

# From the Editor

Haunted Autumn

by Kirsten Hively

**A**utumn was ushered in early this year. On September eleventh summer ended. I have tried and failed many times to find words to bridge change-of-season gap. Words don't fit. They're either too puny to encompass the catastrophic scale or too abstract to portray the heartbreaking details. And it's the details that haunt me. Last words from a cell phone, the too-big obituary page of the New York Times, the hat of a fireman swallowed by the steel and concrete. Thousands and thousands of details to remind us.

When I was a kid someone (probably my dad) told me a scientific theory that held that a new universe is born every time a decision is made. Chocolate or strawberry? creates one universe in which I chose chocolate and another in which I chose strawberry. On September eleventh 19 men took us all into another universe we had never imagined existed. In another universe there is another me writing another essay about other topics, but I'm stranded here in this haunted autumn with no bridge to any other possibility.

But even in the wake of horror and fear and tragedy, life *does* go on. And maybe we can find some small things to make better, some way to harness our grief and shock and anger. Something that will enable us to say the thousands didn't die in vain, and all those hungry spirits can rest now because they helped us, because their lives were worth something to us, if not to the 19 who ended them.

Finding that thing has been difficult for me. I've felt paralyzed, unable to dig for survivors, unable to heal the wounded, unable to rebuild. The endless news has made me feel even more powerless. I don't have any answers, but I've found a place to start.

The thing I keep coming back to is what happened after Tuesday morning. Finding ourselves on the other side of a great breach in history, we all seem to feel the same impulse to reach out, to come together, to find our community. We wanted to see who had made it to this side of the chasm, and let each other know we were glad to be here together even as we mourned the lost. I've been thinking a lot about community even before this happened. I wasn't sure how important community still was in a time of cars and careers and irony.

By most accounts irony seems to have died that crisp fall morning. But community survived – thrived, even. When we gained the perspective bought at such a dear price, most of us saw that friends and family are the stuff life is made of.

So irony is dead. What comes next? Where does a community of artists fit in a nation of mourners? Summer is over...what will winter bring? The best way to find the answer, I think, is by coming back to our communities.

Peace marchers remind us of our international community. Flying flags remind us of our national community. Impromptu memorials all around New York remind us of our

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city community. But none of these are possible, I think, without our local community. To build a great city, a strong nation, and a peaceful world requires thousands of strong communities of neighbors. Here in Williamsburg we have had the relatively rare ability to build a real community. Local stores, cafés, and restaurants have helped, and the network of galleries has been the backbone. We've rallied together against powerplants and toxic waste, each time meeting more people, learning more names. To rebuild the city we need to build up our communities. So take an interest in local politics, hang out at local cafés, find neighbors who will talk about what matters.

That, I think, would be the greatest monument we could build.

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