The memories, the pain and anguish remain deeply embedded in all of us as we recall the horrific events 13 years ago today. In remembrance of Sept. 11, 2001, tragedy, we usually re-run this story in our Front Page.

Triumph of the Human Spirit

By ROMEO P. MARQUEZ

NEW YORK CITY - Bent but unbowed, the human spirit soared higher than the world's tallest buildings put together, ever more determined to overcome the terrorist attacks that have rallied a nation than sundered it.

Nowhere else is that much evident except at the very scene of the horrific tragedy itself – at Ground Zero in New York City’s Lower Manhattan district.
The pain and the grief have somewhat subsided among the hundreds of families whose kin perished in the attacks on September 11, 2001 only to be taken over by a firm resolve to reign triumphant over man’s worst adversaries.

Where once stood the World Trade Center’s twin towers is now an open pit hallowed by the flesh and blood of 2,749 people, among them Filipinos, who died a gory death in the horrendous crash of two planes that leveled the North and South Towers to the ground.

"All we are is dust in the wind"– as the song goes – is an apt description of what had become of the many lives snuffed out in an instant.

But the dust is of the martyred ones and the invisible spirit that makes it soar is of those who perished, whose survivors come to Ground Zero in celebration of their lives and times.

From among the thousands – relatives, friends, tourists and plain kibitzers – who thronged here, tears flowed out incessantly today, Sept. 11, 2005, as reminders of the attacks hovered everywhere in New York City and beyond, enriching the sanctity of Ground Zero as an unexpected burial ground.

Bells pealed, taps sounded and the eerie moments of silence called four times – at 8:46, 9:03, 9:59 and 10:29 a.m. marking the times the planes slammed the edifice and the times they collapsed – was punctured only by sobs and the clasping of hands.

Among those in the multitude were the families and kin of Filipino victims who were either passengers of the planes or employees working at the two towers.

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Time heals.
But for three Filipino families, the pain and anguish over the loss of loved ones in the horrific Sept. 11, 2001 attacks on the twin towers of the World Trade Center remain intact.

For Renee Gamboa, a medical doctor, the event was a grim reminder of a promise her only son had been unable to redeem.

"I'll be back in two weeks," Dr. Gamboa recounts Ronald Gamboa as telling her over the phone a week before the catastrophic day.

Ronald had gone on vacation in Boston and was on his way back to Los Angeles with his three-year-old adopted son, David, aboard the United Airlines plane.

In the phone conversation, Ronald was reassuring her that he would be just in time for the 38th wedding anniversary that Dr. Gamboa and husband Ranulfo, also a medical doctor, had prepared at their residence in Louisville, Kentucky.

That brief talk proved to be the last that Dr. Gamboa had with him.

Ronald and David both died that September morning four years ago.

"I wish they (authorities) would have known it (the attack). There were warnings not listened to," Dr. Gamboa said.

Cielita Peralta remembers her son, Carl Peralta, as a conscientious employee who worked diligently at Cantor Fitzgerald as an investment broker.
Carl, 37 and single, had his office at the 104th floor of the 110-storey World Trade Center’s North Tower, almost at the bull’s eye of the plane that had slammed the building. He had three other siblings, namely, Cielo, Oskar and Judy.

Cielita’s husband, Oscar, and the entire family who live in New York’s Staten Island, paid their respects at Ground Zero.

Unlike many of the grief-stricken families, the Peraltas managed a smile during the brief interview.

The former Quezon City (Philippines) residents said they don’t have any complaints about how the government responded to the crisis during the initial months.

Cielita took note, however, of a plan to construct in Ground Zero an International Freedom Center as a museum documenting man’s atrocities against humankind.

She shared the sentiments of other people that the proposed project was intended as a tourist destination.

Asked about the government compensation, Cielita quipped: "Hindi mabibili ang buhay. Ang iba nga diyan, pag namatay, patay lang! Hindi na ako magrereklamo."

The 50-year-old Hector Tamayo worked as a project engineer at the WTC’s South Tower. He was among those who died in the attacks.
A native of Aklan in the Philippines, Tamayo lived in New York for the last 20 years. "His memory stays with us forever," says Kevin Nadal, a nephew.

Tamayo left behind a wife and two kids who were too shy to be interviewed. The family, however, obliged to be photographed.

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