



‘If Not You, Who?’

After losing their oldest son on 9/11, Mary Fetchet P’00 and her husband, Frank P’00, became unlikely advocates for victims’ families and survivors, as well as the driving force behind the Voices Center for Resilience.

BY GEORGE SPENCER ’76 • PHOTOGRAPHY BY DONNELLY MARKS

Right television camera lights hit the face of **Mary Fetchet P’00**. On March 31, 2003, she testified before the National Commission on Terrorist Attacks – better known as the 9/11 Commission – on its first day of hearings in New York City’s Custom House, a few blocks south of the open wound where the Twin Towers stood and fell. Mary had never testified in public before, and never before had she prepared a written statement.

Nearly twenty years later she would look back and say, “I’m a little mother from New Canaan. I knew nothing about intelligence reform, but I learned. Today I know a lot more than some of the people making policy decisions, which is frightening. That frightened me.”

Her son Brad, 24, the brother of **Wesley Fetchet ’00**, was working as an equities trader for the financial firm Keefe, Bruyette & Woods on the 89th floor of the South Tower (Building Two) of the World Trade Center on the morning of September 11, 2001, when al-Qaeda terrorists hijacked four commercial airliners. At 8:46 a.m. an American Airlines 767 struck the North Tower. Seventeen minutes later a United Airlines 767 rammed Brad’s building between floors 77 and 85. He was unable to escape.

In the early days after 9/11, Mary, a clinical social worker, trekked into Manhattan from her New Canaan, Connecticut, home. She was shocked by the challenges thousands of

families faced getting information and support.

“As much as our nation was unprepared to prevent 9/11, we were equally unprepared to respond to a tragedy of this magnitude,” she says.

Within weeks, she and her husband, **Frank Fetchet P’00**, an IBM executive, took action. They founded Voices Center for Resilience (formerly known as Voices of September 11th), a nonprofit to help survivors’ families. For the last twenty years, it has provided more than 180,000 hours of social-service support for victims’ families – and first responders and their families – through personal counseling, workshops, webinars, trainings, and annual symposia. They also share their expertise with communities impacted by other mass casualty tragedies in the United States and abroad.

Mary soon joined eleven other families to form a family steering committee that championed the establishment of the 9/11 Commission. It led to sweeping intelligence-agency reforms, and Mary was “infuriated” to find resistance to creating the inquiry board.

“The more information we found, the more it was apparent to me and the families that systemic government failures contributed to the attacks on 9/11. I was shocked, horrified, that there was so much complacency,” she says.

On that day in the Customs House in her calm – some might say matter-of-fact – voice, she testified for nearly fifteen minutes in terse, stern tones.

Always in Our Hearts

LAWRENCEVILLE REMEMBERS THOSE MEMBERS OF OUR SCHOOL COMMUNITY WHO WERE LOST ON SEPTEMBER 11, 2001

This “little mother” dressed down the Commission’s members, eleven of the nation’s most powerful men and women whose number included its chair, former New Jersey Gov. Thomas Kean, and former members of Congress. Chastising them for the intelligence failures that led to 9/11, the communications debacles that day, and the needless loss of 2,766 lives, Mary told them: “No one in Building Two should be dead today ... September 11 should have been predictable. The loss of life in the 1993 [World Trade Center] bombing and the continued threats, specifically on the World Trade Center and other New York City landmarks, should have been the wake-up call.

“How could this happen, and who is accountable?” she asked the panel. “Our elected officials with oversight have neglected to implement prior commissions’ important recommendations to improve airline and national security.... It is now 18 months later. We are at war with heightened alert, yet the Commission has had a slow start.”

During her testimony, Mary took out a framed 8 x 10 black-and-white photograph of Brad, a headshot in which he grins ear to ear. Setting it next to her, she said, “I would like to share with you a picture which I took...” Overcome, she touched a finger to her lips. Pausing, she forced herself not to cry. A grimace of sorrow flashed on her face, and she continued, saying “... from his 15-year-old brother’s bedroom. Brad was an understated, athletic, handsome young man, as you can see from the picture, with a sparkle in his eyes and a wonderful smile.”

Her moment of weakness over and with people behind her weeping, she again looked into the eyes of the commissioners. “It is incomprehensible that the devastation was so great that our families are being notified of minute body parts, such as a finger, a jaw, or a vertebra,” she said, “or worse, nothing at all.”

She told them about Brad’s journal and that its front page showcases a line she says “best describes how he lived his life.” This quote from the German poet Goethe reads:

■ Arthur T. Barry

A New York City firefighter with Ladder Company 15, Arthur was the uncle of Matthew Poss ’07 and Laura Poss ’12.

■ Swede K. Chevalier

A landscaper as well as an equities trader, Swede was the brother of Tylia Chevalier ’00.

■ Catherine Chirls P’03

Catherine was the mother of Nick Chirls ’03.

■ Keith E. Coleman ’86

A wrestler who lived in Kinnan House, Keith was married to Elodie Coleman, father to Vaughn and Neva, and brother to Scott Coleman ’89.

■ Scott Coleman ’89

A three-sport varsity athlete and an accomplished cellist, Scott was the brother of Keith Coleman ’86.

■ Jonathan Connors P’02

Jonathan Connors was married to Susan Connors P’02 and the father of Jonathan Connors and James Connors ’02.

■ Bradley J. Fetchet

Bradley was a skilled athlete who came often to Lawrenceville to watch his brother, Wesley Fetchet ’00, play lacrosse.

■ Karen Hagerty

Karen, who organized Christmas presents each year for a homeless shelter in the Bronx, was the stepdaughter of J. Linzee Whittaker ’61 and sister to James Hagerty ’93.

■ Charles W. Mathers P’98

A Navy veteran and volunteer firefighter in Sea Girt, N.J., Charles was the father of Charles H. Mathers ’98.

■ Charles A. McCrann ’64

An honors student at Lawrenceville, Charles was married to Michele McCrann, had two children, and boasted a six handicap on the golf course.

■ Christopher Newton-Carter

Christopher was the uncle of Katya Danko ’09 and André Danko ’12, and the brother-in-law of Keith Danko ’77.

■ Michael San Phillip ’63

Michael was a starter for Ed Megna’s state champion basketball team and for Jack Reydel’s “single wing” football squad. Married to Lynne San Phillip for 35 years, he had two daughters and a grandson.

■ Richard H. Stewart Jr. ’85

President of Cleve House and captain of the ice hockey team, Richard spent each Friday night serving supper at a homeless shelter after his workday at Cantor Fitzgerald.



Twenty years after 9/11, the Fetchets' Voices Center for Resilience staff now includes college interns too young to have firsthand memories of those tragic events, but whose introduction to their full context moved several to change their majors to social work.

"You can tell the character of a man by what he does for the man who can offer him nothing."

"I challenge you," she concluded, "to approach this important inquiry with the same manner that Brad approached life – with an open mind and integrity."

Mary says her life has two chapters – before 9/11 and after 9/11. Three years before that date, she heard a speech on the long-term needs of communities ravaged by mass violence. The speaker

was another mother; her daughter had died in the 1995 Oklahoma City bombing. Mary found it memorable, but it made no profound impression.

"I found out the hard way I was naïve," she recalls.

At a 10th anniversary event, Mary asked U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, who was a senator from New York on 9/11, "How did I end up in this position?"

"If not you, who?" Clinton replied.

"I've felt a moral obligation and a responsibility," Mary says. "You can look the other way. We all make those choices." She admires Mother Teresa, who makes her

think about the challenges of being a public person.

"I realized that it's not about you, it's about it. We're all here with an opportunity to have things work through us, as she did."

Mary traveled to Washington hundreds of times to lobby for the Commission's creation and later for passage of an intelligence reform bill. Although she and other family members made faux pas like taking elevators and trams reserved for members of Congress, "We learned quickly we had the moral authority," she says. "We refused to take 'No' for an answer."

“The more you take the role of rescuer, the less able you are to take the role of victim. Helping gives you power over events that leave you feeling powerless.”

The Center worked with New York City's medical examiner to streamline the notification process, because untrained police officers were showing up on families' doorsteps and causing further trauma. Today more than 1,100 families continue to wait to be notified that the remains of their loved ones have been identified. The Fetchets have been contacted five times.

Mary served on the advisory board that helped create the 9/11 Memorial & Museum. "We wanted the survivors' staircase – the stairs where many survivors escaped – to be incorporated," she says. "We wanted the names of those who died to be etched in stone, so the families would be able to touch them. We wanted a platform where you could proceed down to the footprints of the building. We wanted people to be able to stand on bedrock, and we wanted the footprints of the buildings to be preserved, because that was what was left of where the buildings once stood. We wanted the remains to be in a repository between the two towers."

The Center later worked with the families of 1,600 victims for five years to create one of the museum's core components – the Voices 9/11 Living Memorial Project. This online archive, which includes the six people and an unborn child who died in the 1993 World Trade Center bombing, contains over 87,000 photographs of those who died and mementos documenting their lives.

While compiling this digital archive, the Fetchets consulted with James H. Billington, Ph.D., the 13th Librarian of Congress. "He put his hand to his head and said, 'You don't understand. You're cutting-edge. There are no standards for doing what you're doing,'" Mary recalls. "Can you imagine what we would have if a mother impacted by the Civil War had taken on a project like this?"

Not grasping the enormity of what Billington was telling her, Mary says, "I sort of shrugged my shoulders and thought: *What is he talking about? We're going to meet with families. We're going to scan photographs. We just want the archive to be searchable.*"

The Center is now creating a similar online memorial for the survivor and responder communities. Their numbers are far greater than those who died on 9/11. More than 90,000 people responded, and 400,000 people lived, worked, or attended school in the area. Eighty-three thousand people are being treated for physical or mental illnesses as a consequence of exposure to toxicants on 9/11 and its aftermath, according to the Center.

Mary is disappointed the federal government fails to invest in organizations that focus on trauma survivors' long-term needs.

"If somebody calls us today, we know what they've gone through the last twenty years. We have long-term relationships with the museum, the medical examiner, subject matter experts, and the World Trade Center Health Program, so we can connect them with resources and, most important, connect them with one another," she says.

"We shepherd people in a fairly intimate way as they come forward," says Frank, who retired from IBM in 2006 to become the Center's vice president of strategy and operations. "We build trusting relationships. We are one of them. We are part of them."

Resilience, Frank says, is essential to surviving trauma. "One key message is that life is going to challenge us. We all try to control what we can control, and the surprises come. You decide how you take those on. People who are very committed to change can get engaged and make a difference," he says.

"The Fetchets took the best strategy,"

says Laurence Gonzales, the author of *Deep Survival* and two other books on overcoming crises. "The standard strategy recommended by psychiatrists who specialize in trauma is 'work, work, work.' Find someone worse off than you, and help that person through the bad times. The more you take the role of rescuer, the less able you are to take the role of victim. Helping gives you power over events that leave you feeling powerless."

Brad would be 44 years old today if 9/11 had not happened. He attended Bucknell University, as did his younger brothers Wes and Chris. Like him, they majored in economics and played lacrosse. Brad often came to Lawrenceville to watch Wes play lacrosse and cheer for his team.

After the first tower was hit, the Port Authority told Brad's company that its employees should stay in place because their building was "safe and secure." Brad, believing that only a small plane had hit the North Tower, called his father to reassure him and left his mother this message:

"Hey, Mom, it's Brad. I just wanted to call and let you know – I'm sure that you've heard or maybe you haven't heard – that a plane crashed into World Trade Center One. We're fine. We're in World Trade Center Two. I'm obviously alive and well over here, but it's obviously a pretty scary experience. I saw a guy fall – out of probably the 91st story – all the way down. So, you're welcome to give a call here. I think we'll be here all day. I'm not sure if the firm is going to shut down for the day or what. Give me a call back later. I called Dad to let him know. Love you."



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