

Dear Andre:

October 5, 2001

I was very heartened to receive your package and especially touched that you took the time to mail me the French newspaper. It's always interesting to see how other countries react or what news they convey to the world.

As Jacques says, Tampa is not a city that most people outside the US know about; however, just as any other city in the country, we have been touched by the events and each one of us reacts in a different way. I told Jacqueline and Jacques that we were evacuated last week (I work on the 29th floor of a 52 floor building) because of a bomb that had been placed in our lobby. If it had happened before 9/11, we would have taken the situation calmly but we were quite hysterical in view of the danger that could have been. Every day we have to learn to deal with this situation and it's been quite hard. With all the news we are receiving from radio, newspapers and televisions, we are literally nervous wrecks not knowing what to think or how to act.

I believe that fear is a very hard emotion to deal with. All last week we were bombarded with reports that hijackers had tried to launch a chemical warfare by attempting to rent crop duster airplanes. Because most of Tampa's skyscrapers are in the open, I often imagine when I come into town an airplane hitting our building just like they did in WTC. I think it's very easy, from far away, to think that we should go back to our daily lives. How? Everything is disrupted, no matter where we live. Wednesday, a mentally imbalanced person cut the throat of a Greyhound Bus driver, result 6 dead. Because of the events, Greyhound suspended their buses throughout the United States. That was over 23,000 buses that were going nowhere. Here, because there are so many bridges, they close them every time there is a threat. It means hours to get home or even to work. We deal with a lot of companies in New York that have lost everything and it took days to find out whether the people were dead, alive or what the status was. Just today I read a very angry letter from a lawyer whose law firm was in the adjacent building to the WTC and, still after three weeks, they don't have water or electricity and he resented the fact that the trial had to continue as if nothing had ever happened. No matter how you perceive the situation to be, it is worse than you think. I have spoken to people in New York and, since our view is limited by the pictures that are transmitted by TV, I am told that it is 100 times worse than I imagine. This morning for the first time the airport in Washington DC reopened. Most of the planes lost 80% of their travelers, even in Florida, our tourism is down 86% from last year. I went with friends to an island last weekend that is very tourist oriented and numerous shops were closed because they went out of business in the last three weeks. Many companies that I know are laying off tens of thousands of employees. So, while we are trying hard to put it all behind us and marching forward day by day, it has taken its toll on all of us. I can only imagine that the people in New York are feeling it much worse than I am.

There was an extremely interesting article last weekend in our local paper about the stress that we are all under because of all the information that is being fed to us. Our minds are like sponges that absorb all the data and don't really know how to deal with it or how to expunge it, so we keep all that information in our heads and start having signs of stress. I am having problems sleeping and as I mentioned above as I drive to work, I see the skyline of Tampa and imagine an airplane crashing into a building; that picture on 9/11 had a profound affect on me; a

friend of mine can't concentrate; my boss is very impatient; we all encountered these blocks in our daily lives such as we try to deal with companies that have been disrupted or closed in New York. Back to business doesn't allow us to be too sentimental.

The prospect of war is also extremely scary (see article). I, for one, feel very helpless in what our government is going to do and how it will affect the rest of the world. If we don't go to war, it opens the door to other hijackers who know that America is a coward and doesn't retaliate. If we do go to war, then we bring on to us the anger of so many. Negotiations and diplomatic efforts have so far failed in Israel, what makes us believe that we can negotiate with Muslims. It is a complicated issue that really does not have a simple solution. Living in the "before" is scary but it will be even scarier when we get in the "middle" of the war.

Because we are in the age of technology, e-mail has been a god-sent and a curse at the same time. In one week, I received over 300 e-mails of prayers, emotions, poems, pictures, etc. It has made the bond we feel for each other stronger because we know that others share with us and feel like us. On the opposite side, it is a constant reminder of what happened. The solidarity we have received has been extraordinary; I have received e-mails from friends in France, Italy, Australia, Belgium, London and it's nice to know that people think about us and what we are going through. While we are not in New York, the whole country (as Americans are really fanatics about patriotism) has been plunged into this disaster.

I was trying the other night to convey to Jacques that his impatience with how we are reacting is part of what we need to take the time to reflect. Impatience in retaliating for this catastrophe is not the solution. I think methodical research and ensuring that we do it right is key. I think we need all the allies we can get so that we don't start World War III. I was trying to convince Jacques that just because I live in Tampa and because it is not a big city, does give us the right to mourn in an universal grief that needs to be dealt with. Thinking that we should snap out of our grief and fixation with this disaster is childish. Nobody can recuperate in three weeks from the tremendous repercussions that it has had on all of us Americans first, but the world included.

I had indicated to Jacqueline that I would not be coming to Paris this year. My daily finances took a beating late last year and the beginning of 2001 and it's only through working a lot of long hours and weekends that I have finally been able to catch up. With the economy being so much on the decline, my financial portfolio which took me 26 years to accumulate lost 75% of its value in the last year. I am not afraid to fly, in fact I think now would be the safest time to fly, but I decided that home was where I wanted to be, and I didn't think spending money was wise for the time being. Also, American companies do not give out vacation time the first year on a job. You earn 10 vacation days, but you can only take them the second year. I will be happy to look into making the trip again next year.

I am sure that all my friends/family have different opinions of what the world has become and how the awareness has changed. I hope that because we are family and friends, we will be able to understand that we each have an opinion that is not any worse than someone else's. Our churches have been filled to capacity in the last three weeks from people seeking comfort with their religion. However, where are those people when there is no disaster? God had nothing to

do with the disaster, nor will he have anything to do with justice. How is it possible to maintain the momentum to join in solidarity, whether spiritual or mental, when people seek their relationship with God only when there is a disaster. People were waiting 8 to 10 hours in line to give blood the day after September 11 but where are they when the Red Cross is desperate during other catastrophes? American have been generous enough to give millions to the families of the deceased of the disaster but where are they during normal times when the local charities are begging for help for families and animals?

I belong to a spiritual group based on the book "Conversations with God" and we discuss on an ongoing basis how we can maintain in our daily lives the closeness we feel with God regardless of what religion we can be. In the long run, it doesn't matter which religion is the best or the worst because we will all end up in the same place, with God. We are one with God and we will soon be going home to him. But, in our daily lives, how do we apply our awareness of the sense of belonging to God? Pretty soon, September 11 will be a very bad memory, people will be going back to their daily lives and the momentum will have been lost because people need to find stability and routine in their lives to feel safe.

I think that this tragedy has made me appreciate more the people who surround me and less those people who don't have time for me. I believe everything that we do is a choice and those choices dictate what kind of meaning life can have. I believe that life is so tremendously precious and can, at any moment, be taken away so only the important things are really of value. Those that don't want to take the time to express their feelings, sentiments or emotions, are not connected to others. I have always been extremely lucky to have many friends surrounding me since I did not have my family close by. As Jacqueline always says "quelle famille!!!" I have had and I am grateful for all those that have expressed solidarity for what has happened. The extreme disappointment I have felt from not hearing from some family members is sometimes hard to deal with because it is a reaction I expect. I am not here on earth to judge people but I have a right to have them or not in my life depending on what my needs are or aren't. People who don't want to make time for me are not worthy of my time for them. It is so very important to let others know how we feel and how we cherish those souls that have come into our lives for whatever purpose. They may be gone tomorrow. I now take more time introspect for me and what I cherish. While I have always been in tune with nature, I love even more spending time being outdoors, breathing nature. Florida has a climate that is very conducive to being outside all year round.

Enough written of all this epilogue. I have not quite answered your letter but I did answer with what was important to me. Thank you again for taking the time to send the newspaper. I am certainly looking forward to reading it cover-to-cover this weekend, outside by the pool, listening to a Bach Cantata with my dogs. I sometimes make an appointment with myself so I can enjoy what is important to me. I was very happy to have been able to spend a little time with you and sharing thoughts. I am not sure all my deep thoughts are translatable, but you can certainly share them if you wish. I hope you are well, along with Françoise and if I miss seeing you this Thanksgiving, next year will be that much sweeter when I come for a visit.

Again, I appreciated hearing from you. Je vous embrasse tous les deux bien affectueusement.

Couette

my e-mail address is
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P.S. I really believe that our patriotism will be the sentiment that will help us progress in our grief. The expressions of sympathy, donations, volunteerism that have overflowed express the characters of the American people. Because our economy is down, we are embarking on a renewed and better America and the spirit will carry us. To that effect, I am enclosing ~~two~~ an article which, again, does not have to be right or wrong, because it is just that, an opinion.

John

It is most odd, but I
occasionally find things

