

# **Laboratory for New Thinking on Foreign Policy**

## **Session 3**

### **"Acknowledging Frustration, Finding Inspiration: Paths for Moving Forward"**

*The 9/11 Independent Commission*

**Submitted by:  
Monica Gabrielle  
Boston, MA**

**2/13/08**

Good morning, my name is Monica Gabrielle. I am a 9/11 widow. I am here today to speak to you about the frustrations encountered while attempting to unearth truth, exact accountability, responsibility and justice and endeavor to make our nation safer and more secure.

Reminiscing about this journey is a painful process. It brings back memories of sleepless nights filled with research, writing, faxing, emailing, and making phone calls and far too many trips to Washington, DC. It reminds me of fruitless meeting after fruitless meeting, testimony after testimony saying the same thing and getting the same blank stares. It reminds me of the slow loss of my innocence and the discovery of how dysfunctional our government really is.

It is also a reminder that to learn all this, we put our personal lives on hold, shelved our grief and left our families behind to do what we thought was critical for the safety of our loved ones and the nation.

How does one begin to dissect the journey we traveled and attempt to determine what went wrong? Since I am no expert, I can only offer thoughts and opinions based on my own experience. I leave it to brighter minds than mine to come up with a plan to fix things.

### **SOME BACKGROUND:**

The murder of my husband on September 11 brought with it many questions. Initially, my questions were personal:

How could this have happened?  
Why did this happen to him?  
Why didn't Rich get out of that building?

As days turned into weeks, the questions did not go away, they just seemed to grow.

Why wasn't New York City prepared?  
Why wasn't the World Trade Center on constant alert given the fact that it was bombed in 1993?  
How could 19 men get past airline security?  
Wasn't the Pentagon in protected airspace?  
Why didn't the military respond after the first plane hit?  
Where were the leaders of our country?  
Why didn't they protect us?

Sadly, it seemed that no official within our government was asking any of these questions. There seemed to be a disconnection between the uneasy fear I was feeling and the "go forth and enjoy" message sent over the airwaves. Certainly there would be serious discussions behind the scenes. Without doubt, there would be grave concern that people and agencies may have failed to properly respond.

While waiting for our government to do its due diligence, other 9/11 family members were asking similar questions, and as things sometimes happen, fate brings you together. We were mostly women, mainly homemakers, relentlessly curious and ultimately determined to find answers to our growing questions. After all, how could the 9/11 Families, or the nation, move beyond this horrific event, ease the fears of our children and ensure the future safety of our families and friends without answers? It all seemed so logical and in our innocence, we proceeded forth.

One can only imagine our surprise when we met with opposition. How could it be that our government could be so averse to finding out how 9/11 was allowed to happen? How could it be that our government would not want to make absolutely certain that going forward they had done all in their power to ensure the safety of the nation? In our logical minds, that could only happen if one uncovered all the facts and failures *first*. To do that, we felt that a thorough investigation was necessary.

## HOW THE COMMISSION CAME ABOUT:

As it became obvious that there was little curiosity within the halls of our government, we found ourselves putting aside our deep grief. We began to research every agency and every policy that could possibly shed some light on why the September 11 attacks were not averted or, at the very least, the human toll mitigated.

We researched everything from evacuation procedures and protocols to NORAD and FAA responses to air emergencies. We read everything we could find; we spoke to people who might have information who then gave us more people to speak to. We printed thousands of documents and began filling binders with research. We *googled* throughout many nights and organized our research during the day.

We were trying to determine, for ourselves, where the loopholes in the system were. In doing so, we were unknowingly arming ourselves with factual information that would help form the basis of our eventual arguments of the need for an investigation.

With each new revelation and each new understanding, our innocence diminished and the challenges we would face loomed large. The more we read the more we realized just how widespread the problems were. They seemed to be systemic in nature and involved every agency we relied upon for our safety and security.

Everywhere we looked, it seemed that changes were crucial.

- The World Trade Center site was exempt from building and fire codes
- High-rise evacuation procedures were inadequate
- New York City lacked an integrated command structure
- FDNY emergency radios were inoperable
- Communication equipment didn't allow first responders in New York City to talk to each other
- Terrorists were not watch-listed
- FBI computers were antiquated
- Intelligence agents and supervisors failed to analyze and investigate creatively, aggressively and with curiosity
- The military failed to do anything in a defensive posture
- Congress and the Executive Branch failed to properly share their growing national security concerns in order to garner the will of the nation to fight the growing threat of terrorism

Our questions and research resulted in more questions and more research.

As we sifted through the vast amount of information we were accumulating, we realized that only a thorough investigation would be able to determine the full extent of the lapses that our governmental agencies had experienced. We hoped that such an investigation, across all agencies and at all levels, would yield both a definitive account of how 19 hijackers could have defeated America's multi-billion dollar military intelligence and security apparatus and also prompt accountability. We wanted justice for those killed on September 11; and we needed to make sure that if there was a next time, we would be better prepared with competent people at the helm. We also hoped that a thorough investigation would yield the appropriate recommendations to correct the failures and close the loopholes. We did not want fellow citizens to experience the horror and pain that we did. We felt this was a simple notion fueled by common sense.

While we naively thought that it was our diligent research and dedication that forced the formation of the 9/11 Commission, we slowly realized that while our hard work was a major contributor, it alone would

not have been enough. It was not until the media began to notice our struggle that we began to make real headway. The media helped bring our plight to the nation and public support and pressure began to grow along with our determination. All this put us on a different playing field – we now had an opportunity to share our questions, concerns and knowledge with the American public. We had a chance to move the country from the mindset that 9/11 was a total surprise to the possibility that there may have been, at least some, foreknowledge.

We felt that once a commission was in place, we would be able to finally rest, to go back to our families and attempt to put our lives back together. Unfortunately, that was not to be the case. As the Commission was getting off the ground, we found that we had to scrutinize each proposed member as to their conflicts of interest and prior business or governmental connections. We wanted a pure investigation. We wanted no second-guessing at its conclusion.

Thus began our next phase – the watchdogs of the 9/11 Commission. This would prove a daunting task. The full scope of our efforts can be seen at the archived Family Steering Committee website ([www.911independentcommission.org](http://www.911independentcommission.org)), which incorporates the failures at the local, state and federal levels of our government. It details our long list of questions, statements issued, letters written and testimonies given.

### **INSIDE THE BELTWAY:**

Although we were becoming more aware of the dysfunctional inner workings of our government, we continued to hope for a truly *independent* commission with all the powers of the courts, including the much needed subpoena power. A commission not tied to Washington. A commission that would be able to critically look at the facts and evidence it uncovered, fearlessly follow all leads no matter where they went and report back to the American people. This was, after all, about 3,000 murdered American citizens.

However, once the Commission was created, we realized that our vision of it was being hijacked by Washington insiders – and everyone inside Washington has something to hide. The truth we sought would be diluted by politico speak with Republicans and Democrats protecting their members and parties with little regard for the safety of our nation. The truth would be censored through a “gatekeeper” with Bush White House connections.

Public hearings had to be forced. Swearing in of witnesses had to be forced. We begged to have our questions asked. The questioning of witnesses who came before the Commission was generally softball. If a Commissioner was finally aggressive in their questioning of a witness, they quickly ran out of time and no further follow up ever occurred.

Mr. Rudy Giuliani, Mayor of New York City before and on 9/11, flat out refused to discuss, let alone to take any responsibility for failures of his administration and used his testimony time to glorify himself.

President George Bush and Vice President Dick Cheney refused to give public testimony to the Commission and only agreed to a private “meeting” if they could do it together.

Condoleezza Rice came before the Commission and lied, as did NORAD, the FAA, and every other agency that came to testify.

Furthermore, through all this, the witnesses giving testimony were heralded with accolades of jobs well done by the Commissioners.

Where was the curiosity to find out why there was a lack of national defense, which left 3,000 dead?

## SEEKING ACCOUNTABILITY:

Throughout this torturous process, we issued statement after statement highlighting our concerns – to no avail. Apparently, Washington was more interested in circling the wagons than revealing the truth and that is not an atmosphere conducive to holding people and agencies accountable for failures. When at its inception Tom Kean and Lee Hamilton stated that the Commission was not going to be “*pointing fingers*”, we felt our quest for accountability in this forum was doomed. However, we continued to have hope – hope that as facts were revealed and failures isolated, even Kean and Hamilton would understand that without accountability, this process would be a useless endeavor. We felt strongly that without accountability and the appropriate placing of blame at the derelict parties we, as a nation, would never be able to truly begin to fix the problems. With each roadblock thrown into our path to truth, we became ever more disillusioned with the process and more resolute to the fact that our goal might be left unfulfilled. Yet, we had come so far and we were not ready to give up.

## THE FINAL REPORT AND RECOMMENDATIONS:

As the Commission wore on and we continued to air our grievances with them by issuing public statements and doing press interviews, tensions would build. We disagreed with them on most points. We wanted facts; they wanted to avoid “getting into the weeds”. We wanted transparency; they wanted ambiguity. We wanted truth; they *needed* a whitewash.

This was ever more apparent as discussions about their Final Report began. We were stunned to learn that it was already a work in progress as the Staff Statements issued at the public hearings were forming the basis for the various chapters. We were further stunned to find out that these same Staff Statements had made the White House censorship rounds prior to each hearing. We wanted a declassified report, showing redactions to protect sources and methods or national security. We wanted the nation to know what they did not know. In our estimation, such a report would go far in providing the transparency so desperately needed. However, as the Beltway wagons circled and tightened, so did our hope for transparency and truth disappear.

Much was made of the release of the “Official 9/11 Story”. For an investigative Commission to call its ultimate work product a “story” is telling. So many questions were never asked, let alone answered. Whistleblower testimony was ignored. Areas of gross negligence and failure glossed over. Fourteen million taxpayer dollars and 20 months later, this group of insiders that comprised the 9/11 Independent Commission reported to the American people their summarized conclusion. *The September 11 attacks were the result of a “lack of imagination”!* The Commission’s response to our call for accountability? *Everyone is to blame, so no one is to blame!* They should be ashamed of these comments.

It was only a short leap to understand that any recommendations garnered from such a compromised investigation would be incomplete at best or yielding more bureaucratic layering at worst. Something with which Washington is quite comfortable. Hide the problems with another layer of incompetence. Promote those who should be fired. Offer Medals of Freedom to those you want to silence.

Some of our concerns were acknowledge in *Without Precedent*, the mea culpa written by Tom Kean and Lee Hamilton as follow on to the Commission’s Final Report. Still more of our serious concerns have been validated by recent revelations of the inner workings of the Commission. Furthermore, the recent release of *The Commission: The Uncensored History of the 911 Investigation* by Philip Shenon confirms our worst nightmare: the role of Executive Director, Philip Zelikow, as the “gatekeeper” of the Bush White House.

With the reappearance of Kean and Hamilton, and now Zelikow, having to answer allegations of information withheld from the Commission and its Final Report, the American public will begin to

understand the extent of the sham perpetrated against them; and we will be reminded of what we had fought so hard for and where we ultimately failed to prevail.

## **WHAT HAS BEEN YOUR EXPERIENCE?**

Holding the egregiously incomplete accounting of the murder of my husband in my hands, I felt betrayed. Betrayed by a system I had believed in. Betrayed by the Commissioners who told us to trust them, that they were determined to do a proper investigation so no one ever had to walk in our shoes. Betrayed by the Commissioners who pointed to us in the hearings, telling the public that we deserved to know the truth and who spoke of our courage and determination. They betrayed us to save themselves, protect the sinners and ensure that corruption and cover up continue to thrive inside the Beltway.

As the realities of a long, unwanted struggle for answers to my husband's murder began to sink in, disillusion and disgust with our system, and those in it, took hold. I realized that once you step inside the Beltway, logical thinking is abolished. You discover a system churning along on corruption and greed. It is a well-oiled machine – spitting out public officials into the private sector as lobbyists and lobbyists back into the system as public officials.

I continue to have hope. I believe it is only a matter of time before all citizens begin to see the rot for what it is. It is that day I await, when the revolution for true change and reform begins, in the homes, in the schools, in the streets. When the citizens of this great nation begin taking responsibility for *their* government, throw out those inside the Beltway, and start anew. Something I sincerely believe our Founding Fathers would cheer.

I did not consciously choose to walk this path. It grew out of my need for answers. Had I known what it would entail, I cannot honestly say I would have ventured forth. This journey has exacted its toll: on me, on my family and my view of our government, its members and its policies. My veil of innocence was ripped away and it has left me acutely aware that very few decisions made on our behalf are good ones. Greed and the lust for power are alive and well, causing mayhem around the world.

###