

"The most hateful thing they could do to us"

September 11 widow condemns US war plans

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2 December 2002

Just over a year after her husband was killed in the terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center, Jessica Murrow contacted the *World Socialist Web Site* to express her agreement with an article criticizing the Bush administration's exploitation of the September 11 tragedy. She said that if her voice, as someone who had suffered such a terrible loss, carried any weight, she wanted to raise it as strongly as she could against the drive to war against Iraq.

Her husband, Steve Adams, was at work at Windows on the World atop the World Trade Center's north tower when the first plane slammed into the building. He had recently received a promotion to beverage manager at the landmark restaurant, a new job with additional responsibilities that caused him to come in earlier than he normally would.

"He wasn't supposed to be there until 9 a.m., but he was very conscientious and got there at 8, unfortunately," said Jessica. The irony would not have been lost on Steve, she said, describing him as someone for whom the pursuit of money and career advancement had generally taken a back seat to a passion for ideas and friendships.

September 10 had been the couple's wedding anniversary. They had recently reunited after a lengthy separation. "I guess I was falling back in love with Steve," she recalled. "I wanted to express that, and I didn't. I told myself I had time."

The next morning Steve left before she got up. She was awakened by a frantic call from Steve's cousin asking if Steve had gone to work. He told Jessica to turn on the TV, and she saw the images of the burning tower.

"I called Steve, but the line was busy. The phones were out," she said. "I was thinking to myself, 'There goes Steve's job.' He was finally going to make some decent money after working at blue-collar jobs. I never thought he'd die."

Her brother came over, and the two sat in front of the television, watching the twin towers collapse. Still she hoped that somehow Steve had escaped the building. She repeatedly called the television station where she worked, hoping that she could get herself into a TV truck covering the disaster in order to look for him.

Sometime after 1 p.m., the doorbell rang, but it wasn't Steve. She knew then, she said, that her husband was dead. "I came back in here and took his dirty clothes out of the hamper. I laid them out like it was him, and lay beside them crying for I don't know how long."

Sitting in the Manhattan apartment that she had shared with Steve, Jessica spoke to the WSWS about that terrible day and her experiences since then. On the walls were photographs of Steve and friends wearing white blouses and pants, the costume worn when performing the traditional English dances that they both loved.

After seeing story after story on the aftermath of September 11, Jessica, a sound engineer working for network television, approached her producers and asked them why they didn't interview her. "I'm right here, why don't you ask me about this?" she said.

She wanted to express her opposition to the attempt of the Bush administration, with the support of the media, to use the deaths of her husband and the other victims as a pretext for war. But the effort proved frustrating.

In the first weeks after the tragedy, her network did a report on Windows on the World, where 73 employees, including Steve, were killed. Interviewed were a group of relatives of those lost, most of whom were still hoping against hope that their loved ones would be found alive.

Most of those interviewed had brought photographs of their missing relatives, appealing for anyone who might have seen them to come forward. Like the working class of New York City as a whole, those in the pictures had come from every corner of the globe, including South Asia, South America and Africa. Jessica did not hold up a photo and said she had no doubt that Steve had perished.

Looking into the camera, she said that her husband would have been "mortified" if he knew that the US government was preparing to take military action on the pretext of avenging his death. "Are you going to kill someone else because my husband is dead?" she said. She noted that the man sitting next to her was from Ghana and that the others interviewed had come from other countries, but all shared the same pain and grief.

Her next sentence, however, was edited out of the broadcast. "What evil have we created that would bring people from another nation to do this to us?" she asked. "Don't we need to look at our own actions?"

Some two months later, she was interviewed again as part of a series on the network's employees' experiences with September 11. She was the only one who had suffered such a direct loss in the attacks. Her interview was initially planned to be live, but the producers thought better of it, perhaps recalling her statements in

the earlier broadcast.

“The big story that week was the war in Afghanistan,” she recalled. “I said in the interview that when I saw the scenes from there—of bombed-out villages, people screaming and rubble everywhere—to me it looked just like Ground Zero. How was that helping anyone?” Once again, her statement was deleted from the broadcast.

“The whole thing became a piece about my relation with Steve,” she said. “It was very sweet and very true, but it wasn’t why I agreed to do the interview. They cut out everything I said about the government and about war. Of course, the first 15 minutes of the show were all about Bush and how his ratings had gone up, so I guess they couldn’t very well have me saying that.”

While on a personal level, she said, people at her station were very caring, she came to “the slow realization that nobody gave a damn about what I thought concerning what was happening.” It also became apparent to her, she added, that while television was providing non-stop coverage of the September 11 events, virtually none of it was directed to “why it happened, what the meaning of it was.”

“TV is there to make money and sell soap,” she said. “None of these broadcasts have anything to do with real news, they’re meant to be entertainment. Most of it is fluff or promoting another show on the same network.” She found it increasingly difficult to participate in the production of these shows.

While Jessica, aided by her brother, made a tour of the hospitals, she said she never doubted that her husband had died, and was among the first to file for a death certificate. She was also one of the first to file with the Victim Compensation Fund, which was established by Congress within 10 days of the September 11 attacks in an effort to protect the airline industry from lawsuits.

“My initial reaction was that I never wanted to sue the airlines,” she said. “I wanted to sue George Bush, his father, the CIA and the FBI. They’re the ones responsible, as far as I’m concerned.”

The Bush administration’s stonewalling of demands for an independent investigation into the events of September 11 has only strengthened her belief that the government knew that the attack was coming and did nothing to stop it. She cited the revelations that several of the alleged hijackers had been under surveillance before the attacks, as well as the failure to take any action to intercept the planes before they struck their targets.

“Don’t tell me that there was a communications problem between the CIA and the FBI,” she said. “I don’t trust that 19 fanatics just got onto planes and created that much havoc without anyone knowing.”

She was troubled by the inequities in the compensation regulations, which reflect and reinforce the social stratification in society as a whole. As it is now configured, the childless widow of a 25-year-old investment banker making \$125,000 a year will receive four to five times as much as families with children left behind by blue-collar workers killed in the attack. “My reaction was, why not give us all the same amount?” she said.

She was also dismayed at the attitude of the fund’s “special master,” Kenneth Feinberg. At a survivors’ meeting she attended, Feinberg’s response to questions on the fund’s complicated procedures was arrogant and condescending. At one point, an older

man rose from the audience and challenged Feinberg. “I don’t like your tone of voice,” he said. “You’re talking to a roomful of people whose husbands, wives and children have been murdered.”

Her own effort to complete the thick pile of paperwork required to submit a claim took six months. Among those who went to file for compensation, she added, were immigrants who did not speak English and seemed unable to even begin filling out the forms. She fears that many of them will end up getting nothing.

“In truth, I don’t think many people who lost someone feel any overwhelming patriotism,” she said. “I went to some meetings with survivors, and nobody felt that. I wish we could gather all those who had someone killed in a town meeting and come to some consensus about what political voice we could have—to say that we as the survivors of September 11 don’t want a war against Iraq.”

She described the Bush administration’s invoking of the deaths as a pretext for war as “the most hateful thing that could ever possibly happen to us.” She added that she had no doubt what Steve’s attitude would have been.

Jessica recalled her husband’s reaction to the 2000 election. “He paced the floor ranting and raving all night about it,” she said. “He kept saying, ‘This is the end of democracy.’ He felt that the system had been manipulated for years and that America was being overcome by the corporations.”

A close friend from Massachusetts echoed this recollection of Steve Adam’s political views. “He generally believed that there was this enormous cabal of powerful, rich industrialists/politicians who conspired to keep the common man down, so they could rake in the money themselves,” he said. “Basically, he believed that the country had been taken over by evil men—he seemed to believe that this all started with the Kennedy assassination, which he saw as a coup against a man with good intentions who cared about the common man, and he saw it continuing up through George W. Bush’s stolen election two years ago.”

If Steve had managed to escape the World Trade Center on September 11 while friends and co-workers died, he would have found it hard to function, said Jessica. “But then, to see them using this incident to have a war in Iraq, that would drive him mad. I know he would feel like he ought to be doing something and trying to find out how to stop it.”

A friend first began sending Jessica articles from the *World Socialist Web Site* last year. She then signed up to have articles emailed to her daily. “From the word go, it was the only thing I could read that seemed to strike the truth,” she said. “I used to think that the *New York Times* would be in the middle, but it’s gone to the right. It is so hard to find your own voice anywhere in the media. Your site is the only one. What you’ve written about how the Bush administration is using September 11 has really hit home for people like me.”



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