



## 102 Minutes: The Untold Story of the Fight to Survive Inside the Twin Towers

*Jim Dwyer, Kevin Flynn*

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**The dramatic and moving account of the struggle for life inside the World Trade Center on the morning of September 11, when every minute counted**

At 8:46 am on September 11, 2001, 14,000 people were inside the twin towers-reading e-mails, making trades, eating croissants at Windows on the World. Over the next 102 minutes, each would become part of a drama for the ages, one witnessed only by the people who lived it-until now.

Of the millions of words written about this wrenching day, most were told from the outside looking in. *New York Times* reporters Jim Dwyer and Kevin Flynn have taken the opposite-and far more revealing-approach. Reported from the perspectives of those inside the towers, *102 Minutes* captures the little-known stories of ordinary people who took extraordinary steps to save themselves and others. Beyond this stirring panorama stands investigative reporting of the first rank. An astounding number of people actually survived the plane impacts but were unable to escape, and the authors raise hard questions about building safety and tragic flaws in New York's emergency preparedness.

Dwyer and Flynn rely on hundreds of interviews with rescuers, thousands of pages of oral histories, and countless phone, e-mail, and emergency radio transcripts. They cross a bridge of voices to go inside the infernos, seeing cataclysm and heroism, one person at a time, to tell the affecting, authoritative saga of the men and women-the nearly 12,000 who escaped and the 2,749 who perished-as they made 102 minutes count as never before.

*102 Minutes* is a 2005 National Book Award Finalist for Nonfiction.

## 102 Minutes: The Untold Story of the Fight to Survive Inside the Twin Towers Details

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## **From Reader Review 102 Minutes: The Untold Story of the Fight to Survive Inside the Twin Towers for online ebook**

### **Mauojenn ~ \*Mouthy Jenn\* ~ says**

It was just another Tuesday morning. I was just rolling out of bed after sleeping in. I made my way to the tv in the living room before i got myself a bowl of cereal. The today show was just coming back from commercial break and I heard Katie Couric's voice saying that what was being displayed on the tv screen was a live shot of what appears to be a small aircraft had just hit one of the Twin Towers.

I looked and stopped pouring my breakfast out. I sat on the sofa and was looking at smoke pouring out of the tower along with bursts of fire. I watched for the next few minutes and then grabbed the phone next to me to call my then boyfriend who was a volunteer fire chief/paramedic in our county in New Jersey. He answered and I said he was missing the action in NYC right now as a plane had hit one of the twin towers. He said he was on his way home from a call right that very moment.

I continued to watch the tv news and then I heard his truck pull up. At the same exact time I was watching, live on tv the SECOND plane to hit the other twin tower. I just froze. How could the pilot not see the smoke or the tower it's self. Was there something wrong with the flight routes or something. Surely something had to be wrong. Then my boyfriend came walking in and took one look at my face, glued to the tv and he walked over and said "Jesus Christ!" He sat down. We watched for a few more minutes and then he said what some of the reporters were saying on tv. "We're going to WAR over this!"

That was just shy of ten years ago. I came across this book in the library and decided I would give it a look over, since it was coming up on the 10th anniversary. This book gave me chills, goosebumps and a sleepless night. Ever since watching the events of 9/11 live on the tv, I can't look at a picture of the Twin Towers without shivering. This book is very powerful and moving. A must read to anyone wanting more information or just to see what it really was like.

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### **Ariel says**

I read this in commemoration of the fifteenth anniversary of 9/11. This book was absolutely gut wrenching. It fact it was so emotionally draining that I had to put it down at times to take a breath and remind myself that I was not trapped in a smokey tower, almost two thousand feet off the ground with no means of escape. As I read it felt like I was traveling through the towers as I spent the last moments of people lives with them.

What I take away from this book was no matter how evil the terrorists were and how destructive their act, it was overcome with pure goodness in thousands of ways and by thousands of people. Frank DiMartini and his group were directly responsible for saving 70 people before ultimately losing his life. He could have left the tower with his wife but he kept going up to the impact zone in order to save whoever he could. Abe Zelmanowitz wouldn't leave his paraplegic friend Ed Beyea even though he could have evacuated and saved his own life. Orio Palmer, a firefighter who arrived at the South Tower, fixed an elevator to take him to the 41st floor sky lobby and from there ran up 37 flights of stairs to go into the impact zone. Once there he gave comfort to survivors and directed them to escape routes. Countless first responders who stayed with people they were helping to evacuate even when the news finally came that the towers were in danger of falling. An act of evil on a terrible day overcome with heroism and love, that is what I take away from 9/11.

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## Bruce says

I hate to trash such an enormous amount of reporting, but facts badly strung together do not improve the result by being more numerous.

The reporters' downfall here was the ill-chosen decision to tell the story of the "102 Minutes" in chronological order. All the jumping around from person to person and tower to tower prevents the development of any personalization, any real emotional impact.

There's some interesting background information on the building of the towers and the development of fire safety laws, and the authors endlessly review, repeat, reiterate the failures of the police and fire departments of NYC to institute any means of interdepartmental communication during a crisis. (Did I mention that the cops and firemen don't like each other? Don't talk to one another? Can't communicate? Did you hear that?)

But other reporters have covered these topics as well, so even these tidbits don't rescue the book.

I can't impune the writers' reporting abilities. They put a ton of work into this book, yet there's barely any background and only the thinnest family and occupational information about any of the dozens of the people who fade in and out of the reporting. The writers really needed an editor to tell them their chronological structural gimmick was going to drain all the energy out of their storytelling.

With all the interviews they did, surely they must have found a few people who could have served as the backbone of their narrative. Selecting a few representative lives and fleshing them out and following them throughout the ordeal would have been a much preferable approach. The chronology could still have been preserved to some extent, both within the separate individuals' stories and by presenting the series of single-thread chronicles in an order that took readers through the crisis more or less in the order things happened.

Yes, there would have been a great deal of chronological overlap, returning, with each shift to a new person, time and again to before the first plane and then ending, well, as needed for each individual.

Perhaps the writers felt this had been done in countless newspaper and magazine and TV pieces about this or that hero or victim. Well, yes, and there's a reason for that. The confusion caused by leaping around among more than 100 different people is thus avoided.

The only justification for the "102 Minutes" structure would have been a book about the towers', well, structure, and how the planes' impact and the subsequent fires led to their collapse, minute by minute, without trying to include the human stories as well. But that's not what this book attempts to do. It wants to tell human stories, but it approaches them like 52 pickup: Dozens of separate individuals' stories jumbled into confusion by the slavish adherence to the minute-by-minute chronology.

I'm giving this book just one star because there have been so many better attempts to capture the horrors and heroism of that day, readers shouldn't waste their time with this one. It's frustrating: All those hundreds of hours of dogged, basic reporting frittered away by poor editing decisions.

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## **Tony says**

A detailed, well written account of events inside the twin towers during the 102 minutes between the first airplane strike and the collapse of the second tower, with some astonishing stories of selflessness and bravery. A very good read, but not an easy one - which is exactly as it should be.

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## **Greta says**

In gripping details, the New York Times reporters Jim Dwyer and Kevin Flynn have written down the attempts of the people in the towers to escape safely.

I still remember seeing the live news coverage of the catastrophe. Of the many documentaries I saw afterwards, most were told from the outside looking in. Like many people, I saw more images of destruction and death than I could absorb emotionally.

In this book, the reporters drew on countless interviews with rescuers and survivors, phone, e-mail, and emergency radio transcripts to tell the story of September 11 from the inside looking out.

Reading this book gave me the feeling I was time-traveling into the towers. I feel like I've witnessed the struggle to survive of the people inside the towers. Ordinary men and women who saved themselves and others, as well as men and women who were unable to save themselves and others.

After all these years, I feel like I finally got a grasp on this tragedy and the human experience of disaster and survival.

Great storytelling in a context of inadequate building safety and tragic flaws in emergency adequacy and response.

A remarkable accomplishment. It will stay with me forever.

10/10

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## **Robynne says**

I'll tell you right off - this is a hard book to read. I've actually been working on it for a couple of weeks, but because of the subject matter was only able to handle so much at a time. The authors did an excellent job of pulling together a multitude of accounts and putting them into the timeline of what happened in the Twin Towers on 9/11. They weren't overly dramatic or graphic, but gave a true to life history of what happened there from the inside out, rather than the outside in. I gained a much greater understanding of what happened that day, especially the \*people's stories\*, not just the bare facts.

I felt like I needed to read this book, even though it was difficult, because I owed it to those who went through it, if that makes sense. And this only covered a small portion of those who were inside, because we happen to have transcripts or emails or messages or accounts from those they talked to. The majority did not have a voice, but through reading all the other accounts, we can see what they went through as well. It is both heart-wrenching and inspiring.

The only complaint I would make is that I think they put a little too much emphasis on the "fault?" of the builders, the rescuers, etc. and their shortcomings (i.e. building for rentable space rather than safety, very poor communication amongst police/fire etc.) Hindsight is 20/20, and we need to look objectively at what happened there to make sure we're more prepared for something like this in the future. Shortcomings and

problems should be fixed, policies adjusted, communication worked out, etc. These are incredibly important points that need to be explored. However the reason this happened was because terrorists hijacked planes and wanted to kill Americans. That is where the true fault lies, and this account spent much more time comparatively on the builders, rescuers, etc. and their "blame" vs. the terrorists who actually caused this to happen. Maybe they just assume the terrorists actions are a given to the reader?

I highly recommend this if the subject matter interests you - it is incredibly informative and gives a first-hand perspective, but be prepared for a tough read.

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### **Lara says**

It was a Tuesday like any other. I rose after my normal snooze delay, always thankful for a few more minutes of rest, and got ready for work. My daily routine was uneventful. This morning was different, though. Unlike other weekdays the television remained off, freeing me from the usual background chatter of morning news anchors as I dabbed on some mascara and brushed my teeth. I relished the empty house and the total silence. I got in the car, buckled myself in and made a point not to turn on the radio as I embarked on my 45 minute commute into the office. A few minutes into the ride my cell phone rang, jolting me out of my quiet fog and into a day that would forever live in infamy.

I can't tell you much else about that day except that it was Tuesday, September 11, 2001, and after that jarring phone call asking if I knew what was going on, the silence of the day was instantly shattered. I, along with our nation, was glued to the radio while in the car, in front of the computer at work and the television at home. It seemed that time stood still, or rather, needed to be rewound so that we could understand what was happening. We learned that American Airlines flight 11 crashed into the North Tower of New York's World Trade Center at 8:42 a.m. Surely it was a pilot error or some kind of horrible mistake. But when 16 minutes later, at 9:02 a.m., United Airlines flight 75 crashed into the South Tower (followed by American Airlines flight 77 into the Pentagon at 9:37 a.m. and the crash of United Airlines flight 93 near Shanksville, Pennsylvania at 10:03 a.m.) it was clear this was no accident. This was a calculated, premeditated terrorist attack with aims to do severe and everlasting damage.

I am sure that for many of us the events that immediately unfolded became a blur. New York Times writers Jim Dwyer and Kevin Flynn bring clarity to the day by recounting every single moment of the 9/11 attacks on the World Trade Center starting at 8:42 a.m. when the first jet crashed into Tower 1, until 10:29 a.m. when the second tower fell. **102 MINUTES: THE UNTOLD STORY OF THE FIGHT TO SURVIVE INSIDE THE TWIN TOWERS** is a significant body of work in capturing heroic and heartbreak moments within and around the World Trade Center that fateful day.

Through countless interviews with survivors, families, city, state and federal officials, and research and review of phone and e-mail records, Dwyer and Flynn tell the stories of the day from the voices of the people who lived it, and those who ultimately did not. At just under 400 pages, readers are exposed to the harrowing events of the crashes and the aftermath of challenges facing the World Trade Center's occupants due to the communication breakdowns between city agencies and the structural issues with the towers themselves.

I was fascinated reading their detailed account of the World Trade Center towers which were massive in their size and reach, yet ill-equipped to sustain the crash of a jumbo jet, despite building plans and agencies that said otherwise. They were built to maximize rentable space over safety, each with only three stairwells for 110 floors, four million square feet of office space and 20,000 occupants (versus the Empire State Building's

nine stairwells for 102 floors, 2.25 million square feet and 15,000 occupants). I was baffled that infighting between NYPD, NYFD, NY Port Authority and other rescue agencies trumped necessary disaster recovery training and processes that clearly had a negative impact on the ability to share information. Rescue teams were unable to communicate which stairwells were clear and free for use, or that helicopters needed to be released to rescue tenants on the roof that couldn't descend past the floors consumed with wreckage, or even more crucial... when it was clear for folks to go back upstairs and back to work, to stay put and wait for help or when a total evacuation was necessary.

It's evident there were a number of mistakes attempting to clear out the towers. 102 MINUTES seeks not to point fingers at the failures, but to shed light on opportunities to do differently knowing what we now know. What they uncover through their research is important, vital even. It should be required reading for all of us, but most especially those in positions to impart change in the way we approach disaster and recovery efforts during an attack or high-rise fire.

And despite the harrowing events of September 11, I found myself utterly captivated by this book. My heart swelled reading the stories of humanity and generosity amongst strangers in a window of time--not even two hours!--that was fraught with terror and uncertainty. 2,749 people died in the attacks and 4,400 were injured. Dwyer and Flynn do not claim to have collected all the stories, but they have created an enduring record. As they share in their own words:

No single voice can describe the scenes that unfolded at terrible velocities in so many places. Taken together, though, the words, witnesses, and records provide not only a broad and chilling view of the devastation, but also a singularly revealing window onto acts of grace at a brutal hour.

102 MINUTES encourages us to carry on their legacy--even those we didn't have the pleasure to meet--and to never forget them.

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### **Amanda NEVER MANDY says**

I happened upon this read browsing in the history section for another book. I didn't have a particular one in mind, just wanted to mix up my reading a bit. I had two others in hand when I saw this one haphazardly shoved into a spot on the shelf and I knew instantly that I had found my next read.

This book is exactly what you think it's about. It's straight and to the point and it lays out all of the detailed information in a very organized format. I have nothing negative to say about this book and recommend it to anyone that wants to know more. Sorry for keeping it brief, but I don't feel this is a review where my personal views and reactions to the topic are needed.

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### **Jill Hutchinson says**

This book joins a few others that I have read that truly disturbed me to the point of tears. It is the story of the individuals, both civilian and police/fire personnel who were in the Twin Towers or went there on the rescue mission on 9/11/2001. It absolutely is emotionally devastating and I think what adds to the intensity it engenders is that we saw it live on television. The book doesn't need a long review.....it is a must read but be prepared to be relive the horror of that day.

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### **Theo says**

7 years after the event, I finally dug within myself to find the courage to read this book. I don't think I WANTED to know what happened inside The Towers...it was just TOO close. I was right about that...I didn't want to know. And yet the tying together of this multitude of perspectives to provide a clear picture of the events of those most devastating 102 minutes in our nation's history was done so skillfully as to present an incredibly clear picture of the events. That being said, I can't say how it would appear to someone unfamiliar with the World Trade Center itself. I can't speak to the images created for someone with no idea of the physical structure and layout of the Twin Towers. Still, I doubt that the intensity and terror of the day would be lost on any reader. 7 years later and I hope for all the survivors that the days are a little more peaceful and the nights a little more restful. And may all the readers learn from this book the importance of taking time each day to express themselves to those they love, so nothing is left a question on their final day.

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### **Heather says**

This was a gripping read. Definitely not an easy one, but I thought the authors did a great job of not over dramatizing it. They just laid all the facts and information out there and the facts are devastating enough on their own. I appreciated how they approached this telling and was so pleased that they didn't prey on our emotions. Saying that though, I still cried. How could I not? The events of 9/11 still feel surreal and gut-wrenching. I'm sure they always will. I wanted to read this book to honor those who experienced this tragic event. Those who lost their lives and the heroes who stepped up to the plate that day will never be forgotten. It's always inspiring to see the goodness of humankind at work and for people to act so selflessly and reach out to help. It shouldn't take a tragedy for this to be the case. This should be the norm.

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### **Matt says**

The last moments of Kevin Cosgrove's life were presented as the Government's Exhibit P200017 in the case of *United States v. Zacarias Moussaoui*. Originally labeled the "20th hijacker," Moussaoui was eventually tried as part of a conspiracy to launch a second wave of attacks against the United States, following September 11, 2001.

Exhibit P200017 is a split-screen video: on the right side of the screen is the South Tower of the World Trade Center; on the left side of the screen, you see the transcript of Cosgrove's final call to 911 dispatch, which begins at 9:53 a.m. The audio of Cosgrove's call plays over the split screen, while the tower burns and the seconds slip away. The entirety of the call (though it is clear that Cosgrove made several others) lasts 4 minutes and 53 seconds.

It is a remarkable and agonizing thing to hear. Cosgrove is clearly in a desperate situation, but though he is anxious, he doesn't panic. Over and over, he demands to know when help will arrive. The 911 dispatcher tries to placate him with generalities; Cosgrove, however, won't accept that as an answer. During this striking colloquy, there are several instances when the 911 dispatcher lapses into silence, to the point where Cosgrove has to ask whether she is still there. It is clear that the dispatcher simply doesn't know what to say; and really, there is nothing for her to say. She probably didn't know it at the time, but there was no power on

heaven and earth that could've reached Kevin Cosgrove on the 105th Floor of Tower 2. Indeed, from the first moments of the disaster, a fire chief reportedly told New York's mayor Rudy Giuliani that rescue above the impact zones was impossible.

As the call plays out, Cosgrove displays flashes of understandable anger. He is annoyed at having to repeatedly give the dispatcher information he has already relayed (he angrily spells out his last name, which are displayed in all-caps on the Government's transcription). When the dispatcher tells him to "hang in there," Cosgrove responds: "You can say that. You're in an air conditioned building." Later, after describing the smoke filling the office, he says plaintively: "We're young men. We're not ready to die."

Four minutes and forty seconds into the video, there is a tremendous rush of sound. The video on the right side of the screen shows the top portion of Tower 2 fold in on itself and begin to collapse. Cosgrove's last words – "OH GOD! OH!" – end abruptly, and a computerized voice logs the message number. He was one of 614 people who died in Tower 2, and one of 2,606 people who died in New York that day.

For obvious reasons, including the mass casualties and the fact the disaster played out on live television, the tragedy of the Twin Towers has come to symbolize September 11. In *102 Minutes*, reporters Jim Dwyer and Kevin Flynn accept this reality and narrowly focus their story on the World Trade Center and the individuals within. The title refers to the length of time it took for both towers to collapse, following the first plane strike. Chapter 1 begins at 8:46 a.m., when Tower 1 is struck by American Airlines 11, and ends around 10:30 a.m., after Tower 1 has fallen (Tower 2, though hit second, fell first, due to the location of impact).

This is a book with a closed universe. Aside from a very brief prologue, meant to give a little context, there is no attempt to give a broad-stroke account of 9/11. There are no discussions about intelligence failures. No cutaways to the passengers on the hijacked jets. No mention of Bin Laden. No talk of politics. No arguments about post-9/11 foreign policy. This is a stripped down, gristle-free story of survival. Minute by minute it follows a broad swath of humanity – bankers and window washers, insurers and caterers, firemen and cops – as they struggle against the greatest high rise disaster in history. And always, the clock is winding down to the 102nd minute.

*102 Minutes* is the kind of book that grabs you by the throat and compels you to continue reading. In a way, it is a throwback to those old *Readers Digest* special features that told the personal stories of disaster survivors, such as those who escaped the *Andria Doria*. Make no mistake, however: the momentum of the story never makes you lose sight of the human dimension. To the contrary, the momentum is created by the very acute knowledge that these were real people in the not-too-distant past.

The subtitle of *102 Minutes* purports to tell the "untold" story of the Twin Towers. Published six years ago, the incidents in *102 Minutes* no longer qualify as untold (indeed, in a tenth anniversary reissue, the book has a new subtitle that substitutes the adjective "unforgettable"). To the contrary, many of the survivors and events recounted in the book have passed into legend and lore. This includes the amazing saga of Stairway B in the North Tower, in which six members of Ladder 6, along with bookkeeper Josephine Harris, weathered the collapse.

Still, the power of the stories remain undiminished. For example, there is Brian Clark, a broker for Euro Bank in Tower 2, who was one of only four survivors above the impact zone. Clark, armed with a flashlight because he was his floor's fire warden, helped rescue Stanley Praimnath, who then surprised him with a hug and kiss. Their story is one of rare instances of levity on 9/11. As a study in contrasts – Clark, a white Canadian with a lilting voice; Praimnath, brown-skinned and reserved – the two wouldn't have been out of place in a buddy cop movie. Flynn & Dwyer also tell of the remarkable escape from a stalled elevator. In that

elevator, a quick-witted window washer named Jan Demczur used the metal frame of his squeegee to cut through dry wall.

Unfortunately, most of the stories recounted by Dwyer & Flynn lack a happy ending. There is Abe Zelmanowitz, a computer programmer, who refused to leave the side of his friend, Ed Beyea, a quadriplegic who could not get down the steps. There is Fire Marshal Ron Bucca, who along with Chief Orio Palmer, were the only known firefighters to reach the impact zone. And there is Port Authority construction manager Frank De Martini, who worked on the 88th floor of the North Tower; after the collision, he worked to pry open jammed doors on twelve floors around the crash zone. None of these men survived.

Whether it is a story of survival, or a story of loss, Dwyer and Flynn maintain the same, reportorial tone. Their style is objective and unadorned. The emotional wallop of *102 Minutes* does not come from mawkish sentiments or high-flown rhetoric, but from the stories themselves, and from the known words of both the living and the dead.

Dwyer & Flynn do more than record 102 minutes of suffering and survival, doom and escape. They intercut these chapters with detailed and eye-opening examinations about the safety and security of the World Trade Center, and the effectiveness of the rescue operations. (Besides being informative, these breaks give the reader a chance to breath after the sustained intensity of the central narrative).

Dwyer & Flynn raise serious concerns about the construction of the Twin Towers, noting that their very design ensured the deaths of just about every worker above the impact zones. Somewhere in the neighborhood of 1,500 people – a number eerily similar to the fatalities on the *Titanic* – survived the impacts of the airplanes. These folks, however, had no way to escape. Partially, this was due to changes in the building code, which relied heavily on new materials to ensure safety:

[T]he 1968 code eliminated the need for reinforced staircases and vestibules. Not only the fire towers disappeared. So did half the staircases. The 1968 code reduced the number of stairways required for buildings the size of the towers from six to three. Moreover, those three would have less protection, as the new code lowered the minimum fire resistance for walls around the shafts from three hours to two, and permitted them to be built from much less sturdy material. All these changes offered significant financial opportunities...They would increase the space available for rent by getting rid of stairways and make the building lighter by lowering the fire resistance and eliminating the requirements for masonry.

On September 11, the collision of the two jets into the Twin Towers starkly proved the necessity for better fireproofing measures and more staircases. This reality is ably reinforced by the inclusion of a number of helpful schematics and diagrams showing the layouts of the buildings from different angles. The most effective of these diagrams show the impact of the planes superimposed on the floor plans, highlighting the number of support beams damaged and stairwells blocked.

To their credit, Dwyer & Flynn also critique the emergency response to Twin Towers attacks. This is potentially uncomfortable territory, as it encroaches on our most cherished memories from that awful day: the heroic response of the New York Fire Department. Following 9/11, many Americans clung to the effectiveness of the emergency operations, even when everything else – our intelligence community, our airport security, our immigration offices, and our steel – seemed to fail. Mayor Giuliani spearheaded the charge, noting that tens of thousands of people had been rescued from the Towers.

In *102 Minutes*, that conventional narrative is turned on its head. With journalistic precision, Dwyer & Flynn recount the miscues of the rescue operation. Most of these miscues come down to one word: communication. There were no amplifiers or repeaters to strengthen radio signals; the fire department could not communicate with the police department; the 911 system was overwhelmed. This led to an ad hoc operation resulting in disastrous – and in some cases unnecessary – fatalities. Firemen charged into the building carrying hundreds of pounds of equipment, including thick coils of hose, even though fire commanders knew from the beginning that they could not fight the fire. After the first tower fell, there was no way to get word to all the units in the second tower, and the consequences were predictable:

Nearly all the 6,000 civilians below the impact zone had left the north tower by the time of its collapse, a fact hard to square with the notion that most of the approximately 200 firefighters who died in the north tower could not get out because they were busy helping civilians. In the oral histories collected by the Fire Department, numerous firefighters recalled that they were unaware of how serious the situation had become in those final minutes. This does not mean that the firefighters were not a welcome and uplifting presence... Yet...[that presence] does not explain why so many firefighters died in a building they could have escaped and where there was scarcely anyone left who could be helped. On the 19th floor of the north tower, scores of doomed firefighters were seen...taking a rest break in the final minutes, coats off, axes against the wall, soaked in sweat...

Defenders of the response point to the unprecedented nature of the World Trade Center attacks. But that argument ignores the 1993 bombing of the North Tower. In that incident, all these same issues – mainly, an utter lack of communication – cropped up. In the intervening years, they were not remedied.

In this light, Mayor Giuliani's repetition of the conventional narrative seems designed to cover his own failure to press the issue of better equipment and communication. Dwyer & Flynn also fault him for locating the Office of Emergency Management in World Trade Center 7, right next door to the biggest (both literally and figuratively) terrorist targets in the universe. No one can impugn Giuliani's personal bravery on the day of the attacks, which allowed him to step into the leadership vacuum left by a hightailing President Bush; however, his failure to replace faulty equipment and his inability to display tactical leadership loom large over that day.

Dwyer & Flynn take great pains to separate the chaos of the emergency response from the courage of the first responders. No one can overstate the guts it takes to rush into a burning building when everyone else is heading the opposite direction. Yet the courage of the firefighters was not a suicidal courage. They did not know what they were getting into: initially, the worst they feared was a partial collapse of the top floors; they did not hear early reports from helicopter crews that the buildings seemed to be weakening; and the men in Tower 1 did not know when Tower 2 fell. A failure in leadership squandered a lot of brave men.

The enduring image of the Twin Towers attacks will probably always remain the heroic rescuers. But the best thing *102 Minutes* does is to show the courage of the ordinary workers, those people who kept their heads about them, even without years of training and conditioning. Just about everyone below the impact zones – some 12,000 people – survived. And they weren't rescued; they saved themselves, evacuating in what Dwyer & Flynn call a "mass of civility." Meanwhile, civilians such as window washer Demczur and manager De Martini saved lives with their gut impulses. Even those trapped above the impact zones, waiting to die, often kept an amazingly serene presence. These were people who were thinking and gathering information and problem solving till the final moments. Before he died, Kevin Cosgrove tramped down 20

floors before he was turned back by smoke and heat. Others tried desperately to reach the roof, knowing that rooftop rescues had been effectuated in 1993.

Ten years later, 9/11 is still an open wound. Alone among all the tragedies in the history of the world, it seems to stand outside the realm of art. (Fifteen hundred people died in the second highest-grossing film ever, but that probably didn't stop you from getting a large popcorn and soda). Every time a book is written, or a movie made, or a television program aired, or a song is sung about 9/11, a dozen scolds pop up to tell you the mere act of consuming such media is sacrilegious.

Accordingly, even a sober-minded, clear-eyed, ground-level view of this tragedy prompts a rejoinder from a certain segment of society: what's the point? Why write another book about 9/11, a disaster just about every American saw unfold in real-time? The question certainly arose with the publication of *102 Minutes*. Not only is it about 9/11, it is also a very good book. Since good books are often entertaining to read, this leads us into dangerous territory.

The short term answer is that *102 Minutes* is a historical document, capturing and recording moments that get more distant every day. It helps correct a record that has been skewed by the immediate, emotional response to the attacks.

The longer view, and a more profound answer, is that *102 Minutes* is an act of remembrance. Later generations, those who never watched the Towers fall, will meet Brian Clark and Ron Bucca and Kevin Cosgrove and others, and follow them through a short arc on the most trying day of their lives. And long after, beyond the time when even the survivors and witnesses have died, they will be remembered still, vivid in their humanity, fighting against the inevitable death that looms over us all.

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### **ALLEN says**

I'm not sure this book is a substitute for the official 9/11 report, but it does have a dignity all its own. The one-hundred-two minutes referred to are the time between the first plane struck the first of the giant WTC Twin Towers in lower Manhattan on 9-11-2001, and both towers had collapsed. This focus here is as much on institutional fail as individual bravery; pay attention to the actions that political figures, some of them still prominent today, took before and after the disaster. The kind of "inverted pyramid" prose with its short choppy sentences that the authors frequently resort to is more suited to the daily papers they came from than a serious work of history. Still, well worth reading. Interrelationship of details is excellent, and charts and maps outstanding.

Through an accident my prior review of August 24, 2018 was deleted, hence this new posting.

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### **Jennifer Wardrip says**

This was an absolutely amazing book. Not just because of the true-life accounts of many who survived (or, in many cases, didn't), but mostly because the authors pull no punches in telling the story of 9/11/01.

This isn't a book that bashes the government, both local and national, but it does tell both the good and the

bad, the positive and the negative. While I was uplifted and encouraged by so many examples of human kindness, I was devastated to read that so very many deaths could have possibly been avoided, if there had just been better communication between political-minded departments.

Also, the fact that so many shortcuts were taken in building the World Trade Center, simply to create more rentable space, shows just how far people will go to make a buck. It saddens me that so many lives might have been saved if there were more staircases, if they had been spread out more, if they had had proper fireproofing.

If you're interested at all in the story that is 9/11, then this is a must-read.

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## **Will Byrnes says**

**Jim Dwyer and Kevin Flynn** - images from the National Book Foundation

*102 Minutes* covers the time from the initial impact at World Trade Center #1, the North Tower, to its collapse 102 minutes later. The focus is on survivors, how people managed. In telling heroic tales of survival and sacrifice, Dwyer and Flynn offer much relevant information about how the city construction code was subverted to allow the Trade Center's design. There were, for example, an insufficient number of stairways, insufficient and untested insulation, and placement of stairs in a way that had been vociferously opposed by the fire department. *102 Minutes* was a National Book Award finalist. For anyone interested in the events of 9/11, this is definitely worth checking out.

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## **April Lyn says**

I'm surprised so many people liked this book as much as they did. I didn't think it was very good, and I can't think of anyone I'd recommend it to. I wonder if people just felt obligated to like it due to the subject matter? Or maybe it just reads so much better than it sounds (on audio CD) but I can't imagine the difference is *that* drastic.

Anyway, I have two big complaints. The first is that there are a ton of names dropped (which is fine), but they will talk about what a person did for five minutes and then move on to the next part, and then maybe (or not) pick that person's story back up 10 pages, 50 pages, 100 pages later. I can't follow it. You've named like, 300 people. I don't feel like I could share the specific experience of a single person who experienced Sept 11 as a result of having listened to the CD. Which is too bad. I was really hoping to hear more about who these people were who made sacrifices, choices, etc. I think it would have been a lot better if they'd told individuals stories start-to-finish and then moved on to the next.

Also, as many other people have mentioned, the book is very political. It seems to have an agenda in assigning blame to the people/organizations who failed to act. And to a degree, I get that. I get that victims and families of victims probably feel better knowing that - hey, someone is being held accountable for failing to do his job or for making a drastic mistake or for knowingly going against an order that would have made him more effective. However, it leaves the reader with a very uneasy feeling like, "Did I accidentally buy into propaganda when I just wanted to hear the stories of these individuals?"

Lastly, I say that my experience was surely affected by the crap CDs I got from the library, four out of five of which were scratched.

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### **Mary says**

Oh

My

Goodness

I would put a spoiler alert on this, except that everyone already knows how this story ends.

I almost didn't make it through the book. I originally started reading it because of the technical explanations it had for all the things I never understood fully: the lack of communications, the faulty design of emergency exits in the towers, the layout of the buildings, the timing of the events, and so forth. However, the personal stories of the people involved are interspersed throughout the explanations. Information derived from 911 and family phone calls were pieced together to get a partial picture of what happened to individuals in the two towers before they went down.

Warning: This is very, very disturbing. It tries to stay as practical as possible, and doesn't delve into over-dramatizations...however, you are reading along about what is happening with a certain person, and all of the sudden you are seeing the story from another person's point of view. And then you realize it is because the other person is now gone. A real person, someone who really experienced this event. And their narration ends, just like that.

I spent a lot of time crying, and I really don't recommend this read to you if you don't have closure yet, or if you don't care to know the technical details of the terrorist attack. I'm not sure it was worth it for me, either.

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### **Jackie says**

very interesting and compelling; obviously a subject full of drama and suspense but also extremely well organized and written. my only regret is I read it on my kindle so there are illustrations - plans of the towers, for example - that don't show up well.

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### **Mike says**

I read this book to rekindle my flagging support for our war in Afghanistan (a result of reading War, which tells the story of so many brave men in an impossible area). What better way to refuel my rage than to read about the 102 minutes of terror that emanated from the terrorist refuge in Kandahar. But I came away with a completely different, unexpected result. I come away inspired and humbled by the stories of that day in the towers told in this riveting account. The self-sacrifice and courage of everyday people is truly amazing, a great story about men and women who did what they could to help their friends, co-workers and strangers.

At the start of this book, you are reminded what a normal day it was at first, normal people going to their office or to the restaurant to have breakfast or sitting back in the plane, ready for a long flight. Some of the book deals with the sheer luck and serendipity that determined whether someone got out or not. Some of the book deals with the history of construction and compromises, changes that made the towers less safe. Another theme is the lack of cooperation and, even unhealthy disdain, that existed between the police and the firemen. Many lives could have been saved had there been more cooperation, exercises and coordination between the two services. This book is, in military parlance, an unflinching After-Action Report (AAR) of that day. It is a valuable historical record of a pivot point in history, yet brings it down to a personal level. There is plenty of blame to go around and the authors affix it without a political slant (amazing professionalism from 2 NYT reporters).

I was somewhat hesitant to read this because I thought it would be too intense. We all know many of the stories of that day and a good few are covered here. While the book is intense, it is compelling reading without being too emotional. The stories of \$10.00/hour security guards and hotel employees bravely standing their posts or helping with the evacuation are so heartwarming; you can't help but be proud. We should not gloss over or try to soften the memories of that day; we should celebrate the courage and bravery, not only of the first responders that walked into the conflagration but also of the many individuals who had little or no responsibility to help but did (and many lost their lives doing so).

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### **Kathleen says**

National Book Award Finalist for Nonfiction 2005. It may be seventeen years since 9/11, but the memories of those awful minutes are brought rushing back with Dwyer and Flynn's excellent recounting of that horrific morning. Never forget.

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