

***Glenn Russo (memories of September 11, 2001)
by Artie Maglionico***

Glenn Russo, a lifelong resident of the town of Lodi, has walked the thin line between heaven and hell and lived to talk about it. He looked up and saw the shadow of death, a living nightmare that draped itself like a dark curtain over the landscape. Glenn was there on that fateful September 11th morning and it changed his life forever.

Glenn Russo was born on December 10, 1949. His parents Leonard and Katherine were married in the Spring of 1946 and later purchased a home on First Street in Lodi.

"My mom was a singer on Broadway and performed with the USO during WWII." says Glenn "She and my Dad met while he was in the Army. My sister Judy and I were raised in our 1st street home."

Glenn attended the St Joseph elementary School on Spring St. where he graduated in June of 1974. His classmates included John Toscani, Joe Peraino and Andrew Simaluca. The Church Pastor was Father Hector Di Nardo. "I grew up in Lodi during some pretty drastic changes," recalls Glenn. "The town the way I knew it was giving way to progress. I was sad to see the old main street go but it had to be done."

One of the major changes that occurred happened by way of Fire and it marked the end of the fortress that was once the largest textile mill in the USA... The United Piece Dye Works. "Over 11 acres of property were destroyed." recalls Glenn. " Families on 1st street had to be evacuated since the fire was spreading in that direction."

Glenn entered Paramus Catholic High School from 1974 to 1978 and was one of only 4 students from St Jo's to enter a catholic High School. Most of his classmates stayed home and entered the hallowed halls of Lodi High. Glenn stayed connected to his Lodi roots by becoming an active member of the Boys and Girls Club where he became President of the Torch Club and the Key Stone Club from 1972 to 1974.

After high school, Glenn attended Bergen Community College where he received his Associated Degree. He received a Bachelors degree in Communications from William Paterson University in 1985.

" I had to work my way through college," says Glenn "That's why it took so long."

During that time Glenn coached a Basket Ball team for 7th and 8th grade boys called the Lodi Bullets. The program readied the players for high school competition and the team was soon reaching championship status under Ram Coach Tony Cameleo. Some

of those players were Jeff Dickenson, Pat Panegiota and Neil Sullivan.

In 1987 Glenn became employed by the Selective Insurance Co. in Rochelle Park, NJ. From 1982 to 1988 Glenn worked as a part-time sports writer for a community news paper, owned by Lodi Mayor Chris Pace, called "The Weekly News." "That was a great experience," says Glenn who remembers having breakfast with Mayor Paci at least once a week during his days with the paper.

In 1998 Glenn was hired by a brokerage firm by the name of Marsh and MC Lennan located on the 49th floor of Tower II at the World Trade Center in Manhattan. At the time the Firm was listed as one of the top three brokerage firms in the USA, employing sixty thousand workers worldwide 300 hundred of whom worked in the World Trade Center. "All the top brass worked in Tower One," says Glenn. "I was in Tower Two in the Customer Service Division."

Glenn's title was Client Adviser whose duties included on sight insurance counseling both at the U.N. Building on Tuesdays and at the Con Edison building on Wednesdays.

On Tuesday morning September 11, 2001 Glenn made his daily coffee stop at Cardy's on Union St. He then took the 7:30 A Train into Hoboken. He arrived at his destination at 8:10. "It was a picture perfect day" Glenn recalls "I could see the Towers in the distance. I arrived there at exactly 8:30 a.m." Glenn remembers having his head set on which was a daily ritual so he could listen to the morning news on his way into the city. He took the elevator to his office on the 49th floor and entered his office at approximately 8:37 and chatted on the phone with one of his customers. Glenn was one of a dozen or so people who got to work early that morning since starting time began at 9:00 a.m. sharp. At 8:46 am Glenn, while on the phone with his client heard the sound of an impact and felt the floor beneath his feet rattle. "I lost focus on the client," says Glenn. "I turned and looked out of a nearby window and noticed debris coming out of Tower One."

Glenn dropped the phone and ran over to the window and was horrified by what he saw. Floors 60 to 70 were completely gutted and a thick dense wall of smoke was bellowing from within the fiery darkness. He yelled out to his co-worker Frank that something bad was happening and that they should warn the others and leave the building/ They met in the lobby on the 49th floor and walked down a flight to floor 48. By then everyone was stampeding down the steps, panic stricken and out of control.

"They made an announcement to the affect that we were all safe and that there was no need to evacuate," recalls Glenn. "I wasn't buying it... I saw people leaping to their deaths... I knew we weren't at all safe." At first, Glenn thought that what he had experienced was an explosion of some kind, but in the chaos heard something about a plane crashing into Tower One... by then it was mass hysteria. On the 44th floor he noticed a handi-capped woman clutching on to her cane wide eyed and frightened beyond her wildest nightmare. Glenn ran to her side and offered his help. "Her name was Christal Putkowski," says Glenn. "She couldn't walk due to arthritic knees. It took us 10 minutes to get down one flight of steps."

The people behind Glenn and Christal were cursing at them and pushing them to the side as they stumbled down the stairs running frantically and desperately for their lives. "Leave me here!" the woman told Glenn. "Save yourself... I'll never make it!" Glenn would have no part of it and told her not to worry and that he was going to protect her from harm. When they reached the 42nd floor, they felt their tower shake furiously and from then on it was total pandemonium. At that point Glenn saw teams of policemen and firefighters running up the steps in full gear. Realizing that they were in grave danger he had no recourse but to look for a handi-cap elevator. Again she pleaded with Glenn to leave her behind and to save himself. "I helped her into the elevator and pressed the button for the lobby," says Russo "I was afraid that the doors would not open and that we were sure to perish."

Miraculously, the doors did open and for a moment Glenn and Christal breathed a deep sigh of relief... it was short lived! Once outside they were witness to utter destruction, thick and angry plumes of black smoke that swirled around the poor souls who were caught in a spiral of death. The smell of fuel was overpowering and littered street was groaning with the sounds of hell.

We heard the thuds of bodies hitting the ground and saw people on fire," recalls Glenn. "Three other ladies had followed us out of the elevator and I tried to shelter everyone from the debris that was crashing to earth."

Glenn then got everyone to their feet; the three women ran into the smoke filled chaos and were not seen again. Meanwhile, Glenn ran with Christal for one block... they fell and as Glenn looked up he saw Tower Two enveloped in flames. From there, Glenn guided Christal to the Staten Island Ferry where she climbed safely aboard. "I was temporarily blinded in one eye," says Glenn as he relived those terrible moments. "I went back to the World Trade Center and realized that they had both been hit with planes... then to my astonishment, I watched the Towers fall... first Tower Two...then Tower One... the sound will live with me for the rest of my life." Realizing that he was in harms way Glenn ran to Broadway where scores of other dazed people were seeking shelter from the onslaught.

It was then that Glenn put his headset back on and learned of the attack... he knew right then that his country was at war. Dazed and traumatized by this spectacle of death and destruction, Glenn sat down on a curb in Union Square and began to cry uncontrollably. The tears in fact cleansed his right eye and in doing so allowed Glenn to see what was going on around him." I saw people caring for one another," said Russo. "All around me people were coming to the aid of their fellow man."

At home, no one, including his young son Glenn, Jr, knew until 2:30 p.m. whether or not Glenn was still alive... He was stranded in NYC for two days and was lucky enough to find shelter at his sister Judy's home on East 84th Street.

"We lost 298 employees in Tower One," says Glenn as he tried to hold back his tears of sorrow. "In my Tower we all survived."

It took weeks before Glenn could get a peaceful night's sleep. He kept seeing those

dreadful images in his dreams causing him to awaken into an agonizing thrust of fear. All joy was removed from his being and his heart was heavy laden with grief. "Seeing my son again returned my joy," says Glenn. "All during that nightmare I thought of him and it's what got me through... seeing him made me happy again."

In Lodi, friends and neighbors gave Glenn a hero's welcome. His heroic deeds were celebrated at the Kiwanis Club in December of 01, Mayor Pappozzi on 9-11-02, The Boys and Girls Club in November of 02, received a plaque at a proclamation ceremony by the Lodi Fire Dept. and on 11-11-08 Glenn received an award at the Grand Re-opening of the Intrepid at which President Bush was the Guest Speaker.

"My faith in God and the power of prayer got me through. It helped me to value life to the fullest since I came ever so close to dying," says Glenn Russo. "The Borough of Lodi had heartfelt prayers and thoughts that were of a tremendous inspiration to me... It's a great place to come home to!"