



EXECUTIVE PRODUCED BY ACADEMY AWARD® WINNERS  
DAN LINDSAY AND TJ MARTIN

# 9/11

ONE DAY IN AMERICA



NATIONAL  
GEOGRAPHIC

STREAM ON **hulu**

## DISCUSSION GUIDE



Series Directed By: Daniel Bogado  
Executive Producers: Dan Lindsay, T.J. Martin and David Glover  
Executive Producer for National Geographic: Carolyn Payne  
Series Producer: Caroline Marsden  
Edited by: Chris Nicholls, Audinga Kucinskaite, Dan Lavender and Sam Bergson  
Story Consultant: Joe Bini  
Music: David Schweitzer

Featuring: Jay Jonas - FDNY Captain Ladder Six, Kevin Leary - Production Chef for World Trade Center Marriott Hotel, firefighter John Morabito, Joseph Pfeifer - Chief of Battalion One, Frank Puma - FDNY Emergency Medical Technician, paramedic Chuck Sereika

**9/11: ONE DAY IN AMERICA** streaming on Hulu

Rating: TV-14

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## A NOTE FROM THE EXECUTIVE PRODUCERS

To create this docu-series, the filmmaking team sifted through 951 hours of archival footage – some never seen before – to make an immersive and emotionally charged seven-hour account of that fateful day 20 years ago. It offers a comprehensive and intimate look at how the tragic events of that day impacted so many lives - capturing the heroic acts of selflessness and bravery of strangers saving one another at all costs and revealing the triumph of the human spirit when tested beyond belief. Over the course of three years, filmmakers interviewed 54 people for a total of 235 hours to tell the comprehensive, chronological story of Sept. 11 – all in the first person.

Our hope with this series was to bring to the forefront the true human experience of 9/11 in a way that would honor both the victims and the survivors of the attacks that day – a series that forgoes the geopolitical implications and instead focuses on the experience of the people that were there.

With such deep access to footage and first-hand stories from those who bravely sat down with us to share their experiences, the series offers hope that through immense difficulty, we can rise above when we work together.

- Executive Producers Dan Lindsay, T.J. Martin and David Glover

## A NOTE FROM THE NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC TEAM

We all remember exactly where we were on Sept. 11, 2001. Amidst the tragedy, chaos and sadness, what we also remember are the incredible feats of heroism, selflessness and humanity on display that day. With this series, we aim to immortalize these stories and continue National Geographic's legacy of authentic, powerful storytelling that provides deeper meaning around important historical events.

Complementing the series, the September issue of National Geographic magazine, available online at [NatGeo.com](https://www.natgeo.com), includes a powerful photo essay showcasing rarely-seen, and in some cases, never-before-professionally documented **9/11 objects and relics from the tragic day**, including the public's first look at the Flight 93 recovered engine. In addition, season 7 of Nat Geo's **"Overheard" podcast** delves into 9/11 in episode 5.



We also want to take a moment to remember our fallen National Geographic colleagues Ann Judge and Joe Ferguson who were aboard American Airlines flight 77— the plane that was flown into the Pentagon on September 11, 2001.

[LEARN MORE ABOUT THEIR LEGACY.](#)

## HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE

Thank you for sharing **9/11: ONE DAY IN AMERICA** with your family and/or community. This guide has been designed to help you reflect on the documentary, and perhaps, most importantly, to help you guide other viewers through a range of thoughts, emotions and reactions that are all part of the viewing experience. It contains information about the film, essential themes, discussion questions to consider, as well as activities to deepen engagement.



*The world trade center is seen in the New York City skyline. (Library of Congress/Carol M. Highsmith)*

## SERIES OVERVIEW

**9/11: ONE DAY IN AMERICA** offers a comprehensive account of 9/11, using archival footage and new interviews with eyewitnesses who have had almost two decades to reflect on the events they lived through. Made in official collaboration with the 9/11 Memorial & Museum, the result is one of the most powerful, immersive and emotionally charged accounts ever produced about that fateful day.



*Image taken by NOAA's Cessna Citation Jet on Sept. 23, 2001 from an altitude of 3,300 feet using a Leica/LH systems RC30 camera. (Photo Credit: NOAA)*

Rating: TV-14

How to Watch: **9/11: ONE DAY IN AMERICA** will air over four consecutive nights on National Geographic beginning Aug. 29 at 9/8c. Episodes will be available next day on Hulu.

[WATCH THE TRAILER](#)

## EPISODE DESCRIPTIONS



*Jay Jonas, FDNY Captain Ladder Six, led his men through the stairs of the North Tower when the building collapsed on them. (National Geographic/Daniel Bogado)*

### | EPISODE 1: FIRST RESPONSE |

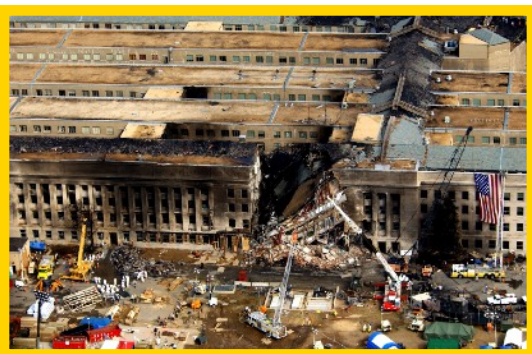
As a hijacked plane hits the north tower, we follow the first firefighters on the scene and their race against time to rescue the civilians trapped above and witness a businessman trying to save the life of a badly injured stranger. As a second plane hits the south tower, no doubt remains: America is under attack.



*Firefighter Mickey Kross became trapped in the collapse of the North Tower in the miracle staircase. He is one of the few people to have survived that collapse. (National Geographic/Brandon Widener)*

### | EPISODE 2: THE SOUTH TOWER |

As an announcement tells people to remain where they are, those in the south tower watch with shock as the north tower is hit by a hijacked plane. When the second plane hits, civilians in the south tower have to find a way to escape from the top floors to safety. Paramedics at street level face an onslaught of both the badly injured and casualties. They race against time to save lives.



*THE PENTAGON, ARLINGTON, VIRGINIA, USA: FBI agents, fire fighters, rescue workers and engineers work at the Pentagon crash site on Sept. 14, 2001, where a high-jacked American Airlines flight slammed into the building on Sept. 11. (Photo Credit: Department of Defense/ Tech. Sgt. Cedric H. Rudisill)*

### | EPISODE 3: COLLAPSE |

After two planes hit the World Trade Center, a day of terror continues to unfold. Flight 77 crashes into the Pentagon, while Flight 93 is hijacked and diverted toward Washington D.C. We follow the heroic stories of military personnel in D.C. and the United 93 passengers as they desperately struggle to save lives. Back in New York, the south tower collapses, unleashing a new wave of casualties.





An aerial view of Ground Zero burning after the September 11 terrorist attacks. (Photo Credit: NIST)

## | EPISODE 4: THE CLOUD |

Survivors become separated when they are engulfed by a gigantic dust cloud after the fall of the south tower. We follow them as they wrestle with the trauma of their experiences and desperately search for missing loved ones. When the dust settles after the collapse of the north tower, we witness emotional reunions and heart-breaking losses.



In September 2001, 42-year-old Daphne Carlisle had been working for the Port Authority as an Administrative Assistant for 7 months. She worked on the 82nd floor of the North Tower and loved her new job, but was frightened by the distance to the ground when she looked out her office window. When the first plane hit, she saw the shadow of the plane's wing as it approached the floors above her. (National Geographic/Daniel Bogado)

## | EPISODE 5: I'M COMING FOR YOU , BROTHER |

First responders look at the vast pile of debris at Ground Zero and wonder how anyone could still be alive. But one group of firefighters who were inside the north tower as it collapsed managed to survive miraculously. Now they are trapped, and as they radio "mayday" for help, other firefighters must race against time to locate and rescue their "brothers" in a dangerous and unstable ocean of rubble.



Wreckage from World Trade Center at Ground Zero on September 11, 2001. (Photo Credit: FEMA)

## | EPISODE 6: IT'S ALL GONE, KID |

In the aftermath of the towers collapsing, two former Marines and an ex-paramedic head to Ground Zero to search for survivors. Together they stumble upon two Port Authority police officers trapped 50-feet beneath the rubble. Putting their own lives on the line and against all odds, the volunteers manage to pull off one of the most daring and inspiring rescue stories of the day.

## KEY FACTS

- On September 11, 2001, 19 terrorists hijacked four commercial airplanes scheduled to fly from the East Coast to California.
- At 8:46am ET the north tower of the World Trade Center was hit by a plane. 17 minutes later, a second plane flew into the south tower.
- About half an hour later, hijackers crashed a third plane into the west side of the Pentagon in Arlington, Virginia.
- The U.S. government grounded all airplanes flying over the country, but it was too late for United Airlines Flight 93.
- The 9/11 Commission determined that the United States Capitol was the likely intended target of United Airlines Flight 93. The plane was brought down short of its target after the hijackers were overpowered by a group of passengers, which included four men: Tom Burnett, Todd Beamer, Mark Bingham, and Jeremy Glick. Todd Beamer's last words were heard by a telephone operator shortly before the call was disconnected: "Are you ready? Okay. Let's roll."
- 2,977 people were killed on 9/11. This was the single largest loss of life resulting from a foreign attack on American soil. The attacks caused the deaths of 441 first responders, the greatest loss of emergency responders on a single day in American history. Only 18 people were rescued from the rubble.
- In 2014, the National September 11th Memorial & Museum was opened in honor of their memory.

## CONNECTING THE THEMES

While each survivor had a unique experience and recollection of 9/11, their collective stories share a few common themes. Throughout the documentary series, we hear of strangers helping each other, and everyday people finding the courage to act despite their fears. Many of the survivors shed a light on the importance of seeking mental health services to cope with the tragedy, and through that coping we learn how many turned their grief into love and hope.



*Frank Puma, FDNY Emergency Medical Technician, was stationed at the base of the towers when the first plane hit. (National Geographic/Daniel Bogado)*

## Strangers Helping Strangers

Almost every story told throughout the documentary includes an anecdote about strangers helping one another. Kathy Comerford shared that she witnessed two men carry an older gentleman who had artificial legs and couldn't continue down the stairs. Kathy herself shared her inhaler with a woman she encountered on the stairwell who was having an asthma attack. Brian Clark heard Stanley Praitnath, a complete stranger at the time, calling out for help and risked his life to save him. Bill Toti stayed with Antoinette until they were able to find her help. These courageous and kind people serve as an inspiration for how to respond during challenging moments. It's important to remember that during tumultuous times, we must come together and see the humanity of one another.



*Kathy Comerford, head of events for Morgan Stanley, was attending a meeting on the 70th floor of the South Tower when the first plane hit. (National Geographic/Daniel Bogado)*

## Everyday People Finding The Courage To Act

There were many heroes present on 9/11, but these heroic figures are still everyday people who had to fight through their own fears in order to act. As journalist N.J. Burkett remembered the battalion of fire fighters lined up below the towers, he said, “they looked like soldiers who were gonna go into a battle. But you look at their faces. And they looked frightened. They looked scared to me.”

Chuck Sereika, a former paramedic, and Jason Thomas, a former Marine were both retired from their respective fields but still found the courage needed to act. “I felt compelled. I felt that it was my duty to respond. I had all this training,” Thomas said. “I remember just running to my car, grabbing my uniform out, and then heading straight to the crash site.” Sereika had a similar impulse. “I guess every reason I ever became a paramedic kicked in,” he said. Despite their past professions, these two men were ordinary citizens, with no real obligation to serve, and yet they risked their lives and jumped into action.

Tom Burnett, Todd Beamer, Mark Bingham, and Jeremy Glick – the four men who overpowered the hijackers on Flight 93 – didn’t have any formal training in security, but they rose to the occasion to do what they needed to do in order to protect themselves and their fellow passengers. Even though they were not able to save their own lives, their courage saved countless lives on the ground.

These brave Americans prove that everyone is capable of heroic actions, even if they must act while frightened.



*Marine Jason Thomas felt duty-bound to head to Ground Zero to help when he heard about the attacks. He was searching the rubble when he located Port Authority officer Will Jimeno and helped rescue him. (National Geographic/Stefan Wiesan)*

## Mental Health Awareness

Throughout the documentary, we hear how survivors used therapy to help cope with the post traumatic stress that comes from witnessing such a monumental tragedy.

After recounting his experience serving as an EMS on 9/11, Ernest Amstead shared how the traumatic memory stayed with me. “It took me three years to push it back or from this cortex part of my brain to the frontal part of my brain, the memory. Or put it somewhere with the psychiatrist and the clinician to help me move her around so that she's not in the mind's eye in the daytime or in the nighttime. Or at any time. The human body or the human mind is not positioned, or the brain can never be positioned to deal with tragedy of another human being”



*Ernest Armstead, FDNY emergency medical specialist, treated people at the base of the towers. (National Geographic/Daniel Bogado)*

Therapy helped Armstead, but memories of such a traumatic event are impossible to completely erase. As Tom Canavan explained, “It's hard sometimes to just go through everyday life without thinking about that day. And I know a lotta people go, ‘Well, you're alive. Get over it.’ There is no getting over it. There's dealing with it and moving on with your life, but it's always gonna be there.”

While the 9/11 survivors and people who endure trauma and tragedy may have to live with difficult memories, mental health services like individual therapy and support groups can make coping with a new reality more manageable.

## Turning Grief into Hope

The last episode of the series illustrates the power of turning grief into hope. When reflecting on his brother's funeral, Battalion Chief Joseph Pfeifer said, "I could remember moving from an intense sadness to thinking about the times we sailed. And the sadness disappeared into wonderful memories."

The 9/11 Memorial and Museum aims to help families like Pfeifer's remember and honor their loved ones by sharing stories of loss, recovery, and hope. Tom Canavan, who now works at the Memorial Museum, perfectly described the site's mission: "Part of our job here is to show you this is how these people lived. They were just everyday people; they got up, they went to work; feed their kids, put clothes on their back, get 'em through school, make their life good. Your memory shouldn't be your name on a wall somewhere. That's not you. You are the person in that photo album. You are the smiling person, living your life. That's how you want people to remember you."



*Joseph Pfeifer, Chief of Battalion One, was the first chief to arrive at the scene of the attack and set up the command post in the lobby. (National Geographic/Daniel Bogado)*

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Which moments and stories in the film stood out to you most? Why?
2. What are your biggest takeaways from this documentary series?
3. In episode 3, Tom Canavan describes how he willed himself to get out of the hole and reach safety. He said, "At any point, it would have been easier to just sit down and that would have been the end of me. But then I just kept thinking I can't just lay here waiting. Don't, don't give up. Just, I don't know if everybody has that don't give up. Most of the New Yorkers I know, they don't give up. They don't. You can knock 'em down, they get up again." What do you think creates grit and resilience?
4. Former marine Jason Thomas said, "My mother raised me to respond when you see someone in need. She would always tell us, 'You are your brother's keeper. Never leave your brother behind.'" What are some values, skills, and/or former training you think would naturally kick in if you were in a crisis?
5. What are some ways you've survived grief? How did you cope? What resources were available to you?
6. If you were alive during September 11, 2001, what do you remember about that day? Did this film bring back any specific memories or emotions from that time?
7. If you or your family lived in NYC during 9/11 and the months after, what did it feel like being a New Yorker during that time? How does the city feel the same or different in 2021?
8. How did New Yorkers honor 9/11 first responders? Where in the city can we still see tributes to those brave men and women lost on that tragic day?
9. What are some ways we can continue to honor the lives lost in the 9/11 attacks?
10. Do you have any outstanding questions about the events that occurred on 9/11? Are there any specific questions you'd like to ask any of the survivors featured in the documentary?



## ACTIVITIES

### **Interview a loved one about their memory of 9/11.**

Everyone remembers where they were on 9/11. As we approach the 20th anniversary of this tragic day, it's important to reflect on what it meant to us as individuals and as a country. Interview a loved one about what they experienced on September 11, 2001. Where were they and how did they find out about the attacks? Who did they turn to for support and information? What were the dominant emotions they felt that day?

### **Write a letter to honor and thank heroes in your own community.**

What is a hero, and how can you show gratitude to those who act heroically? In this activity, inspired by "Dear Hero" letters written by children in response to 9/11, we invite you to write a letter or create artwork to honor and thank those in your own community who have stepped forward to help people affected by COVID-19. Learn more [here](#).

### **Explore the 9/11 Museum & Memorial.**

The 9/11 Memorial Museum invites visitors to learn about the history of the 9/11 attacks and 1993 World Trade Center bombing at the site where the Twin Towers once stood. The Museum's dynamic blend of architecture, archaeology, and history creates an unforgettable encounter with the story of the attacks, their aftermath, and the people who experienced these events. They currently offer online programs for [students and teachers](#) and [youth and families](#), as well as [online resources](#) which offer content and strategies for learning about the attacks and their aftermath. Plus, you can now take in panoramic views of the rebuilt World Trade Center in a live, interactive virtual tour of the 9/11 Memorial led by Museum staff using Zoom.

## Speak with children in your life about 9/11.

It may seem intimidating to broach such an intense topic with children, but there are plenty of resources available to help educate young people about the world changing event of 9/11. In addition to the resources on the 9/11 Museum & Memorial website, we recommend **National Geographic Kids' September 11 reader**. With compelling photographs and sensitive, age-appropriate text, this Level 3 reader recounts the shocking attacks at the World Trade Center, the Pentagon, and in Pennsylvania, explains who was behind the attacks, and celebrates the spirit of hope that emerged through the inspiring story of rescue and recovery and the heroes who raced to save lives.

Visit **neverforget.org** for more resources and ways to give back.



## TAKE ACTION

### Support the FDNY Foundation

The FDNY Foundation, established in 1981 is the official not-for-profit of the New York City Fire Department (FDNY). Their mission is to promote fire and life safety education and help the FDNY better protect New York. The FDNY Foundation funds programs that advance the FDNY's goals, which include maintaining operational excellence, reaching out to the community with an array of fire and life safety programs, and ensuring that our firefighters and EMS personnel have the best available training and equipment. They also played an integral role in ensuring that 9/11 first responders and their families were taken care of after the horrific tragedy. If you are able, please consider **donating to the FDNY Foundation**.

### Below is a list of resources to help you or a loved one access mental health services and crisis support.

- National Suicide Prevention LifeLine: 1-800-273-8255
- Crisis Text Line: Text HOME to 741-741
- Trevor LifeLine for LGBTQIA+ Youth: 1-866-488-7386
- Steve Fund Crisis line for BIPOC Youth: Text STEVE to 741-741
- Trans LifeLine: 1-877-565-8860
- Distress Text Option for folks who are hard of hearing or deaf: To connect to an agent in American Sign Language, call 1-800-985-5990 from your videophone.
- Para las personas que hablan español: llama o envía un mensaje de texto 1-800-985-5990 presiona "2"