

NAMES (A 9-11 MEMORIAL)

By Michael Scarborough

Those of us who work with gold often find ourselves working in religious institutions with which we have no spiritual affiliation or emotional connection. We are aware that the place itself, or perhaps the statue or memorial on which we are working has meaning to someone so we work respectfully, but perhaps not as reverently as we would were it our own place of worship or a memorial to a family member.

I was asked to design and build a Veterans' shrine altar for a church in Brooklyn, which included the names of all the men and women from the parish who had served in World War II. As I placed the name plaques, one by one, on the altar, I found the names interesting and I wondered who they had been. My father is a veteran of that war, but even so, I found it hard to have an emotional connection with all those people who had gone to distant places to fight, and maybe, to die.

Shortly before the memorial was to be consecrated, the priest who had commissioned the altar asked me to design and build a memorial to those who had died in the attack of 9-11, which occurred just a mile from the church itself. Individual names were not to be listed but as I worked on the piece names came to me: the name of a man in my wife's business with whom she spoke daily; the name of a fiancée of a co-worker; the names of friends of friends; the names of the firemen and rescue workers; the names of the people on the airplanes. None had gone off to fight in a distant land. They had died so close to us that the ash from the burning buildings settled on the roses in our garden.

Both the Veterans' altar and the 9-11 memorial were consecrated on September 11th, 2006. During the ceremony, I looked again at the names of the veterans and began imagining all of them just like the people who were remembered by the 9-11 memorial....soldiers, yes, but just men and women doing their jobs. In those moments, I finally felt the reverence for the WWII veterans that had eluded me while I was working on their memorial. I also knew that after this experience, I would never again struggle to connect to those whose lives I might, in the future, be commissioned to memorialize.

