Five days after the World Trade Center attack, Yael and I had a rare opportunity to see a side of Ground Zero that has generally been off-limits to media and volunteers. Naturally, we couldn't resist the temptation to take a few pictures. We wanted to share them with friends far and wide who don't live in New York. Hopefully, the attached Powerpoint show will give you a sense for what it was really like. (I hope it didn't take too long to download.)

By way of background, on the Tuesday of the attacks, I was 5000 miles away in Anchorage on business. I couldn't concentrate on work. That Thursday, I decided I had to get back to New York to see it for myself. Somehow, through a lucky combination of finding a charter plane to New York, finding the only hardware store in Manhattan with hard hats and respirators left, and sweet-talking our way through five layers of tight police security, Yael and I found ourselves 48 hours later at Ground Zero, working the rescue alongside a team of professional fireman, policeman, FBI, NYPD, CIA, and other federal agents.

Two weeks after the attacks, we look out my window in New York and see white smoke rising 15 blocks away where the World Trade Towers once stood.

Bob
Ground Zero

Five days after the attack
For a several block radius from the crash site, storefronts were blasted out, streetlamps blown down, and cars buried under inches of gray concrete dust.

Fluorescent orange spray-paint marked which buildings had been searched and how many victims found. “Morgue, 2 Blocks” was spray-painted on the front entrance to Brooks Brothers. It seemed very out of place.

Looking through the broken out display windows, you could see neatly-arranged shelves of button-down shirts coated in thick gray silt. Dumpster-sized wooden boxes, labeled “aircraft parts,” were placed every block or so.
Yael stopped for a picture in front of the Millenium Hilton. We would soon discover it fared far better than other neighborhood hotels.
LOCAL 817

YOU TOOK YOUR SHOT
NOW IT'S OUR TURN
GET READY TO GET YOUR NUTS KICKED IN
Signed Ed Lover

TO THE HEROES
REST IN PEACE
TD-33
RIP

TO The Memo.
Thats work in 76 Rest In Peace RIP.

98 INTA

COME HOME STEVE + TOMMY
Office papers and fragments of desks and chairs littered the streets as we neared Ground Zero. A street vendor cart lay abandoned, its doughnuts and sandwiches spilled across the windows and floor. There was an flattened fire truck lying upside down, an ambulance that had been amputated in half by a falling beam, and a passenger car crushed open, revealing a full set of golf clubs in the trunk.
The area was considered a crime scene, so we weren’t supposed to disturb anything. But my curiosity got the best of me.

I picked up a sheet that landed ominously in a cemetery across from 6 WTC. It was the lease between Cantor Fitzgerald and its subtenant, eSpeed, on the 103rd floor. When the second plane struck, their escape route was sealed off by the fire.

1500 children of Cantor employees lost a parent. I later attended a Memorial Service for someone I knew. At the conclusion, the family gave us an envelope with 2 sheets of blank paper and the below note.

---

Please Tell us about our father

Please send us a note telling us something about our father.

- His special characteristics
- A favorite story about our father
- What you remember most about our father
  [Maybe even send us a picture]

My mother will save these for us, and someday it will allow us to know more about our Daddy.
Who knows it may even be a bedtime story.

Hannah, Lucy and Henry
The first WTC building we saw was #7. Once 47 stories, it was now a 60-foot high mound. I was told it fell later; everyone was evacuated. An abandoned street vendor cart stood in front.

Multiple high pressure hoses were spraying it down to suppress underground fires that would continue for weeks. It reminded me of coal seams I've seen burning in mountainsides for years.
Approaching WTC 2, I was struck with how much damage had been done to other buildings in the area. Windows, even 15 and 20 floors up, blew out. A shard of the Trade Center weighing many tons hung from a nearby building.
Arriving at 2 WTC, Yael jumped onto the bucket brigade. For hours, she passed five-gallon buckets of debris down the line. It gratified her to be able to support the effort in some tangible way. The intense, fast-moving, assembly-line rhythm offered an escape from the awful reality of the job.
A surveyor trained a spotting scope on the corner of what appeared to be a crushed three-story structure. It was all that remained of the 45-story Marriott. He explained, “My job is simple. You see that leaning building? Every two minutes I sight in on it. The second I see movement, I fire off this siren to clear the workers away.”
Then, every hour or so, the “All Quiet” call would ring across the job site as someone suspected they heard tapping. The beehive of activity would grind to a halt. People would almost stop breathing, shut off their power tools, kill the engines on their front-end loaders, and listen for sounds of life. Each time, after several disappointing minutes of silence, rather than finding a live survivor, a call would come out to pass more body bags down the line.
My surveyor friend thought that digging out the rubble by hand undermined the pile, increasing the risk that large pieces could collapse on the rescue workers. He also thought there might be pockets of life buried deep that the bucket brigade would not reach in time. He thought cranes should have been brought in sooner to lift heavy pieces off the top. But the firefighters didn’t want to risk maiming any of the 350 firefighters and emergency response professionals who might be buried near the surface.
Fireman had to cut the twisted metal skin of the Trade Center into smaller pieces so the cranes could lift them.

They also had to remove hanging objects before people could work underneath them.
I saw a cable that had been lashed high onto what remained of WTC 2. I later heard they tried to drag it down using a crane. But it was too solid.

An experienced welder complained to me that a local union crew had taken over the welding equipment he was using. He thought they were getting paid which upset him: “I belong to a union, but I’m not here for money.”

He was frustrated watching an inexperienced union welder take ten minutes to cut through a beam he said he could slice through in two minutes—while potential survivors might be buried beneath.
I wandered far out onto the pile with a welding crew. I shoveled surface debris away so they could weld bare metal. The mishmash of burnt paper, shattered concrete, splintered office furniture, and jagged metal objects was so compacted that it took 3-4 stabs each time to get my shovel under the surface.
As darkness fell and the wind picked up, the scene felt more ominous. I looked across a deep pit to all that remained of 2 WTC, a charred and twisted skeleton of metal beams rising 15 stories above the wreckage. You could see right through gaps in the skin of the building frame into smoldering fires that seemed to glow a brighter orange with the onset of darkness. After four days, I wondered what could still be burning.

In the distance, I could hear metal shifting and creaking. Every now and then, a piece of dangling rebar would fall and clang onto the pile. You couldn’t see it; you could only hear it. It rang with the sound of death. Few rescuers, if any, had trespassed that deep into the remnants of 2 WTC. I couldn’t get myself to go nearer for fear that something would fall on me, and I might become trapped.
Yet I knew that, if there were still survivors, they were likely pinned inside that remnant of WTC 2. A fireman told me 500-1000 might be buried there—less than half a football field from where we stood. I wished there were more I could do to help. I think that was probably every rescue worker's feeling.

Judging from my limited exposure, working on the rescue was probably more cathartic for us rescuers than it was effective for those we were hoping to save. Part of the problem, according to one fireman, was that New York had lost 70 of their 200 best rescuers, their top chiefs, much of their rescue equipment, and the emergency response center when the towers collapsed.

In the lower center, you might be able to see a crater 30 feet below street level where the Promenade used to be.
I ran into a canine team from Indiana. Kaiser, the search dog, was spooked from walking on hot metal beams. Trained in back country search in Indiana, he was clearly uncomfortable walking on a mountain of metal (note his bandaged foot), in downtown Manhattan, at night.

Four days after the collapse, heat and smoke still wafted up through the carnage. The stench of burning building material was sickening to me wearing a respirator mask; I can only imagine how pungent it was to the animal with his keen nose.

When Kaiser thought he smelled someone, he would bark. Then, another dog would be brought in to confirm the “canine hit” before the bucket brigades would hand-dig on the spot.
I was impressed with how able the dogs were to climb up and over beams. I don’t know how much each beam weighed, but I do know that five of us could stand on one without budging it. It was hard to fathom the forces a single falling beam would subject on the human body, let alone a floor’s worth—or a building’s worth.
Part of the 8th floor of Deutsche Bank landed, strangely enough, 15 feet below the beams we were traversing across. I didn’t climb down, but I was told that one office was eerily still intact, its desks and chairs thrown into the corner.

While the rubble covered several square blocks, it was hard to believe it rose only 60 feet above street level. 110 stories of skyscraper had compressed into the basement!

The dogs led us to a tangle of beams with cracks just wide enough to slip through. A fireman crawled down with his shovel. A few minutes later, he found two victims. We passed him body bags which you can see him holding under his arm.
Union Square
The weekend after the attack
The next day, Yael and I went over to Union Square. As intense as the destruction at the Towers, was the camaraderie of strangers and the outpouring of love and support at Union Square and all around New York.
Thousands of people placed candles, flowers, teddy bears, and even paintings around the Square. People were mostly silent as they perused the hundreds of “missing posters” taped to walls and fences. Many made reference to scars, tattoos, or jewelry their loved ones were wearing when last seen.
Yael brought me over to see an email taped to the pavement called “Tons.” It spoke about the emptiness of the media’s reporting on dry statistics.

Of all the prayers I read, the ones written by school-children touched me most.
All the diversity of New York seemed to be present. A group of Tibetans several hundred strong meditated, burned incense candles, hung prayer flags, and chanted, praying for non-violence. Mexicans marched and sang in the streets, waving Mexican and American flags. It seemed as if the whole world had come together to share the pain and incomprehensibility of what had happened.
Looking into the eyes of those who perished hit me with the magnitude of the loss. They were all just normal people; it could have happened to any of us.
One Last Time

By Kari Magedoff

Through the smoke, I see your eyes
They shine on me with your love
I need to gaze at you
One last time

Through my tears, I feel your touch
Your arms embrace me
They make me feel safe
One last time

Through the pain, I hear your voice
It softly caresses me
Touching my soul
One last time

Through the darkness, I say goodbye
You kiss my lips
Filling my heart
One last time
The melting pot of America came together in Union Square to grieve. Strangers felt a common pain and connection. It was a living example of what is so precious about America. While we differ on some things, all of us gathered there agreed on the sacredness of life and the unspeakable loss of September 11.

How to respond to such acts is the vexing question. It’s hard for me to comprehend how humans could do this to each other. Seeing pictures of those killed and the pain of those left behind, I certainly felt the urge for compassion, forgiveness—anything that could end the cycle of killing.

But I question whether it could ever be possible to reach the hearts of those hateful enough to inflict such loss and suffering on others. That makes me feel an urge for justice.

I suppose this is the same issue the religions of the world have been grappling with through thousands of years of human history.
I went to Yael’s Temple the following Tuesday for Rosh Hashonah in Long Island. In his sermon, Rabbi Michael White said the following:

“The thing about human evil is that whenever it goes toe-to-toe with human goodness, it always loses. Of course, in the short-term, monstrous madness wreaks havoc and can cause immeasurable pain, as it most certainly did this past week. But, in the end, the human spirit is so much stronger than the forces which would destroy it.”