

# The Washington Post

## Honoring the Dead by Serving the Living

### Survivor Works to Grow A Day of Good Deeds

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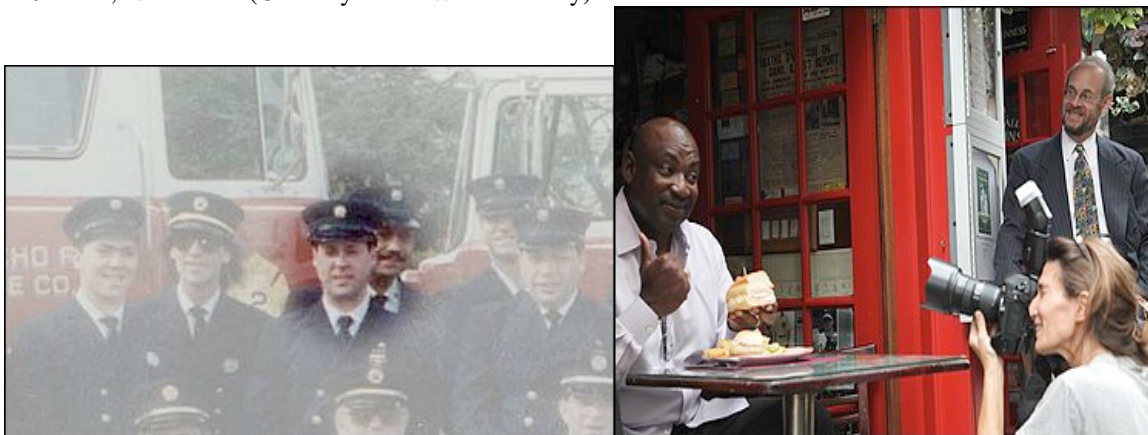
Friday, September 11, 2009

SLIDESHOW

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Jay Winuk looks at a plaque honoring his brother Glenn, who died at the World Trade Center. Jay and a colleague are trying to establish 9/11 as a day of service to others. "We never use the word 'holiday' for this," he says. (Travis Fox - The Washington Post) Jay's brother Glenn Winuk (pictured above) died at the World Trade Center in 2001. Glenn was an attorney, and also volunteered as a firefighter in his hometown of Jericho, New York. (Courtesy of the Winuk Family)



Glenn Winuk, an attorney who was also a volunteer firefighter, worked across the street from the World Trade Center. On 9/11, he first helped evacuate his office building, and then grabbed a medical kit and ran into the towers. (Family Photo) Winuk watches a photographer shoot photos of Giants great George Martin with his namesake sandwich, part of a fundraiser for first responders. (Travis Fox - The Washington Post)

NEW YORK -- The taxi is blowing down FDR Drive, heading south, Ground Zero a mile or so ahead. Jay Winuk is letting a humid breeze blow in through an open window as he considers his dead brother's legacy and the meaning of 9/11.

For eight years, he and fellow public-relations executive David Paine have worked to make the anniversary of the terrorist attacks a national moment of something other than sorrow, something other than the day, amid thousands of other tragedies, Winuk's brother Glenn died while trying to rescue people in the South Tower of the World Trade Center.

Now on the cusp of a huge success, with congressional and presidential approval officially recognizing Sept. 11 as a day for people to do a good deed -- any good deed -- Winuk is adamant about what he doesn't want this day to become.

"We do *not* want this to become a federal holiday," he says in his soft voice. "Holidays tend to become three-day weekends, barbecues, going to the beach and white sales. We *never* use the word 'holiday' for this. It's not about taking a day off and doing something fun. It's a day for reflection and for action."

And: "It's an extraordinary moment we're at now."

In April, President Obama signed into law the Edward M. Kennedy Serve America Act, which gave federal authorization to establish Sept. 11 as the National Day of Service and Remembrance. Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton is scheduled to deliver the keynote speech at Friday night's official ceremony in New York. More than 200 organizations, working through Paine and Winuk's [group](#), My Good Deed, and through ServiceNation, another volunteer-based group, are overseeing thousands of individual and corporate projects across the country, all designed to honor the memory of those who died on Sept. 11.

Winuk and Paine say they hope to re-create the spirit of the days and weeks that followed 9/11, when it was said all irony was lost, strangers reached out to help one another and, as President Abraham Lincoln once put it, "the better angels of our nature" appeared.

"There was something different about the country in the days after the attacks," Paine says, standing with Winuk on Liberty Street, between the gaping hole of Ground Zero and the front entrance of FDNY's Ladder Company 10 and Engine Company 10, which lost so many [firefighters](#) that day. "It provided a glimpse of what the country could be, all those people coming down to help at Ground Zero, expecting nothing in return."

He pauses.

"It was a better place to live."

\* \* \*

Glenn Winuk was a lawyer at Holland & Knight, working just across from the Trade Center. He was also a volunteer firefighter and emergency medical technician in his home town of Jericho, out on Long Island. He had close-cropped brown hair, a friendly smile. A family photo shows Winuk in his dress uniform, beaming at the camera.

When the planes crashed into the towers, he helped evacuate his building, then grabbed a medical kit and ran into the towers.

He was 40 years old, had no wife or children. He had lived for moments like this.

"As a child, I can remember my uncle, also a firefighter, holding Glenn or myself and sliding down the fire pole in the station where he worked," Winuk says. "We asked my dad to put a pole from our bedroom down to the garage."

Then the towers came down.

For weeks, Winuk and his parents harbored hope. "Air pockets in the rubble, maybe he hit his head and was in a hospital somewhere." When Mayor Rudolph Giuliani finally announced that rescue effort had turned into a recovery operation, the family planned a funeral.

The Winuks, who are Jewish, took a cue from survivors of the Holocaust, who, when they had no body to bury, had put favored belongings of their dead in an otherwise empty coffin. In went Glenn's law books, a Jewish prayer book, a toy firetruck he'd had as a child.

Then, the following March, Glenn's partial remains, along with those of several other firefighters, were discovered in what had been the lobby of the South Tower. Glenn's medical kit was at his side. The casket was dug up and his remains added.

"It was a very hard [funeral] service," Winuk remembers.

\* \* \*

That same spring, Paine, a native New Yorker who had moved to California, was still feeling haunted by the attacks, though he had lost no family members. Looking for a way to help, he learned that the New York Mets were each giving a day's pay to help 9/11 victims and their families.

"That's it!" he remembers thinking.

He rushed to buy domain names on the Internet: Onedayspay.com, .net, .org and so on. He thought the idea was catchy -- Americans donating salary or one day's effort to some sort of volunteer effort, in honor of Sept. 11 victims. On his Web sites, he invited people to "do a good deed" and post it on the site as a means of inspiring others to do the same.

"More than 50,000 people posted their deeds on the site," he says. "That was with no advertising, no anything. It was amazing."

He had worked with Winuk at a public relations firm earlier in their careers, and they had remained friendly. Knowing Winuk had lost his brother, he approached him with the idea of trying to turn Sept. 11 into a day of volunteering.

Winuk leapt at the chance.

It was a slightly bewildering scene to wade into. More than two dozen Sept. 11 charities had sprung up. They had to establish a clear line of action that would not interfere with other projects. "It could be a little competitive back then," remembers Terry Sears, executive director of Tuesday's Children, a [nonprofit](#) organization that offers help to families of 9/11 victims.

"David and Jay had a very clear vision of what they wanted to do that was very forward-looking when most people were looking at the here and now," Sears says. "They wanted to make some good come out of 9/11. I would say they saw the rainbow before everyone else did."

By the summer of 2004, they had changed their organization's name to My Good Deed and were ready to reach out to Congress. On July 4, they tracked down Washington lobbyist (and native New Yorker) Fred Dombo, who had been recommended to them. Dombo remembers he was "sitting in the attic at my mother-in-law's beach house in Rehoboth" when the pair called him, asking for advice in negotiating the mysteries of the Hill.

Dombo, working pro bono, reached out to Rep. Peter King (R-N.Y.), who immediately took to the idea of a day of service, Dombo recalls. For the next five years, Winuk and Paine made dozens of trips to Washington to build support on both sides of the political aisle, getting key backing from then-Sen. Hillary Rodham Clinton (D-N.Y.) and her fellow New York Democrat, Sen. Charles E. Schumer. By this spring, it was attached to the Kennedy bill and sailed through both the House and Senate.

Meanwhile, their national outreach and good relations with Sept. 11 families had helped their volunteering idea catch on with any number of groups across the country.

Earlier this week, while arranging volunteer events for this weekend, Paine was walking through the Tribute WTC Visitor Center. He bumped into Jennifer Adams, the chief executive of the [center](#). He asked about an event scheduled for Friday that Adams was arranging, stuffing care packages for troops deployed overseas.

"We've got 300 volunteers coming!" she said, excited. "Which is good. It might rain."

Across town, former New York Giants star George Martin, a client of Winuk's, was sitting at Foley's [Pub and Restaurant](#). In front of him was a chicken sandwich named in his honor ("The Chicken Cordon Big Blue"), an effort to raise perhaps \$1,000 for the continuing medical expenses of first responders to the Trade Center. It was the latest of his many efforts related to Sept. 11 volunteering, inspired by the friends he lost that day. In 2007, he walked across the country for the same cause, and to help with raising awareness for My Good Deed. He hoofed 20 miles per day, and raised \$2.5 million.

"None of these are huge sums but if everyone did a little bit, the sum total would be tremendous," he said.

Sitting across from him at the table was Winuk, manfully ignoring the heat in a wool pinstripe suit, quiet. He was smiling. It was unclear if this was in response to what Martin was saying, or if, perhaps, he was lost in memories of his brother, the little boy on Long Island who had once ridden down a fire pole in the arms of his uncle, grew up to save lives and would later serve as the inspiration for a day dedicated to helping others.

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