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Sharing the Pain of 9/11 Loss, on a Stage

By [David W. Dunlap](#)



The troupe of “Performing Tribute,” presented by the Tribute W.T.C. Visitor Center, after performing for the first time on Monday. From left, Bridget Damiano, Donna Kaz, Gerry Bogacz, Katherine M. Richardson, Ann Van Hine, Gail Langsner and Paul McFadden. (Photo: David W. Dunlap/The New York Times)

“They found a piece of Joe’s elbow first.”

Bridget Damiano speaks the line without dramatic inflection. These are words that scarcely call for embroidery. But her voice is not without affect. Rather, she speaks with the plain, compelling voice of experience. She is, after all, describing a cousin who died at the World Trade Center.

Ms. Damiano and five other volunteer tour guides from the [Tribute W.T.C. Visitor Center](#) opposite ground zero told their stories to a *seated* audience on Monday night, in a

production titled “Performing Tribute.” (Limited seats are still available for a second presentation on Tuesday evening; details are below.)

Under the direction of Donna Kaz, the troupe takes turns describing the era before 9/11, then the day of the attacks and then the aftermath, through interwoven, personal narratives.

The point of “Performing Tribute” is to expose wider audiences to these stories. And to raise money for the center. The power of the accounts comes from their understated detail.

Gerry Bogacz, who was in the trade center that morning, described the building jumping back and forth more than three feet and recalled an almost tangible sense of panic forming on the fire stairs, spreading from one person to another before it abated.

Ms. Damiano talked of volunteering to work for the Salvation Army after 9/11 and being asked what she could do. Stumped for a moment, she said she suddenly realized: “I’m a wife. I’m a mother. I’m Italian. I can cook.” And so she did.

Gail Langsner, who was tending pet birds in her nearby home, remembered escaping with bird carriers hung on a yokelike broomstick over her shoulders — “like every picture of fleeing refugees you’ve ever seen” — and trying to brush pinhole-sized burns off her shirt from the shower of particulate debris.

Paul McFadden, formerly of the Fire Department’s Rescue 2 unit Brooklyn, spoke of his confidence when arriving on the scene that Chief Raymond M. Downey would already have the situation well in hand — until he ran into one of the chief’s sons, a firefighter, who told him, “My father’s under this rubble.”

Katherine M. Richardson, whose husband, Robert McPadden, was in Engine Company 23, said she knew when she learned that more than 300 firefighters had perished that Bob would not be coming home. She recalled telling the medical examiner’s office to stop notifying her every time one of his remains was found and she remarked on the phenomenon of receiving 10 death certificates.

Ann Van Hine, who was married to Firefighter Richard Bruce Van Hine of Squad 41, noticed something else about the death certificates. The cause was listed as, “Homicide.”

For this reporter, who has probably spent more time at ground zero in recent years than any of his colleagues, “Performing Tribute” was a quiet reminder that the construction going on now is more than redevelopment. It is recovery.

A second performance is scheduled for 7:30 p.m. on Tuesday in the TriBeCa Performing Arts Center at the Borough of Manhattan Community College, 199 Chambers Street. About 50 seats remain. They can be reserved by e-mail to jchiles@tributewtc.org.

