

## THE HOMEFRONT

TERROR HITS HOME

## La. families make desperate calls

Telephone provides  
lifeline for themBy Bruce Nolan  
Staff writer

While the terrible pictures bloomed and flickered on televisions, Jessica Berg in Metairie repeatedly mashed the buttons of her cell phone, trying over and over to reach her mother, her father, her sister — any of them — in Manhattan.

Each call failed. And each time, a mechanical voice advised her: "Due to the tornado in the area you are calling, your call cannot be completed."

Berg kept calling. So did Margaret Goodman, a Jefferson Parish school administrator whose 35-year-old son, Kevin, is a first-year student at the Episcopal church's General Theological Seminary in Manhattan.

So did Art Brief, director of the Burkenroad Institute at Tulane University's A.B. Freeman School of Business.

His 26-year-old daughter, Laura, works for a nonprofit in lower Manhattan. Her building was just a couple of blocks from the World Trade Center, he said Tuesday.

He could not remember, but for all he knew, her subway stop was under the building that two jetliners had just shattered.

Brief called when he saw the pictures. He missed her at the apartment; she had already left for work.

Then, thankfully, she called from her office. She said she was safe, but was evacuating immediately from the area.

## Making calls

A few minutes later, the first tower crumpled and buried the neighborhood in debris.

Laura called again, said Brief. Now chaos was all around her.

"She said she was on the street when the World Trade Center collapsed. She said a security guard yanked her inside a building. She said it was dark and smoky inside, and she used the word 'trapped.' I think maybe they were just holding everybody inside, but she said she was trapped, but OK. She was scared, but she was actually trying to comfort me."

Goodman, meanwhile, heard from a co-worker that Kevin, the seminary student, had checked in and was safe.

And in Metairie, Berg kept calling.

At the Jewish Day School where she taught first grade, Rabbi Geoffrey Spector of nearby Congregation Shir Chadash had already come and spoken to the first-through fifth-graders, she said.

"He explained about terrorism, and that a terrible thing had happened in New York," she said. "That all over the country people would be angry and sad," and their parents would soon come to pick them up.

The rabbi said a prayer in Hebrew.

## Getting through

Meanwhile, the pictures kept getting worse, and Berg could not get through on the phone to New York.

Berg's sister, Jennifer, worked as a speech pathologist near the financial district, her mother was a school psychologist and her father was in real estate.

Earlier in the morning she had spoken with her father, who told Jessica they were all safe, she said.

But here was the tragedy expanding, with two of the world's greatest skyscrapers falling

into the streets, and Berg's confidence was eroding, she said.

The voice on the cell phone kept explaining about the "tornado."

Eventually, she got through and learned that her family was safe.

Stressed and alone — her husband was coming back from Baton Rouge on business — she allowed herself the luxury of a temporary breakdown.

"Basically, I got a little hysterical," she said.

In time, the Briefs heard again from Laura, Art Brief said.

She was walking back uptown to her apartment near Harlem and called in again from a restaurant in the East Village, he said. She had stopped to get something to drink on her way home.

## Still waiting

But not all vigils were ending. Dee Martinez, a New Orleans office manager, watched the day's events with a sick dread.

Her husband's best friend, Herbie King — the godfather of the Martinez's 2-year-old son, Samuel — worked in one of the World Trade Center Towers.

So did Herbie's wife, Kelley.

For that matter, so did Martinez, before she and her husband moved to New Orleans eight years ago.

They had not heard from the Kings all day.

All day, Martinez stayed glued to the television. Over and over, she said, she ached for someone on television to say where the two jets had hit the buildings.

"Was it up high, like 80 or 100 floors up? My husband said he thinks Herbie and Kelley work on a floor somewhere around the 40s. Maybe they got out. I don't know. Can you imagine thousands of people trying to get down those stairwells?"

"We don't know what's going on. You can't get through; you have to keep calling. If you keep trying, you may luck out."

Martinez added, "My uncle is an (emergency medical services) worker in New York. I heard from my aunt. He had called her and said all he's seen is body parts all over the streets."

## A daughter and a brother

For Jean Cefalu of Slidell, Tuesday morning brought a double dose of terror.

Cefalu had already said goodbye to her daughter Sarah, a 16-year-old junior swimmer at Northshore High School, that morning as Sarah traveled to the airport in Kenner to catch a flight to the USA Swimming convention in Detroit.

Then Cefalu found out one of the hijacked planes was an American Airlines flight from Boston to Los Angeles. She knew that her brother, John Erickson, was traveling on an American flight that morning from Boston to Los Angeles.

At that moment, she thought her daughter's plane was in the air and her brother's plane could have been the one that crashed into the trade center. Luckily, Erickson was scheduled to take a later morning flight from Boston and neither he nor Sarah had boarded their flights before the government grounded all domestic air travel minutes before their scheduled takeoffs. Both telephoned Cefalu, letting her know they were safe.

"It was awful," Cefalu said. "There are no words to describe it."

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Staff writer Tammy C. Nunez contributed to this story. Bruce Nolan may be reached at bnolan@timespicayune.com or (504) 826-3344.

## Attacks a bitter reminder for local mother

Daughter-in-law  
died in OklahomaBy Natalie Pompilio  
Staff writer

Like mothers and fathers across America, Joyce Levy spent Tuesday morning checking on her children.

Corey, 29, sat next to her in eastern New Orleans, watching in horror as a 110-story emblem of American power crumbled to the ground on live television, footage that brought back wrenching memories of the terrorist bombing that killed his wife in Oklahoma City six years ago.

Richard, 24, checked in from Natchitoches, where he is a student at Northwestern State University. Justin, 14, was in class at Bishop McManus Academy. Safe, she assumed.

But where was her 30-year-

old, her oldest, "Bam-Bam," the Navy man? Based in Virginia, he often travels to Washington and New York for business. He didn't answer his phone at work, at home or in his car. For two endless hours, Levy called friends and family, they called her, and everyone prayed.

"It was like 1995 all over again," she said.

Levy's daughter-in-law, Lakesha, died April 19 that year, one of the 168 victims of the explosion once known as the greatest terrorist attack on U.S. soil. It took rescue workers nine days to find Lakesha amidst the rubble of the Alfred P. Murrah Federal Building, a nine-story office complex.

On Monday Levy stared at her television, the images broadcast from New York City bearing an eerie resemblance to the video once flowing from Oklahoma. The smoke and dust, the dazed survivors, the overwhelming feeling of panic as everyone asked the unanswerable: "Why?"

"It was like 1995 all over  
again."JOYCE LEVY  
who lost her daughter-in-law six years  
ago in the Oklahoma City bombing

Levy watched, waited and wondered if she would lose another family member to a terrorist attack. And if she had, how long it would take before she would know the truth.

"We're wondering who's here, if they're alive, if they're alive and hurt and if we're going to recognize them," she said, contemplating the rubble left from the World Trade Center, each of whose towers was 10 times the size of the Murrah building.

Constance Favorite, Lakesha's mother, called during the vigil. She was so upset by the news that she had to be driven

to a family member's home, Levy said. Favorite wanted to know if her son-in-law and grandson were all right.

"She was crying and she couldn't stop," Levy said. "I don't know what kind of toll this is going to take on her. Constance and I, we were two mothers today, just like we were with Lakesha."

Just before noon, Levy's oldest son called from Virginia. He was unharmed, he said, and the words made his mother weep. The sound of her sobs started him crying, she said.

"Lord," she said, "how much more is this world going to stand or are we going to take?"

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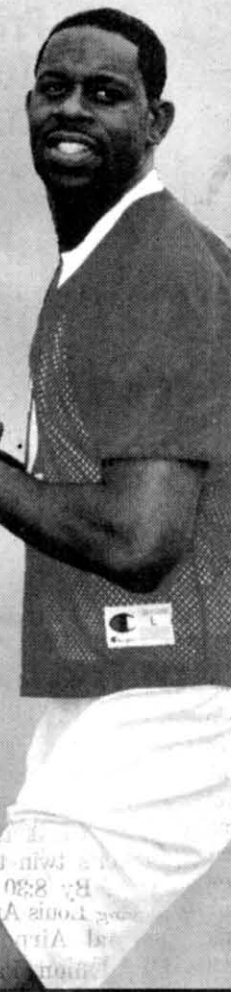
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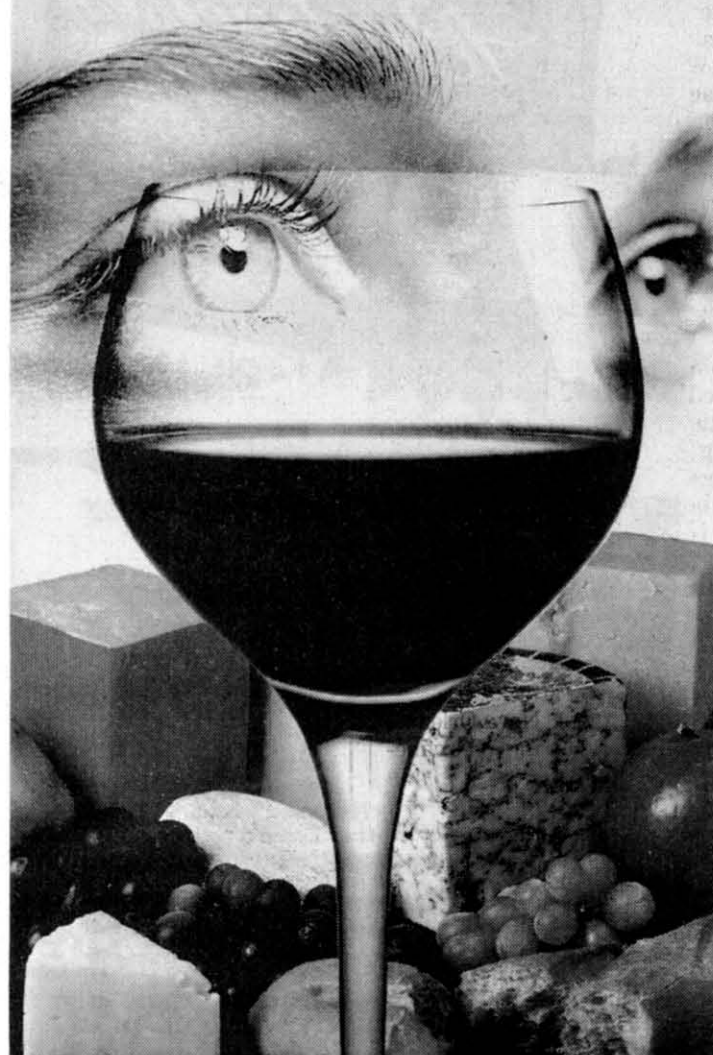
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