

A 9/11 Widow: Disgust, Dismay



MONICA GABRIELLE, whose husband died in the World Trade Center on 9/11, says the terrorist attacks that day six years ago should have been a big wakeup call for the country, and they weren't. (ALEJANDRA VILLA / NEWSDAY / July 1, 2004)

Rick Green
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Before she became someone else, before she watched the South Tower crumble, before she believed six years could pass and nothing would change, Monica Gabrielle's thoughts were of early retirement with her husband, maybe a trip to Europe.

Pay your taxes, raise your kid, don't ask questions and hope things work out.

"You suddenly realize that is not enough," she told me when I called. Gabrielle lost her husband and a well-ordered life in West Haven on 9/11. She has been raising hell ever since.

"I am disgruntled, disgusted and dismayed," Gabrielle said, reminding me of unsecured borders, vulnerable ports, a fear-mongering president and his misguided Iraq war.

"We had hoped that out of that personal loss that at least it would motivate those in position to know and do, to move forward," she said from her new home on Long Island. "Once that innocence is ripped away - that those in power are there to protect us - then reality hits. Nothing has changed."

Nothing, except the years without her husband, Richard. Nothing, except the deaths of thousands. Nothing, except politicians who talk endlessly about 9/11, but deliver little.

"Why, the thought that the government is going to fix itself. Are you kidding me? They don't do oversight on what they are supposed to do unless the public puts pressure on them; it is not going to happen."

Speaking out, she endured the likes of creepy Ann Coulter, who tried to smear Gabrielle and other outspoken widows as millionaire "broad ... reveling in their status as celebrities" who were "unaware that 9/11 was an attack on our nation."

Yeah, the woman who started a campaign to make skyscrapers safer, who helped lead the push for creation of the 9/11 Commission, who has been there to testify before every board and commission, who said Rudy Giuliani's grandstanding made her want "to vomit." Just a broad who dared to question the men.

So don't ask if she is "moving forward." She doesn't want to share her pain with the television viewers of America. She'll spend today with her daughter.

But Gabrielle still wants that loud discussion. Do I know, she asks me, that the government still won't release the full investigation of the CIA's failures leading up to 9/11? Is it any surprise there are so many crackpot theories when the government still won't come clean?

"Sadly, what 9/11 should have been was a major wakeup call to the public that they need to do their civic duty and be involved in their communities on a local and federal level," Gabrielle said. "We need to hold our elected and appointed officials accountable and responsible."

Without Gabrielle's anger and mobilizing - along with a half dozen or so other 9/11 widows - we likely would have never seen a 9/11 Commission. She's one of the "Jersey Girls" - despite her Connecticut connection - who faced down the pundits and politicians who couldn't believe that real victims would challenge the Decider President.

She was there next to Sen. Hillary Rodham Clinton during the State of the Union speech, but she mentioned Dennis Kucinich and Ron Paul - polar opposites who oppose our terrorism policies - when I asked about 2008.

"We have medals of freedom and promotions. We had accolades and a couple of years later we had Katrina. I am more baffled today than I was six years ago. I am more suspicious and I am less inclined to believe."

So today, bless the thousands of victims, the fighting men and women who have perished, but also give thanks for Monica Gabrielle, who is still outraged.

Rick Green's column appears on Tuesdays and Fridays. He can be reached at rgreen@courant.com.

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