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EAVESDROPPING IN AMERICA

Poems in Progress
by Natasha Bernstein

1.
After September 11th
at McDonald's in Connecticut
beautiful Caucasian women
still talk about shopping

2.
After September 11th
at McDonald's in Connecticut
beautiful Caucasian women
in designer jeans
wear little enamel stars and bars
on their turtlenecks.

After they leave
a minimum wage worker
with dark skin
and a long white braid
busses their American trash
wipes their American masonite
sweeps their American floor.
NEW YORK IS A BEAUTIFUL CITY OF PEOPLE WHO COME FROM ALL OVER THE WORLD.

TODAY THE PEOPLE OF NEW YORK HAVE SOMETHING IN COMMON WITH THE PEOPLE OF IRAQ, VIETNAM AND OTHER COUNTRIES WHO HAVE LOST LOVED ONES TO AMERICAN BOMBS.

SOMEONE WANTED REVENGE ON THE UNITED STATES AND THEY GOT IT.

NOW IT IS AMERICANS WHO WANT REVENGE.

OR

WE CAN HAVE OUR REVENGE. THERE CAN BE LOTS AND LOTS OF REVENGE.

WE CAN LEARN FROM EACH OTHER HOW TO FORGIVE, AND GROW.
"First Writing Since" by Suheir Hammad

September 25, 2001
Suheir is the author of "Born Palestinian, Born Black" and other books.

*****************

1. there have been no words.
i have not written one word.
no poetry in the ashes south of canal street.
no prose in the refrigerated trucks driving debris and dna.
not one word.
today is a week, and seven is of heavens, gods, science.
evident out my kitchen window is an abstract reality.
sky where once was steel.
smoke where once was flesh.

fire in the city air and i feared for my sister's life in a way never
before. and then, and now, i fear for the rest of us.

first, please god, let it be a mistake, the pilot's heart failed, the
plane's engine died.
then please god, let it be a nightmare, wake me now.
please god, after the second plane, please, don't let it be anyone
who looks like my brothers.

i do not know how bad a life has to break in order to kill.
i have never been so hungry that i willed hunger
i have never been so angry as to want to control a gun over a pen.
not really.
even as a woman, as a palestinian, as a broken human being.
ever this broken.

more than ever, i believe there is no difference.
the most privileged nation, most americans do not know the difference
between indians, afghanis, syrians, muslims, sikhs, hindus.
more than ever, there is no difference.

2. thank you korea for kimchi and bibim bob, and corn tea and the
genteel smiles of the wait staff at wonjo the smiles never revealing
the heat of the food or how tired they must be working long midtown
shifts. thank you korea, for the belly craving that brought me into
the city late the night before and diverted my daily train ride into
the world trade center.

there are plenty of thank yous in ny right now. thank you for my
lazy procrastinating late ass. thank you to the germs that had me
call in sick. thank you, my attitude, you had me fired the week
before. thank you for the train that never came, the rude nyer who
stole my cab going downtown. thank you for the sense my mama gave me
to run. thank you for my legs, my eyes, my life.

3. the dead are called lost and their families hold up shaky
printouts in front of us through screens smoked up.

continued on page 6
BIGGEST HAUNTED HOUSE

ALL YOUR FAVORITE HORROR FILMS LIVE

URBAN LEGENDS FINAL CUT

LEGENDS NEVER DIE.

All proceeds go to H.O.M.E Co-op to make houses and feed.

Bless you!!!!

HALLOWEEN: THE HOME COMING Horror
With rumors that the infamous Michael Myers is still alive, a group of teenagers stages a fireball ritual at the Haddonfield house on Halloween night. Stars: Jamie Lee Curtis, Tyra Banks, Busta Rhymes.

JEOPARDS CREEPER (R) Horror
A brother and sister, on their way home from college, make a horrific discovery in the basement of an old abandoned church, unleashing an indestructible force that relentlessly pursues them.

PSYCHO

LEATHER FACE
FRIDAY The 13th

MIKE MYERS

CHUCKY & TIFFANY

OVER 200 CHARACTERS ON DISPLAY

THE EXORCIST HA HA

THE SHINNING

HANNIBAL LECTURE BREW FOODS

ART...
BE ENTHUSEASTIC
PLEASE JOIN IN TO BE A PART OF OARLAND MAINE'S FIRST EVER HALLOWEEN SPECTACULAR CELEBRATION
I SAY START AN ANNUAL TRADITION OF FINE. LETS PUT HOME ON THE MAP.
I'M GOING TO HELP.
I SAY MY FRIENDS OF HOME HAVE GREAT IDEAS.
DONT LET YOUR CHILD OR CHILD WITHIN MISS OUT....
FIRST EVER HALLOWEEN SPECTACULAR CELEBRATION
IT'S YOUR TIME TO SHINE.
DONT LET THE BURN OUT.
VOLUNTEER A WHOLE LOT OF LOVE IS PUT INTO MAKING THINGS A STRIDES OF HOME CO-OP FEST.
OCTOBER
we are looking for iris, mother of three. please call with any
information. we are searching for priti, last seen on the 103rd
floor. she was talking to her husband on the phone and the line
went. please help us find george, also known as a! del. his family
is waiting for him with his favorite meal. i am looking for my son, who
was delivering coffee. i am looking for my sister girl, she started
her job on monday.

i am looking for peace. i am looking for mercy. i am looking for
evidence of compassion. any evidence of life. i am looking for
life.

4. ricardo on the radio said in his accent thick as yuca, "i will
feel so much better when the first bombs drop over there. and my
friends feel the same way."

on my block, a woman was crying in a car parked and stranded in hurt.
i offered comfort, extended a hand she did not see before she said,
"we"re gonna burn them so bad, i swear, so bad." my hand went to my
head and my head went to the numbers within it of the dead iraqi
children, the dead in nicaragua. the dead in rwanda who had to vie
with fake sport wrestling for america's attention.

yet when people sent emails saying, this was bound to happen, lets
not forget u.s. transgressions, for half a second i felt
resentful.
hold up with that, cause i live here, these are my friends and fam,
and it could have been me in those buildings, and we"re not bad
people, do not support america's bullying. can i just have a half
second to feel bad?

if i can find through this exhaust people who were left behind to
mourn and to resist mass murder, i might be alright.

thank you to tbe woman who saw me brinking my cool and blinking back
tears. she opened her arms before she asked "do you want a hug?" a
big white woman, and her embrace was the kind only people with the
warmth of flesh can offer. i wasn't about to say no to any comfort.
"my brother's in the navy," i said. "and we"re arabs". "wow, you
got double trouble." word.

5. one more person ask me if i knew the hijackers.
one more motherfucker ask me what navy my brother is in.
one more person assume no arabs or muslims were killed.one more person
assume they know me, or that i represent a people.
or that a people represent an evil. or that evil is as simple as a
flag and words on a page.

we did not vilify all white men when mcveigh bombed oklahoma.
amERICA did not give out his family's addresses or where he went to
church. or blame the bible or pat robertson.

and when the networks air footage of palestinians dancing in the
street, there is no apology that hungry children are bribed with
sweets that turn their teeth brown. that correspondents edit images.
that archives are there to facilitate lazy and inaccurate
journalism.

and when we talk about holy books and hooded men and death, why do we
never mention the kkk?

if there are any people on earth who understand how new york is
feeling right now, they are in the west bank and the gaza strip.
6. today it is ten days. last night bush waged war on a man once openly funded by the cia. i do not know who is responsible. read too many books, know too many people to believe what i am told. i don't give a fuck about bin laden. his vision of the world does not include me or those i love. and petitions have been going around for years trying to get the u.s. sponsored taliban out of power. shit is complicated, and i don't know what to think.

but i know for sure who will pay.

in the world, it will be women, mostly colored and poor. women will have to bury children, and support themselves through grief. "either you are with us, or with the terrorists" - meaning keep your people under control and your resistance censored. meaning we got the loot and the nukes.

in america, it will be those amongst us who refuse blanket attacks on the shivering. those of us who work toward social justice, in support of civil liberties, in opposition to hateful foreign policies.

i have never felt less american and more new yorker, particularly brooklyn, than these past days. the stars and stripes on all these cars and apartment windows represent the dead as citizens first, not family members, not lovers.

i feel like my skin is real thin, and that my eyes are only going to get darker. the future holds little light.

my baby brother is a man now, and on alert, and praying five times a day that the orders he will take in a few days time are righteous and will not weigh his soul down from the afterlife he deserves.

both my brothers - my heart stops when i try to pray - not a beat to disturb my fear. one a rock god, the other a sergeant, and both palestinian, practicing muslim, gentle men. both born in brooklyn and their faces are of the archetypal arab man, all eyelashes and nose and beautiful color and stubborn hair.

what will their lives be like now?

over there is over here.

7. all day, across the river, the smell of burning rubber and limbs floats through. the sirens have stopped now. the advertisers are back on the air. the rescue workers are traumatized. the skyline is brought back to human size. no longer taunting the gods with its height.

i have not cried at all while writing this. i cried when i saw those buildings collapse on themselves like a broken heart. i have never owned pain that needs to spread like that. and i cry daily that my brothers return to our mother safe and whole.

there is no poetry in this. there are causes and effects. there are symbols and ideologies. mad conspiracy here, and information we will never know. there is death here, and there are promises of more.

there is life here. anyone reading this is breathing, maybe hurting, but breathing for sure. and if there is any light to come, it will shine from the eyes of those who look for peace and justice after the rubble and rhetoric are cleared and the phoenix has risen.

affirm life.
affirm life.
we got to carry each other now.
you are either with life, or against it.
affirm life.
Famous important men of history
Archimedes, Plato, Aristotle
Hitler, Stalin, Tojo
Elvis & Joe DiMaggio

Osama bin Laden
is a piker compared to any of the above

Goering and the Luftwaffe
Himmler
Rommel & Gudren
Patton
them too

The siege of Leningrad however was all I wanted.

Winter ice and snow
starving every day
no fuel for heat except
dead bodies.

A little bit of cooking grease
was all that was saved

by Jesus and the clergy.

#1
he wrote poems in second grade
became an accountant to earn his living

#2
docile factory workers needed
followers only no imagination

#3
in the good old USA
families ate chemicals for dinner
plastic forks speared the buffalo heart

#4
dead indians officiated at the bacon awards on TV

#5

#6
some of them escaped from the planet beforehand leaped forward in time
some of them Japanese Kamikaze pilots reincarnated all made of succulent bacon

#7

GIVE US OUR DREAM

Earth With you we can do it.

Green We intend to try.

PEACE TO THE WORLD AND PLENTY TO THE POOR.

BERNSTEIN & HOLTZ, eds.
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