Point. It kind of reaffirmed that I wanted to see it through. It became a way for me to honor him.

JAMES: I think it was March of '02, I took the test to become a fireman. When I turned 21, I got on-- on the job a couple, a couple of months later.

PATRICK: Kind of full circle moment for the both of us to be, you know, taking on that next chapter of our lives. At the same time, we were taking on something a bit bigger than ourselves in terms of just, you know, service. So I went to Iraq for a year-long deployment before we got deployed to Afghanistan.

JAMES: I'm definitely very proud to be a member of the FDNY and to follow in his footsteps. I'm a lieutenant, which is the same rank my father was when he was killed. I have three kids. I have two boys and a daughter at home. I'm trying to emulate what, you know, the way he raised us, which is, you know, by being there, by-- by kind of making, making every minute that you're home present.

PATRICK: We have kids of our own. They know who Grandpa Kevin is, and they know what he did, and they know that he was a hero. And they get to grow up, you know, knowing that, which gives me a lot of comfort.

JAMES: You know, as we move forward, I think it's-- it's important to, to keep to keep an eye, you know, on the past and to tell those stories and to kind of bring my father to life.

PATRICK: How do we keep that memory alive, and how do we live out the phrase "never forget" that's mentioned a lot when you speak of 9/11, but what does it really

mean? So to us it means paying it forward, and it means living a life worthy of their sacrifice.

JAMES: Acts of service like he used to do all the time, helping people like try to live a life that that my father lived.

PATRICK: I feel like he did that throughout his life. He overcame a lot of hardship. He went through a lot of difficult times himself, and what he focused on was the positive of having his family, and being there for his family, and being there for his neighbors, and being there for the community that he served. So if you can take that mentality and live your life, you know, in service of others, it becomes very rewarding. And I think that's the best way to honor their life and their legacy and their sacrifice is by-- by living your life, you know, in service of others and with others in mind.

JAMES: I think he'd be happy.

PATRICK: I think so

I think he'd be really proud of how things worked out.

JAMES: 100%.

PATRICK: You might never be rich, but you're going to love going to work every day.

JAMES: Yeah, he was right about that.

CAITLYN MCINTYRE: America's Camp gave us countless memories in a place where we could truly be kids.

OLIVIA PEREZ-JOHNTRY: Everybody knew we were there for that reason, and it was never "That's the girl from 9/11." We were all the girls from 9/11, and so we were able to be girls. We were able to laugh and to play, and

CAITLYN: We were unapologetically ourselves.

OLIVIA: Yes.

CAITLYN: My dad, Donald James McIntyre, was a Port Authority police officer on September 11, 2001. I don't have as many memories as I'd like, because I was five on September 11. What I do remember was incredible. First and foremost, my dad was a family man. He was excited to come home from work. He was a cook. He was playing with the kids.

OLIVIA: I don't know much about my dad, my father, Anthony Perez. What I do remember of my dad was his smile. How often he smiled, and if he wasn't smiling, he was trying to make someone smile. He just was goofy. Always so goofy and making jokes and tried to stay very lighthearted about stuff.

CAITLYN: He just was-- had so much joy. Everything he did was for his family. My dad actually named all three of us, so it was like his pride and joy being a dad. There's nothing he wouldn't have done for his kids. His coworkers and his best friends talked that he was the guy that you wanted to have with you. He just made everybody feel at home. So on September 11, 2001, I was five. I had just started kindergarten.

OLIVIA: And I was just your everyday ten-year-old girl. I went to school. I was on a school bus. Fourth period comes and children are starting to get pulled out of school and kids are getting called out. We asked the teacher, "Why is everyone leaving?" The World Trade Center has been attacked, and my dad had just gotten a job there. I remember my skin was crawling, and I remember I'm shaking, and I didn't know what to do.

CAITLYN: I do remember coming home and seeing the TV screen with the towers on it. My dad had been working a lot of overtime, so that day he was actually in Jersey City, and when he heard that the first plane hit the towers, he locked up, and he went immediately to the scene. He did call my mom on his way over just to tell her that he loved her.

OLIVIA: And I remember my mom and my stepdad picked me up, and that was not normal. And she sat me down on my bed. And that was the first time I'd ever seen my mom cry. And she said, "I don't think you're going to see your dad again."

CAITLYN: I don't remember having any formal conversation about what happened that day. There was a lot of unknown in the aftermath of 2001. My mom was incredibly resilient. We did a lot of family time. My mom's mom and dad stepped in a lot to help us, and it was incredible to see how many people truly loved and cared about my dad.

OLIVIA: I went to school the very next day. My mom wanted normalcy. She wanted me to continue a routine, and I'm so thankful that she did that. I just remember everything was always handled with care. Everybody handled me with care, and I didn't want that. I wanted to be a normal kid.

CAITLYN: I had met a few young girls who've become my best friends. They said that they were going to this place called America's Camp, and it was truly the best thing that could have ever happened to me at the time.

OLIVIA: My mom said, Olivia, you got to try America's Camp. The idea of leaving my mother was something I couldn't stomach, and the second you get to where the busses were, it was home.

CAITLYN: It gave me such a place to feel like myself and to be understood by other people.

OLIVIA: These were kids who got me, and that was when I felt seen. And that stuck with me. And that's why I wound up going into education. The first day I stepped into a classroom, I said, "Yep, this is where I need to be."

CAITLYN: So I grew up in a family of first responders, my dad obviously being a police officer, and my mom was a nurse, so it felt very natural for me to follow in their footsteps. I became a nurse. Before every shift, I would put my dad's badge number on my wrist.

OLIVIA: I remember I shared my story, and I had a young girl come up to me and she goes, "Ms. Perez, does it ever get any easier?" And she goes, "My mom just died recently. Does it get any easier?" And I said, "Eventually. And then there are times where it's impossible and you need to feel what you're feeling. But know that your mother, my father, wouldn't want you to wallow, would want you to rise above and continue going."

CAITLYN: Children are so resilient. It was such a beautiful, I mean, incredible experience as a nurse to be able to be with these children and parents at their darkest times and be able to give them the empathy, the time, the understanding. Although I didn't say it, I knew what they were going through. 25 years later, I think for me, the biggest thing to take home is how much of a hero my dad was. He walked in when everybody else was walking out. I hope that my daughter can learn and take forward to, and go the extra mile for people, because it's what people really need, and it's how we come together.

OLIVIA: But that's why I went into teaching, to be that science teacher that sees a student for more than what they're going through, to be that ear, to provide that guidance. And I think that that's not only in service of the loss of 9/11, but I think that's in service to my dad. 25 years is a lifetime. I have a family. I'm a mom, and he's not here for that. But I'm going to keep his memory alive. I'm going to keep sharing my story. I'm going to be Olivia Perez, daughter of Anthony Perez. Loud, proud, and silly.