

# *Walking Through the Valley of the Shadow of Death*

**A sister remembers her brother, a New York City firefighter who died at the World Trade Center.**

**I**n the late evening on September 11, 2001, my brother, Bruce Van Hine, FDNY-Rescue Squad 41, was officially listed as missing. The following are the events that occurred surrounding that day. Was it all in God's providence? Does God plan each person's move so they were right where they needed to be? Has God allowed us to look back on these events and claim the good and receive comfort? Is it true that "even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for thou art with me"?

of chemo treatments for ovarian cancer and the beginning of radiation treatments for breast cancer. Mom had the itinerary planned with side trips and restaurant coupons.

September 11 was a bright and beautiful morning in Carlisle. We met my husband's parents at a local restaurant for breakfast. When we got there, my mother-in-law asked, "Did you hear, a plane struck the World Trade Center?" And as we sat down, the server said, "The second tower has been hit by a plane." My mom simply said, "Bruce is on duty today."

We prayed for more than food at that table. As the food arrived, so did the additional news that the Pentagon had been hit and there was something about a plane crash in Pennsylvania. I must confess at that point I felt as if I were in the middle of a Tom Clancy novel. We worked on trying to eat.

After breakfast, we said our good-byes because this was the day to return to my mom's house in Toms River, New Jersey, about an hour-and-a-quarter from New York City. We had one last stop before we left, to pick up a gift certificate at another local restaurant. There I was greeted by the owner who was in tears and basically in shock. She told me that the towers had collapsed. This was information I had to keep from my mother, at least for the present.

In the car I simply said that we would not be listening to the radio. We would have better information about the situation later when the news teams could sort it out. Actually I wanted to be back at my mother's house with her friends, minister, and doctor in case



Firefighters line the street outside of Bruce Van Hine's church for his memorial service.

On September 6, I boarded a plane in Kansas City for Newark, New Jersey, to attend a wedding. I had planned to go just for the weekend, but two weeks before we were supposed to leave my husband had a change of plans and could not go. I decided to extend my trip so I could be there for Mom's eighty-third birthday on September 14. Extra time on the East Coast would also allow Mom and me a brief visit to Carlisle, Pennsylvania, where my mother-in-law was in between the end



An American flag is hung from two fire trucks at the memorial service.

the information was more than she could physically bear. We drove for four hours, mostly in prayerful silence. We saw flags being lowered to half-staff. I noticed no planes or vapor trails in the clear morning sky. We traveled onward and by mid-afternoon arrived at my mother's home. The TV went on.

There are some career choices that are more dangerous than others. Fire fighting is one of them. My brother had made my mom promise that if she ever saw anything on TV regarding FDNY, she was not to call Ann, his wife. Instead, Ann would call her if there was any news. By 7 p.m. there had been no call. Mom said, "You didn't make that promise Bobbie. Would you call?"

Ann did not have any news, but she expected to hear something within a few hours. At 9 p.m., she called back. Bruce and five other members of his squad were listed as missing. They had been at another fire, and because of their rescue specialty were called over to the World Trade Center. They arrived at the first tower as the plane hit the second one. Squad 41 was at Ground Zero.

Ann had always worried about how she would tell my mom if something happened to my brother. And here I was, with Mom, and could gently be the buffer to simply say, "He is missing. That's all we know. And we can't go beyond that right now."

What comfort to be there together.

I couldn't get out of my mind that while Bruce was missing to others, he was not missing to God.

There were many trips up and down the Garden State Parkway to my brother's home in Greenwood Lake, New York. Family and friends called. Cards came. Ann was the first among the squad wives to make the decision to have a memorial service. It was scheduled for Saturday afternoon, September 29.

It was another clear, sunny day. More than an hour before the service people began to gather. The report in *The New York Times* the next day said that there were 1,000 people there. There were 300 uniformed firefighters. Two hook-and ladder trucks were parked out front—their ladders poised at forty-five degree angles. An American flag hung between them. The busy street was respectfully silent as traffic was diverted. As the firefighters filed in, the congregation stood and clapped until all were in place. The deputy mayor of New York was present and said that they determined that 25,000 lives were saved because of the rescue workers. People saw the lights on the firefighters hats that helped lead them to safety.

We came together to worship God and to remember a fallen brother. One of his lieutenants, Charlie, spoke of Bruce's love for hiking the Appalachian Trail. Bruce would place Gideon New Testaments in plastic bags in the

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Bobbie Bower and Bruce Van Hine with their mother, Hannah Van Hine

shelters so hikers would have a chance to read the gospel. Bruce was spiritually prepared to die. During the service Ann spoke and most directly said, "We got you here. What will you do with what you have heard?"

October 8. I am in Chicago. After an extended three-and-a-half weeks on the East Coast I came home for three days and then was off to Chicago. This request to write a reflection has been good. I attended Worldwide Communion Sunday at North Park Covenant Church, the early service with just a few people. The opening hymn was, "The Church's One Foundation." It was the same opening hymn at Bruce's memorial service. The last two verses have been especially meaningful both then and now. Seated next to me on either side were people who had met Bruce in June, when he, Ann, and their daughters Emily, seventeen, and Meghan, fourteen, had visited Chicago. In the fellowship hall after the serv-

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ice, I remembered seeing Bruce there, during another visit, at my daughter's wedding reception.

I am in Chicago because on September 24, the day President Bush declared the flags to fly at full staff, my daughter went into labor. As flags were being raised, at 6:05 a.m., and 6:07 a.m., twin boys were born—our first grandchildren, and my mom's first great-

grandchildren. A new page in our lives has turned. There is a new way to return to life, and it is "well with my soul."

Did God plan out the timing on all these things? What does it mean, "The Lord gives and the Lord takes, blessed be the name of the Lord?" Can we ever really understand God's providence? What do you think? □

