

REBIRTH:

A Guide for Conversation and Getting Involved



163 William Street
4th Floor New York, NY 10038
projectrebirth.org

office 212.346.1482
fax 212.346.1481

I have hope . . .
That it's all going to work.
It's all going to be good at the end of the day.
We'll teach our children what happened.
. . . and hopefully
. . . the world will be a better place when we finish.
That's all you can hope for.

Brian Lyons, *REBIRTH*

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From the Director of REBIRTH: Jim Whitaker

Greetings to our viewers,

My name is Jim Whitaker and I want to thank you for watching *REBIRTH*. Since 2002, a team of dedicated people has worked to tell the story of how five individuals persevered and healed after the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks. Our courageous film participants emerged from despair, gathered hope, and finally, drew upon their own strengths and recovered. Their journey of resilience belongs to all of us, and our communities. The people on the screen, and there are thousands, are the "everyday heroes." They are the construction workers rebuilding the World Trade Center site, first responders, New York City and State government officials, families who lost so much that day and major corporations -- all working together, both on the screen and behind the camera, to bring this film to you, our viewers. At the end of the film, you will be inspired by this very long list of individuals and organizations. We could not have made this film without them.

Over the years, we showed our work-in-progress to 9/11 survivors, first responders, family members who lost loved ones, educators whose students were affected by the attacks, and mental health professionals who have cared for the 9/11 community. They not only urged us to continue our work, but also reassured us that what we were doing was "real" and reflected their own journeys -- both personal and professional -- in the aftermath of the attacks. We are indebted to this group of people; they too are part of the Project Rebirth community.

REBIRTH serves as our personal invitation to you, to become part of a bigger story and join our community. One that is not only committed to making something good out of a horrific event, but also to learn how we can be better prepared to cope and persevere and rebuild from any future events that befall our lives and our communities. This guide is a starting point for reflecting and more deeply appreciating the stories that are told in this film, and what they mean to you.

Our efforts involved so much more than just making a film. We wanted to create something that can help others. I invite all of you to take the opportunity to go on the *REBIRTH* journey with us and not only revisit this day in history, but work with us as we deliver the message of personal and community transformation, from despair to hope.

Jim Whitaker, Director and Producer, *REBIRTH*

September 11, 2001

It is a day no one can forget. We've heard about the clear blue skies, the chaos and confusion, the outpouring of compassion and the collective grief that flooded over us. Where were you and what were you doing? Questions repeated hundreds of times across a saddened nation as we tried to make sense of the senseless.

We all suffered losses; our security and safety, our way of life. But some families and communities lost more than anyone could imagine, husbands, fathers, sisters, brothers, wives, co-workers and children, almost 3,000 people from 90 countries.

The rest of us gave blood, donations, socks for workers at Ground Zero, and teddy bears for children whose lives were forever changed. Yet something else emerged from this epic tragedy. People reached out to each other and their communities. A groundswell of compassion pushed past the grief. We stood together, unafraid of sharing fears or friendship. Loss usually brings overwhelming loneliness but on September 11th, many shared this burden.

Often we hear people say that they can't imagine how families can get through such terrible times. But they do, we all do. The human spirit carries us through the murkiest waters. How does it happen? Where do people find the strength? In this film you will meet five ordinary people thrust into an extraordinary moment in time. We not only learn from them but we become teachers as well. Because each of us has a story to tell.

REBIRTH is filled with revelations. Watching the five participants in the film will compel you to bring messages of hope and rebirth to your family, friends and community. It is the shared experience of loss and trauma that makes us human. We will not only help each other on this journey but we can launch new dialogues of growth and healing. It is a conversation that is long overdue in this country. Please join us.

Screening *REBIRTH*

REBIRTH is a film of hope and resilience. People have many reasons for seeing this film; honoring those who lost so much on that day, gaining a better sense of the tragedy and learning how people heal and grow through loss. Bearing witness to these stories can evoke a wide range of feelings, a natural response to such situations.

Regardless of why you have decided to see *REBIRTH*, here are some suggested guidelines that may be helpful. For families and friends of those personally affected by September 11, exercise self-care and realize that you may relive and re-experience some elements of that day.

It is helpful to watch *REBIRTH* with people you know, who are supportive of each other. Holding formal or informal conversations after the film is a first step in getting the word out to your communities. *REBIRTH* is one hour and 35 minutes long.

It is best to be with people, friends, family, colleagues and others with whom you feel comfortable when watching any film that tells a real and very moving story, *REBIRTH* is no different. Take time to talk about the film before and afterwards, share your thoughts and reactions.

Consider strategies to soothe, provide relief and counter-balance any uncomfortable feelings you may have. Self-care, a first step towards healing, can be approached through the five senses: see, touch, smell, taste, and hear the comforts in the world around you. Talk, be with friends, read a favorite book before bed, enjoy a favorite food or drink, play peaceful or relaxing music, give and get physical contact, look at calming images, and depending on your beliefs, pray or meditate.

And, like Tanya, find sanctuary in your world.

Beginning Conversations after *REBIRTH*

Talking about the impact of a community disaster or catastrophic event offers an opportunity to discuss how people respond and help each other, not just in the immediate aftermath but for the months and years of rebuilding that lie ahead.

It is not just about “re-experiencing” the event, it is about raising consciousness about the way such events affect everyone in a community, from the uniformed personnel, to health care workers, to schools and children and to families.

This is the message *REBIRTH* wants to send. You are not alone, there is help and you will get through this.

Common Reactions to REBIRTH

- Start by exploring reactions to the film.
 - In many cases, people will think back to that day in 2001, where they were, who was there, and what was happening.
 - You may find yourself retelling your own story, as if September 11 was yesterday.
- What about your emotions? Describe them.
 - Was there a shift or change at different points in the film?
 - We all experience a wide range of feelings, anger, sadness or disbelief. However, there are moments of laughter, joy and feeling inspired by the participants’ experiences.
- Starting a conversation or writing about your experience after watching *REBIRTH* can be a learning process in itself.
 - As you think about the film, what did you learn that you did not know before? Give one or two examples. Think about a colleague or friend. What would they find helpful?

Questions for Conversation

- Where and how did you see support for the participants in the film?
 - There is not one way or an ideal way to give or get support. We constantly search for the right words and actions, never sure if we are helping or hurting. The most important gift we can give to another person is our presence.
- What did you learn about loss, grief, resilience and healing?
 - These concepts are difficult to discuss and even more difficult to experience. We tend to think we are the only ones feeling as we do.
- Think about each of the participants in the film: Brian, Nick, Ling, Tanya and Tim.
 - What did you see as their defining characteristics and individual ways of healing? How did they differ? How were they the same?
- Where did the participants find sanctuary as they healed from their losses?
 - What is your own experience in finding sanctuary?
 - Name three ways you found sanctuary as a child, and three ways you find sanctuary now.
- How did the film participants memorialize and commemorate their loved ones?
 - Did you think about memorials in your own life?
 - Finally, which of the participants would you want to talk to and what would you want to ask or say to them?
- You may find yourself thinking about the film in the days and weeks ahead.
 - Films that have an afterlife often make us think more deeply about the characters and our own lives. How will this help others learn about loss and community disaster and support?

WHERE DO WE GO FROM HERE?

How To Bring *REBIRTH* Conversations To Communities

No doubt you will find that you are eager to continue the conversation about *REBIRTH*.

Viewers have told us that as they watched the film, they thought of different people and groups who could gain a great deal from the *REBIRTH* message. There are probably three or four organizations in your own community that could benefit from a *REBIRTH* screening and community conversation, such as the Fire Department, Law Enforcement, the Red Cross, your church or synagogue, colleges and health care facilities. No matter what the size of the group, the conversations will be thought provoking. The time to learn about trauma, loss and support is not when you are in the middle of a disaster or community catastrophe. It is now.

Bringing such important conversations to a community is the first step for preparedness -- not just the physical requirements for rescue and recovery but the educational and emotional foundation that helps us understand how we can protect ourselves, heal and assist others at times of need.

PLEASE JOIN US

The profits from *REBIRTH* are being reinvested into helping people, specifically for younger generations to remember and learn the lessons that have emerged from responding to 9/11. Project Rebirth has reached out to professional groups who are trying to better understand mass traumas similar to 9/11– psychologists, doctors, nurses, firefighters, law enforcement, researchers, the military, and educators. We found that although people and communities were recovering from the trauma and grief of mass disasters, there was not enough information being shared about what had been learned. We hope to make a difference by providing more information and educational programs.

Visit Project Rebirth on the web and
learn how you can help:

<http://www.projectrebirth.org>

What People are Saying: **REBIRTH** Makes a Difference

Nancy, 9/11 family member:

This film is fabulous. Just amazing. I loved what they did. It was so moving...after all this time, I was so deeply moved. It is so interesting, the whole grief process. We are still a long way from understanding grief but this is a start...for us to deal with our national collective grief, we all do it in so many different ways. It took me a while to understand. It has made a real difference in my life.

Dody, Arlington Fire Department, VA

We show several video clips to our new recruits, they are built into our Trauma Inoculation program. Project Rebirth is a fabulous organization started by several Georgetown alumni. They have created a film that follows 5 victims after 9/11. We use the clips of Brian, whose firefighter brother died on 9/11. Brian does such a good job describing what happens to your body when traumatized. Our recruits can see how different the subjects are in the film; it is food for thought for our firefighters.

Joseph Primo, Director, Good Grief, Inc, Morristown, NJ

REBIRTH provides a safe space to begin a conversation about loss and grief. It gives you a sense of imagining what it is like, what it would feel like. The film will be very useful to train people; it creates an opportunity for self-awareness, has incredible talking points and also allows us to discuss 'visceral' reactions. Although this is about five people and 9/11 it is applicable to any kind of loss. I will use clips of the 17 year old and follow his growth after the loss of his mother. There has never been a film that allows us to follow a person's healing over time.

Wendy, Corporate Consultant, Washington, DC.

REBIRTH is truly a healing tool for any person who has suffered loss or trauma or who is in the midst of significant life challenges. There is a level of understanding provided to the moviegoer that cannot be captured in a single interview or a recap of events. To have followed those impacted over years and to experience their emotions and actions at the exact time they are living it is the overwhelming value. To see them rebuild their lives as the actual area of devastation is being rebuilt--the impact of that alone---does not have words. I was reminded of the amazing and resilient human spirit---and my resolve to live the best life possible was further ignited. REBIRTH is a blessing. I will encourage others to go see it.

The Film Participants

Brian, a New York City construction worker, lost his youngest brother, a firefighter, when the towers fell. Driven by the urgent need to do something, Brian immediately went down to the site to see if he could help in the massive search and rescue effort. The Ground Zero pit becomes a second home to Brian, a place of both reverence and renewal, as he is named a project manager for the reconstruction of the World Trade Center and discovers both the city's grit and his own hard-fought resilience.

Nick was a high school student when he lost his mother, the woman he called "the glue of our family." She was working in the financial industry on the 104th floor of the World Trade Center on 9/11. His mother's sudden death sent Nick reeling and tore at the fabric of their family. Nick sets out on a personal search to find the best way to honor all that his mother meant to him – a journey that leads him from anger to Yale to Wall Street and from unanticipated self-discoveries to family reconciliations.

Ling worked on the 78th floor of the World Trade Center when a plane hit the building. Knocked unconscious by the impact, she felt blessed to be among those who escaped the tower with her life, only to discover later that she had suffered extensive 2nd and 3rd degree burns. Ling begins a challenging, unpredictable, roller-coaster process of recovery. She learns to approach her precarious health with an inspiring sense of resolve and love of life in the moment.

Tanya was about to be married to Sergio, a New York City firefighter, when he was killed in the line of duty on September 11, 2001. Tanya's world was shattered when she lost the man she called her "soul mate" as they were planning for their wedding and life together. Tanya takes unforeseen turns as she begins to integrate her unflagging devotion to Sergio into a new life and unexpected new love.

Tim moved to New York to be part of what he considered the most revered Fire Department in the world, the FDNY. He soon became best friends with his mentor, Captain Terry Hatton of the elite Rescue 1. Although Tim had moved into the Mayor's Office of Emergency Management, both men

were called to the scene of the World Trade Center on 9/11. They each went into separate buildings. Tim saw World Trade Center One collapse, knowing that Terry was on the upper floors, leaving Tim to grapple with survivor's guilt and memories of their incredible friendship.

The Filmmakers wish to express their profound appreciation to all of the individuals, and their families, who have so generously shared their lives with us during the past nine years:

DEBBIE ALMONTASER

TIM BROWN

NICHOLAS CHIRLS

CHARLES COOK

LARRY COURTNEY

JOSEPH KEENAN

BRIAN LYONS

TANYA VILLANUEVA TEPPER

LING YOUNG

For additional information about this guide, contact Donna A. Gaffney, DNSc, PMHCNS-BC, FAAN, Advisor for Education and Research at donna.gaffney@projectrebirth.org