



Fall and Rise (4/30/19)

- 00:00:24 Ruth Dewa Ayu: Good evening. My name is Ruth Dewa Ayu, and I'm the assistant director of public programs at the 9/11 Memorial and Museum. It's my pleasure to welcome you to tonight's program. As always, I'd like to extend a special welcome to our museum members, to those tuning in to our live web broadcast at 911memorial.org/live, and to the 9/11 survivors, first responders, and family members that have joined us this evening to mark the book launch of "Fall and Rise: The Story of 9/11" by Mitchell Zuckoff.
- 00:01:00 On the morning of September 11, 2001, bestselling author and journalist Mitchell Zuckoff was on book leave from the "Boston Globe" when his editor called. Airplanes had struck the Twin Towers of New York's World Trade Center in an apparent terrorist attack. Both planes that hit the towers had taken off from Boston's Logan Airport. Zuckoff rushed to the newsroom. He wrote the lead story that appeared on page one of the "Globe" the next day, and for months after, Zuckoff wrote about the attacks, the perpetrators, the victims, and their families.
- 00:01:35 So began an abiding commitment to the true story of that day. After years of meticulous reporting, Zuckoff wove together multiple strands of what happened in New York, at the Pentagon, in Shanksville, Pennsylvania, and among military responders into "Fall and Rise," a mesmerizing, minute-by-minute account.
- 00:01:55 Mitchell Zuckoff is a professor of journalism at Boston University. He's the author of numerous books, including "13 Hours: The Inside Account of What Really Happened in Benghazi" and "Lost in Shangri-La." As a member of the Spotlight team at the "Boston Globe," he was a Pulitzer

Prize finalist for investigative reporting and the winner of numerous national awards.

00:02:18 His work has appeared in "The New Yorker," "The New York Times," and other national publications. For the past 18 years, Zuckoff has been dedicated to helping people who weren't here on 9/11 experience it through his penmanship. Continuing in this vein, we're delighted that he is partnering with the 9/11 Memorial and Museum to help bring our educational workshops and tours to New York City and tristate-area students, providing schools who might not otherwise have had the resources to visit this historic site, access both the space itself, as well as a guidance from a skilled member of the museum's education staff.

00:02:57 As such, it is my distinct pleasure to welcome Mitchell back to the museum. Please join me in welcoming Mitchell Zuckoff, in conversation with Amy Weinstein, our vice president of collections and oral history.

(applause)

00:03:17 Amy Weinstein: Well, thank you very much for joining us here this evening, Mitch. You've received some very high praise for "Fall and Rise" from your fellow journalists, and I hope you'll let me add my voice to those critics and say thank you for giving me the opportunity to read an advance copy of the book. I've been working on this book professionally for about as long as you have, and, still, I found so many things to learn in your text.

Mitchell Zuckoff: Thank you.

00:03:42 Amy Weinstein: So, so thank you. And I'm going to guess that you began your interviews with the protagonists in your book the same way that I begin my oral histories for the museum. So I'd like to start our conversation today by asking you to tell us just a little bit more about

what you were doing on the morning of September 11, what you thought your ordinary day was going to be like, and if you'd rather start on September 10, which is where you start with many of the people in your book...

Mitchell Zuckoff: Interesting.

Amy Weinstein: Start there.

00:04:14

Mitchell Zuckoff: Sure. Thank you, Amy, thank you, all, for coming. I was, as Ruth said, I was on book leave. I was in, uh, what we, we call sort of "fuzzy slipper mode." Um, I was, you know, I had been a reporter for a very long time, and working daily, and then this is an opportunity to kind of relax a little bit.

And so I had been working on my... what would, what would become my first book when the scene that, that Ruth described happened. But I actually have no independent memory of September 10. I am... this is one of the reasons why I am so amazed by, and I, I think there's a reason why when I ask people about their September 10 for the book, uh, I came to understand that, that September 10 had a different meaning for people whose lives were so utterly changed by September 11.

00:05:07

And as much as I was affected by doing this work and by telling the story for the "Globe," I was not affected in the way that, that some of my friends who are here tonight and so many of the people I talked to. And so it was just a normal, it was a normal day. It was just another Monday. So for me, the story really does begin personally on September 11.

00:05:31

Um, and, you know, you get to a newsroom, and it's, it's chaos. I, I was going from zero to 180 in that sense, of the, the quiet, slow process of writing a book to the ultimate daily experience. I was... I, I had some experience with that. I had covered, I had written the lead story about when J.F.K. Jr., his plane crashed. I had taken the lead on the "Globe" for

that. I had taken the lead for the "Globe" for the Columbine story two years earlier.

And so it was immediately understood that I would play that role again. But cranking up the machinery that day, it felt a little rusty until three or four hours in.

00:06:19 Amy Weinstein: You know, and that was such a big responsibility to, to cover this story for such a, a big newspaper. So many people found that they couldn't think, they couldn't focus, they couldn't concentrate. It was just anxiety and worry. How did, how were you able to, to not give into that and to, to be a responder?

00:06:44 Mitchell Zuckoff: Well, I appreciate you saying that. I've never actually thought of myself as a responder, um... and I am not sure I do in that sense, compared to the people who... who rushed in to the flames. Um... I think it's the discipline of the work. I think it, it's the understanding that we have a job to do, and you go into a kind of a journalistic cocoon, where you can't think. We, we had a colleague at the "Globe" whose father was on Flight 11. And colleague and friend, David Filipov, and so Alexander Filipov was a victim.

00:07:21 And we knew this fairly soon after as the day was unfolding. And we couldn't let that stop the work that was happening in the room. We knew that there was going to be nothing else in the paper the next day. And simply the fact that I, I had... more than two dozen amazing colleagues who were feeding me and constantly on the phone, and I'm making calls.

00:07:48 And I was working very closely with a terrific aviation reporter named Matt Brelis. So Matt had wonderful sources at the, at Logan, and all around Boston's aviation community. So Matt and I were working very closely together. And I think we just simply couldn't allow ourselves, and I think we all had the let down later, but that day we couldn't.

00:08:12 Amy Weinstein: Hmm. You know, and I thought that "Fall and Rise" really effectively melds the hard news, the investigative journalism, with two other genres that I think are very different, the obituaries and, and features, the other kinds of stories. Did you choose that path for the book, or did it emerge during the writing process?

00:08:39 Mitchell Zuckoff: I, I knew at the outset that was how I had to do it. The human element to me was the way I could connect readers to this story, that I was not going to contribute something important or, you know, meaningful, if I was simply doing the news version at 500 pages. I knew that the news, the investigative work, the... the sort of pulling together the strands of the communications failures, of the military issues, the things that, that I try to highlight, particularly in part one of the book.

00:09:14 And then the construction failures within the Twin Towers that I highlight in part two. Those are investigative techniques. But that was always going to be the scaffolding on which I overlay the human stories that I felt people would connect to. And I didn't know which of the protagonists people would feel the most empathy for. I think it depends on the reader. I think a 20-year-old woman might connect to a different person than a, a 38-year-old father of a young baby, and, and onward from there.

So I always knew that that would be, that the obituary version, the feature version would be the, the heart and soul of the book.

00:10:00 Amy Weinstein: And as, as Ruth said, you, you stayed with it for nearly two decades. Did, um... was that without interruption? Did you give yourself a little pause at all?

Mitchell Zuckoff: I, I did. And I, I have done other books. I think the story always stayed with me. I talked about the work that I had done in the immediate aftermath of 9/11 often, particularly the one story that became the, um... the, the test model or the scale model of this book.

- 00:10:33 So after writing the lead story on the news pages for the first two days, I came in the Thursday, September 13, and I pitched my editors on the idea of a narrative that we called "Six Lives." It told the story of six people connected to the first hijacking and the North Tower. And with the help of four amazing reporters, we quickly sort of fanned out and got those stories together.
- 00:11:01 And I put together for a 5,000-word narrative that ran that Sunday. And that story to me was, as much as I was very proud to have written the, the lead story on, on September 11, "Six Lives," in some ways, was to me the, the highlight of my newspaper career. Telling that story under that pressure was our first opportunity to let the heart and soul of the event breathe on page one of the Sunday "Boston Globe."
- 00:11:33 And so that's the one that stayed with me most, and that's the one that... I'm happy he's here. I, I was talking about five years ago or so when, at, at a conference, when my agent, Richard Abate, who, who came to the conference, heard me talking about it. And it was so clear to him, "You're not done with that story. That is living inside you." And that was the, the sort of the, the... the new genesis moment of "Fall and Rise."
- 00:12:06 Amy Weinstein: And, you know, I think in New York, it often, it feels, it's a New York story. It's a D.C. story. But... and Pennsylvania, for sure. But it's also a Boston and, and California story. What was it like to be in Boston at, at the, the newspaper for Boston while you were learning the details of, of Boston's place?
- 00:12:32 Mitchell Zuckoff: It was, it was so present, because... so I live in the, in the city of Newton, just west of Boston. And you find out very quickly that you're one degree removed from so many of your community members who lost someone that day. And then... and I, I teach at Boston University, where 28 people received degrees who, who died that day. And, you know, our offices at "Boston Globe," "The Boston Globe," were on Morrissey Boulevard, about a mile from Logan Airport.

00:12:55 And so, you know, it was very common for us to sort of stand on... we had a roof deck parking lot, and we would watch planes taking off all day if, you know, just if, if you weren't hard on deadline. So it was so present for us. And we realized that, especially on the first two planes, we had so many community members, that we did a smaller version, you know, the, the "Times'" "Portraits of Grief," it was, was brilliantly done.

00:13:35 And if you haven't seen it, these, these wonderful little vignettes about people that were not quite an obituary but just a little, beautiful remembrance. We did versions of that, and because we had fewer than the, the number of New Yorkers who... and New Jersey and Connecticut people, we had just pages upon pages of those. And so that was, that was very present for us.

Amy Weinstein: I kind of want to go back to the investigative journalism...

Mitchell Zuckoff: Sure.

00:14:07 Amy Weinstein: Side of this. It felt to me that the writing you did on the civil and military aviation chapters of the story is both... was so compelling but so extremely disturbing. I don't know what word to use, other than "disturbing." And you did devote quite a few pages to presenting those facts, the people, the weight of their responsibility, and the communication missteps. Can you talk about that a, a little bit more?

00:14:35 Mitchell Zuckoff: Sure, Amy, yes. I realized, I think fairly early on, that that was going to be a central theme, particularly of the, the part one, at, at the outset. The aviation failures, the communication failures, you start... as soon as you, you, you delve into this, and you start... and I wasn't initially wearing my investigative journalism hat when I was thinking about this story.

I was thinking about the human element, but that kept slapping me in the face, and, and I couldn't not tell those stories. You know, when you come

across the fact that the FAA had a, a no-fly list of 12 names on it, and the State Department had a, a list of 60,000 names on its terrorism tip-off list, and it didn't share them with the FAA.

00:15:22

And the FAA's chief... I was reading congressional testimony, and the FAA's chief aviation security expert was unaware that the State Department list even existed. As soon as, an investigative reporter, you hear that kind of thing, you say, "Okay, there's more to it than simply telling the experiences of people. The communications failures, the, the coordination failures have to have their own place in the book." And the trick, if you will, is going to be how I do weave them in without making it into a white paper?

00:16:00

And so that, that became kind of a writing, reporting trick that, that, frankly, it taxed everything... (sighs) everything that I did in this book has its roots in 35 years of journalism. So Spotlight team is in this book. Um... my feature writing is in this book. My previous books, how to figure out how to, you know, how to make that work is all in there. You know, and you, you did not lose, in any way, the essential humanity of the people doing those important jobs in those places...

Mitchell Zuckoff: Thank you.

Amy Weinstein: That, that day. And I think that's... a, a gift.

00:16:34

Mitchell Zuckoff: Thank you. I, I want to say one thing about that. Because what... I was thinking very consciously about that. Because I understood, and I knew in my, in my heart, in my mind, in the front of mind, that the people who made these mistakes, they didn't mean to. This was not their... I... this goes back to... my, my previous book was this book about Benghazi, "13 Hours." And I knew that there were failures on that day, and I reported them, and some became controversial.

00:17:08 But I also knew that the real responsibility for the attack did not lie with the C.I.A. base chief, or, you know, the, the failure to communicate from the State Department why we have the... you know. They made mistakes, and those are lessons that we can learn. But the real responsibility lies with the people who did this.

00:17:30 And so for me, even as I focused on the F.A.A. communications failures, or the military-response issues, um... I, I felt I needed to point out the humanity of a Peter Zalewski, the... who, who was directing Flight 11 and Flight 175 out of Boston. I needed to focus on the humanity of a guy I came to know pretty well, Major Kevin Nasypany, who was directing the air-military response. These were good people who were put in a terrible situation. I needed... and, and so, by bringing out their, their personal stories, I felt I could honor that.

00:18:09 Amy Weinstein: You know, and I don't know if you... I think you did speak to some of the pilots who were scrambled.

Mitchell Zuckoff: Yes.

Amy Weinstein: You know, the one or two that I've spoken with, they feel a deep sense of responsibility themselves, that somehow they were at fault, that they, they didn't do, do everything and, and...

00:18:31 Mitchell Zuckoff: That's exactly right. And, and... and they live with it. And, and many of those same pilots did go on to serve in Iraq and did go on to serve, you know, in, in the military theater that followed these events. And a lot of them did so quite bravely. I think they did all they could. But they simply weren't given the opportunity. And... (sighs) I... almost for them, I'm happy-- "happy" is not the right word-- that they weren't faced with that choice of, "If you were," you know... "If you're tailing a hijacked civilian plane that you believe," that is really... and I, and I talk about it as, in the book as, you know, the old, you know, the, the moral quandary of the train problem of, "Do you derail the train, knowing you're going to kill one, or do you," you know... that's just a, a terrible place to be.

00:19:23 Amy Weinstein: It's a choiceless choice.

Mitchell Zuckoff: Yes.

Amy Weinstein: I think. You know, I noticed, um, and, and you mentioned this a few minutes ago, you also were not afraid to tackle head-on issues about the construction of the World Trade Center, the placement of the fire stairs, the fire retardants, communications to people inside the buildings that day. And did you do that as well without accusation or without anger. Um... I guess maybe you've answered it, but answer it again. How did you do that?

00:19:58 Mitchell Zuckoff: Yeah, that's... that took me a while. I'm not, I'm not a structural engineer. I'm not a... you know, I've read some plans. But... so it, it took a lot of work to figure that out. And I understood, I, I came to understand how the building code and the switch in the building code was sort of happening, unfolding as the buildings were going up. And... and how the Port Authority of New York and New Jersey sort of took advantage of that, to, to maybe put in one fewer stairway or, or several fewer stairways than... and, and not have a, a fire stairway.

00:20:36 But they didn't do it thinking that they were going to be endangering people. I think there were failures, and, and I, I felt obliged to point them out, again, not to ever suggest that, that an engineer was responsible for the collapse, or the engineer was... an engineer, you know, a particular person who designed it. This was an opportunity for us to say, "Okay, this happened. And look what it cost us." And if we're not going to look at it for 9/11, if we're not going to say, "What are we doing wrong now," in some of these, you know, these pencil-thin buildings going up, then, then shame on us. But, but not shame on them.

00:21:19 Amy Weinstein: And on 9/11 the Port Authority lost... itself, lost so much. It, they, it lost people, and it lost it, its home.

Mitchell Zuckoff: Yes.

Amy Weinstein: It, they were their buildings, so.

Mitchell Zuckoff: Exactly.

Amy Weinstein: You know, we were talking about this before on the phone last week, and again today, I really felt that you and I, or you and the museum staff, we were traveling the same path. Um, we, as we collected objects, we... as we were planning the exhibitions, recording oral histories, um... we had to decide whose stories we, we could tell and whose stories we maybe couldn't tell. How, how did you make those hard decisions?

00:22:08

Mitchell Zuckoff: Those are the hardest, because the book rises-- I'm sorry, the book rises and falls on those decisions, if you will. If I make the wrong ones, people don't come along for the ride, if, you know, if, if you do it wrong. People are not compelled to keep reading, because they're not connected to the individuals you're writing about. So it started with a, just a, a giant net of, you know, capturing hundreds of these stories. And then plotting them in and finding... Tracy Kidder, the wonderful author, has a great line. He says, "You go where the light is."

00:22:46

And I've always adopted that, I've always quoted Tracy about that. And sometimes it's the light of the story, just the way it connects to you. And sometimes it's, "Will this person be accessible to me? Will this person consent to talk to me and trust me enough to do this?" Because I can't really do what I do if I'm doing it at a remove or based on other people's work. Um... so those choices drove the, the work for, for probably almost three years, yeah.

00:23:20

Amy Weinstein: You know, and maybe this is a good opportunity to say that some of those people that you interviewed are, are here with us

tonight. I saw Chief Jonas. Um... Brian Clark. Would you like to do the honors of introducing them?

Mitchell Zuckoff: Thank you.

Amy Weinstein: And the others?

Mitchell Zuckoff: I, I would love to. It's, it's such a privilege to be able to share with you some of the people who I was able to write about. And I'm, I'm so honored that they joined us tonight for the launch of this book. And just in, in alphabetical order, I want to mention them. Uh... my friend Brian Clark is here. I know he's in the back somewhere.

00:23:58 There he is. Brian was in the South Tower. And, and I want to be really clear, so I'll be repeating this word a lot. They won't say it, so I will say it. These are five heroic individuals. And Brian, he, he saved Stan Praitnath and Stanley in turn, Brian says, saved him. And I, I won't tell the whole story, but I, I hope you'll read it, and you'll get to know what a remarkable man that, that Brian Clark is. So thank you for being here.

00:24:32 Uh... They're all special, but Elaine Duke, right here, up front. We'll, we'll save the applause, we'll applaud them at... all at the end. Elaine was on the 88th floor of the North Tower. And her heroic journey down the B stairwell in the North Tower, on her own two feet, after suffering terrible injuries, uh, is, just, is to me, just one of the great inspirations I've ever been privileged to hear. And I have to mention one other thing about Elaine. This is Elaine's first return visit to the World Trade Center since September 2000... 2001. Welcome.

00:25:26 Deputy... FDNY Deputy Chief Jay Jonas was also in the B stairwell. Some of you may have heard the story of Jay and his men, the, the extraordinary members of Ladder Six, and their remarkable behavior when they stopped to rescue Josephine Harris, under Jay's direction and his leadership.

- 00:25:53 And Jay is the first one to sort of very quickly make sure that I, we point not to Jay but to his whole team and to the men with him, and that's very characteristic of, of Jay's heroism. And we, we introduced Jay and Elaine earlier. And we're pretty sure they passed each other when Jay was on his way up and Elaine was on their... her way down that day in the B stairwell. So it's, it's an honor to have Jay here.
- 00:26:26 Cecilia Lillo. Hi, Cecilia. Cecilia is here representing herself and also FDNY paramedic Carlos Lillo, her husband. They were both there that day. Cecilia survived and heroically got out and got herself and two friends out down the... several stairways in the North Tower, into the concourse, where, tragically, her two friends were swept away from her.
- 00:27:05 Cecilia, the whole time, had been telling her, her husband, Carlos to not come up. He was insisting he was going to come up and get her. But she had insisted that she would come out and find him. He was saving people that morning, and there are photos to prove that. And Carlos did not survive. So she is here both as a survivor and a family member of a hero. Thank you.
- 00:27:36 And the last among us, last of the group, but, but hardly the least, is my friend Chris Young. Chris Briggs Young was... didn't belong in the North Tower. He was delivering... he was making a delivery that day, and he was on his way down in the elevator when the elevator stopped. And he spent... he was one of the last people in New York, maybe the last person in New York, who was still conscious, who didn't know what had happened on 9/11.
- 00:28:10 He spent 90 minutes, roughly, inside, alone inside an elevator in the North Tower, keeping himself calm, keeping himself collected, keeping his, his thoughts together. Um, I think many of us would not have handled it nearly as bravely as Chris did. I know... I'm not sure I would have.

00:28:30 And he got out just moments before... he, he, he wouldn't give up, and that perseverance saved his life. Because near end of the North Tower's life, he kept pushing and pushed open the elevator doors just minutes before the tower came down, and got out, and literally was almost swept away by the collapse. So will you please join me in thanking them for sharing their stories.

(applause)

This... This book would never have been possible, even remotely, without the five people in our presence tonight. I'm so grateful.

00:29:23 Amy Weinstein: And so am I. Um, I... and, you know, I feel also privileged to have recorded with Cece, to have had her share her story, her... her love of, of Carlos, her, her growing up, her survival in 1993 and again in 2001; to have recorded with, with Jay and to have recorded with Brian's other half, with, with Stanley, um... But, you know, I think the process is a little different. I am wondering if you could talk about how you, how... I will confess. They, they will tell you if I don't, I sometimes tell them I'm not a journalist. I sometimes...

Mitchell Zuckoff: Don't worry.

00:30:12 Amy Weinstein: I sometimes tell them I'm, I... It's the only example I have to help them relax, to have them feel comfortable, that it is not my goal to exploit them. And I don't know, they'll tell you if it was effective or not. But, but how, how did you get them to... how did you gain their trust, get them to, to open up? And, and how much time?

00:30:36 Mitchell Zuckoff: As much as they would give me. Um... in, in each case, I think, with the exception of Elaine, I think I sent an email to everyone, uh, explaining who I was and what I was trying to do and linking that "Six Lives" story to it as a way to show them, I think, my thinking, I, I, I can't speak for them, but, "I've been here since the beginning. I, I've wrote

about this. This is what I try to do. I try to humanize these stories. I try to do it respectfully and truthfully and completely."

00:31:12

I, I, I try to make clear in that first email I'm not, I'm not here to rush them. This is, this is a, a project, when they're ready. And, and I, I'm very fortunate that, that all of them did. With, with Elaine, I don't think she'll mind me saying, it took a little longer. (chuckles) I sent Elaine letters. I had, I was, it was a one-way pen pal for a while.

(laughter)

00:31:42

And I would call her every now and again, every few months. And... and she never told me to stop calling. She would always say, "I got your letters. I got your letter. I'm thinking about it." And I was so grateful for that. And then one day, many months after we first corresponded or I corresponded, it was a summer night. My wife, Suzanne, and I were out on our patio, and I got a call, and it was Elaine. And she said, "I think I'm ready to talk with you." And it was just a matter of the time.

00:32:20

It was just... um, I think her sisters, who are, who are here, had encouraged her to, to share her story, because it should be remembered. And she should be remembered. And so I'll... I don't know why they trusted me. I'll let them tell you. But I, but I hope they feel it was well placed.

Amy Weinstein: I'm sure that they do. And, you know, you, you also made sure to talk about what was happening inside the Pentagon and, and in Shanksville. And I thought some of the most riveting writing was with those Pentagon survivors who were simultaneously also responders.

00:33:02

You really captured their grit, their determination to, to live and to help others. That's a very different kind of community, that military community, and I think their story is, is less well known. Was your process any different? Or how, how did you penetrate that community?

Mitchell Zuckoff: That was, that was different. And I needed to establish bona fides, essentially, with them. And one or two people sort of had to sort of give me their stamp of approval before... I, I felt it was, it was very much a, a daisy-chain of... well, I spoke to Marilyn Wills, Lieutenant Colonel Marilyn Wills.

00:33:42 And once it was evident to other people that I had spoken with Marilyn, they... you sort of get this kind of nod of, "Well, he made it through this former MP, this lieutenant... this tough lieutenant colonel, and Marilyn had him at his house... her house."

Um... and then I was able to get a tour of the Pentagon... because of that, I was able to get a tour of the Pentagon, to see the outer ring where it all happened. Because I can't tell my story as well if I can't visualize it. I had been in the towers. I had, you know, I kind of had a physical sense of them. (clears throat) And so that was essential. But that was a slower process, because the military is more of a closed community. I am not ex-military. I didn't have that, that, that entree.

00:34:31 And then... and, and, and they are, I think... not that the folks here were in any way aggrandizing. They were so modest, and they were so, you know, "Please don't focus on me. Let me tell you about this person." And so that added time to the process. Um... I'm thinking of, you may be thinking of... Dave Tarantino, is an example.

00:34:54 He's a navy, navy doctor who ran toward the flames, and Dave put me off for the longest time, till after I had talked to another guy, a former admiral, Dave... Dave Thomas, and the family of a victim, Jack Panches, and then Jerry Henson. And only after I got all of these other people did Dave Tarantino, who is, is a remarkable hero...

00:35:21 He's a name every... to me, every American should know this name. Um... only then did Dave finally agree to meet me. And, and he was great, but it was, it was, it was pulling teeth. And here's a guy who, who, again, you

know, if you look at the book, you'll see the story. You know, Dave could have been a hero that day by going to the, the center courtyard of the Pentagon and, and, and triaging victims.

00:35:46

He's a doctor. Instead, he took this navy ethos that every sailor is a firefighter and ran toward the flames. And he gets to the A.E. drive, which say ring inside the Pentagon, and he sees a hole, and he goes in, because there are people in there. And he goes and he finds that Dave Thomas is struggling to help Jerry Henson. And he remembers, I mean, Dave Tarantino had fallen out of a plane in college, and his parachute failed to open, he, and he was a broken person as a 19-year-old young man.

00:36:27

He remembered what it felt like to be completely helpless, and he knew that. He crawls into this room, on his back, leg presses a desk and book cases off of Jerry Henson, and pulls Jerry across his body and pushes him toward the door. I'd be telling that story to strangers.

(laughter)

Mitchell Zuckoff: I would be... you would all, you know, I would be the guy on the street saying, "Did I tell you what I did on 9/11?"

(laughter)

Mitchell Zuckoff: Have you got a minute?" Um, and he... it's pulling teeth with Dave. But it deserves to be told.

00:37:07

Amy Weinstein: It does. And I don't want to give it away.

Mitchell Zuckoff: I'm sorry.

Amy Weinstein: But Commander Powell, and Colonel Grunewald and Martha Carden, they're just jaw-dropping, breathtaking stories of humanity.

Mitchell Zuckoff: I have to give a shout-out to Colonel Grunewald, who was the one... Bob Grunewald was the one who, who, who... who got me into the Pentagon. And he trusted me very early. And you know him, and he's just such a, a wonderful, warm-hearted guy. And he's the one who gave me the tour of the Pentagon. So I really thank you for mentioning him.

00:37:45

Amy Weinstein: Oh, good, and, you know, I just, I want to cover the, the same ground but in the Shanksville-area community. We were talking before, I think you said you visited the, the memorial, the visitor's center. Do you want to talk a little bit about that aspect?

Mitchell Zuckoff: Sure. You know, Amy is a, a master oral historian, and so I, I got to connect with the people who have done the history, the oral histories, Donna Glessner and above all Kathie Schaffer, and they were my entree into, into Shanksville. These two women, who were typical, you know, women doing their work.

00:38:29

Nancy... pardon me, Donna was working in her family's hardware company, I believe. And, and Kathie was, was working as a, a nurse. And the plane lands there, and they take on completely different lives. And, and Kathie Schaffer has done a... rough... going on 800 oral histories surrounding Flight 93. And she agreed to trust me, and she... those two became my guides to Shanksville. And they introduced me to everyone I needed to meet. And they showed me around. And because I had their stamp of approval, I think people were willing to say, "Okay, he's a journalist. He's, you know, a big-city journalist."

Amy Weinstein: From Boston.

00:39:11 Mitchell Zuckoff: From Boston, you know. I had everything against me. "But Kathie seems to like him. So we'll, we'll let him stick around." And... and, that's... as you know, that is really, it's, it's such a small community, and it's such a tight-knit community.

And, um, the people of that town have such a feeling of responsibility to the story, that they... if, if I had come in there, if anyone had come in there in any kind of transactional way of taking the story, you would have been drummed out. You would have been ridden out on a rail. It was understood that, you know, this was going to take time. This was going to take multiple visits. This was going to take dinners.

00:39:57 And I was thrilled. I was happy they, they allowed that. Uh... Because they feel like this was visited upon their community, and they have to preserve it in the memory of the 40 heroes of Flight 93. And they have grown very close to the families. And the people of the town are very, very protective of the families of Flight 93. And so there's a real connection there.

00:40:24 And so when you go to Shanksville and I, I urge you to, because I think the Flight 93 memorial is really a remarkable, beautiful, sacred space, and, and a different telling than, than the incredible story you tell here, but its own sort of valuable addition to, to the story, to the narrative. And they introduced me, and one guy who I, I never got to talk to as much as I wish I could have was, was Wally Miller, the, the coroner, who played an enormously valuable role, but I had to include him in the book.

00:40:58 So I, I, I cobbled things together with Wally. But ultimately it was, it was Terry Schaffer, the volunteer fire chief, who became the center of, of the telling of, of the Shanksville story for me. And, also, one of my favorite people in that area is Linda Shepley, and I don't know if you know Linda.

Amy Weinstein: I'm not sure. She... does she have the stuff on her lawn, the memorial, on her lawn?

Mitchell Zuckoff: No. I know who you're thinking of.

Amy Weinstein: That's somebody else, yeah.

00:41:27

Mitchell Zuckoff: Yeah. Linda lives up... outside Shanksville in Stoystown. And she is the woman who was... she was hanging her laundry that day...

Amy Weinstein: Oh.

Mitchell Zuckoff: When Flight 93 came overhead, low and, and banking. And she was one of probably two or three final witnesses. She had the longest view of its final descent. And so Linda and, and her husband invited me to come to their house and stand in their backyard and see where she was hanging the laundry that day.

00:42:02

And that's how that chapter opens, because, again, you... as a writer, as somebody who does this, sometimes you're looking for that unusual way in that allows the reader to, to sort of... it's, that's the proxy more the reader, that all of us did not experience what our five guests did of that levels of drama, but just the idea that on a, on a normal, sunny day you went outside to hang laundry, you... they were planning on trading in their car at the Chevy dealer, so, you know, he was off work for the day, watching the "Today" show, and they knew that was happening in New York.

00:42:41

But from Shanksville or Stoystown to New York, it, it feels like a million miles away. It's a five-hour drive, it's... But it's another world. So they weren't going to go about their business any differently, until this visited upon them.

Amy Weinstein: I think I could talk to you for another hour or so about, about Kathie Schaffer, about Donna Glessner, about Terry Schaffer. I have to hand it to you for getting them to, to open up. They're... they have

always been very clear to, to us that they were the means through which the story about what happened on the planes could be told.

00:43:27

So we'll, we'll save further talk on that topic. But before I turn it over for questions to the audience, I do want to go back to, to where they feel the, their sense of responsibility is to the people on the planes, on, on all the flights. In the museum we do try to, to, to share some of the phone calls that were made from inside the towers, from the planes. It is not easy to, to listen to, to those calls. And it's my sense that you also listened to the cockpit voice recorder on Flight 93, or?

Mitchell Zuckoff: I... that is... I could only have the transcript.

Amy Weinstein: The transcript, okay.

00:44:09

Mitchell Zuckoff: Yes, that was limited to the family members, because you can... in the Moussaoui trial, that was introduced, but the, the actual tape recording remains classified.

Amy Weinstein: But it sounds like you did listen to the, the, the phone calls that the...

Mitchell Zuckoff: Oh, every, every one.

Amy Weinstein: Can you, I mean, that was very challenging to, to... it's very... it's very rewarding to hear, to, to learn the beauty of, of people, but it's very hard to listen to. Can you talk about that a little bit more?

00:44:41

Mitchell Zuckoff: You, you phrased it perfectly. It, it... I remember, um... I think one of the first ones that I heard with the person was Julie, was Julie Sweeney, um... now Julie Sweeney Roth. So I went... early on, I was

doing reporting on the planes, and I went... she was living on Cape Cod at the time, where she had lived.

00:45:03 So this is Julie Sweeney Roth. Her husband, Brian "Moose" Sweeney, was on Flight 175, the second plane. And... and Moose was a former fighter pilot. He was a Top Gun instructor. You know, he knew that was going on, and he got off a, a voicemail off to her from the, the phone behind his seat. And it's, it's in the book. And Julie shared it with me. When I'm, I'm standing there in her, her beautiful home, and, and, and first I realized... before she even played it, she started speaking it.

00:45:38 She, she knows... she knows it by heart, every word, every inflection. This was probably 15 years later when I first met her. And, and then, you know, then I... then to hear it is a powerful experience, because this was, this was an incredibly personal, beautiful message from Brian, from Moose, to, to Julie, that she, that she incredibly shared with the world as part of her tribute to him. So I could talk about each one of these, but, but that's one that, that is particularly meaningful.

00:46:16 Amy Weinstein: And you also... any of you can, all of you can listen to it. It's on a timeline that the museum has created about 9/11. And... I highly... it will be a challenge, but I, I would encourage you each to, to, to do that. I think maybe I better give the audience a little time to ask questions. Ruth, I'm not sure how we want to do that, if you have the microphone or... Does anybody...?

Woman: I have a question. In researching your book...

Ruth Dewa Ayu: Could you wait for the microphone?

00:47:01 Woman: Oh, I'm sorry. My name is Kathy, I'm a family member. I lost my husband that day in the towers.

Mitchell Zuckoff: I'm so sorry.

Woman: Thank you. I'm wondering, in researching your book, did you use any information from the 9/11 Commission report?

Mitchell Zuckoff: I did.

Woman: Good.

Mitchell Zuckoff: Yes, I did. You know, I, I double-checked as much as possible. Is there, is there something in your question I should know?

Woman: No, just, just the knowledge that I was one of the maybe 25 families that got the Commission going.

00:47:32

Mitchell Zuckoff: Oh, wow.

Woman: So when you probably came in, it was published, and you were able...

Mitchell Zuckoff: Yes.

Woman: Yes, yes.

Mitchell Zuckoff: Oh, thank you for doing that.

Woman: But it was very challenging. Our government did not want us to have a commission.

Mitchell Zuckoff: I know it.

Woman: And it was very hard fought.

Mitchell Zuckoff: Wow, that was very brave of you.

Woman: Because we knew a lot of information that was going to come out in that commission report.

00:47:52 Mitchell Zuckoff: Well, I'll, I'll tell you two things. I had the great pleasure of working very closely with John Farmer, who is the lead counsel of the 9/11 Commission. And John served as a fact checker, and he vetted my manuscript, because I wanted to go to the... I wanted to put it through the hardest, most rigorous challenge I could. And so John then turned me on to a fellow named Miles Kara.

Woman: Yes.

00:48:19 Mitchell Zuckoff: And so Miles Kara is a retired army intelligence colonel who served as an investigator for the 9/11 Commissioner... Commission. And I think Miles knows more about the events in the air than I think anybody on the planet. And Miles put me through the wringer. He, we went on a, on a line-by-line review of the manuscript, and it was... I'm, I'm so grateful to both of them. And so, yes, so, so the, the work of the commission absolutely breathes inside my book.

00:48:52 Woman: That's great. And one last tidbit. One of the ways we got this through was we researched the Pearl Harbor Commission.

Mitchell Zuckoff: Wow.

Woman: Our government did not want that to be made, either, but it did come out, and it took many years for that to come out. And the major part of that was that the navy and the army would not talk to each other. So the intel was somewhat there also for that incident.

Mitchell Zuckoff: That's tragic, wow.

Woman: Thank you.

Mitchell Zuckoff: A lot to learn. Thank you so much.

00:49:26 >> MAN: Hello, my name is Jeffrey Collins. I know eight people who died that day. And probably because we're Irish. So, but... when they opened the memorial, I came down, and although there were machines where I could have located the names, I couldn't really deal with that kind of mechanical machine.

00:49:46 So I took to walking around the two squares. So I looked at every name, and I eventually found the eight names I was looking for. But in addition to that, I kept getting a terrible kick in the stomach. I kept coming across women's names that said they were pregnant. And I... I don't remember that being pointed out shortly afterwards.

00:50:15 But I often think that there were fathers of those children, there were potential grandparents, and even potential great-grandparents who lost these unborn children. Is there a subgroup that gets support or is it ever acknowledged that people who were really in the background, lost out a lot that day by losing out their own future prodigy?

00:50:41 Mitchell Zuckoff: That's a great question. I'm not aware of any specific help for people who lost potential grandchildren or potential children or, you know, fathers who lost potential children. I do write in the book about several women who were pregnant. I tell the story of a flight

attendant who was sort of hoping to spring that news on her parents that day. And, and I mention, I think I, I, I count the full number of women who were, who were known to be pregnant who died. But I'm not sure, I hope they do find support.

>> MAN: Thank you.

Mitchell Zuckoff: Thank you.

Amy Weinstein: There's somebody up front.

00:51:29

Mitchell Zuckoff: Yeah, hi.

Woman: I'm Liz, I'm a former student.

Mitchell Zuckoff: Great to see you.

Woman: You as well, congratulations. I am, well, I have two things. I'm going to be the annoying person who shares a story and then asks the question.

Mitchell Zuckoff: Be my guest.

Woman: I still remember, I think now it was more than ten years ago in class when you... we all read the "Six Lives" story. And that's one of my, like, light-flashbulb memories. So I couldn't miss this. And then were you working on the book at that time? Or when did you start? What year did everything kick off?

00:52:07 Mitchell Zuckoff: It was... yeah, I...it's a great question. And... (sighs) I guess in a way I was working on it at the time. But not officially.

Woman: Yeah.

Mitchell Zuckoff: I was writing a different book. But it was always, it was always front of mind. And when I was sharing it with your class, I, I would share it almost inevitably, any time I talked about narrative writing, I, I don't make my work the center of the class.

00:52:34 But to show this is a story of a deadline narrative. This is how we do this work, and it just... um... but I didn't start working full-time on this story till, until... this book till after 2014, till after I had finished the Benghazi book. But I think it was, it was always there. And I'm just, I'm so grateful that Richard, you know, kicked me in the pants and said, "Get to work."

Woman: Great, thank you. And one more question being, what made you feel so compelled to tell these stories?

00:53:06 Mitchell Zuckoff: Yeah. I felt once you, once you come up with an idea like this, or once you, you are sort of exposed to an idea like this, you, you can't not do it. You, you, it becomes this, this responsibility, that, "Okay, I have, I think, the ability," and I knew, and I have a wonderful support group from HarperCollins who's here, my friends, my family, my HarperCollins family. I've got a fabulous publisher who would support me doing this, who would, you know, give me the kind of years-long, you know, support and help to make this happen.

00:53:42 And, and so I had the ability, I had the support, and then when you realize that we're at this, this sort of, I think, this, this key moment in time, it's really a break point, where we have an entire generation with no memories of 9/11, and we have this entire generation of people with memories that are starting to fade. And before they're gone, we got to put those two together. And then there will be another generation

coming up in a minute. And so you realize that if, if I don't do this, maybe somebody else will, but maybe not.

00:54:20

You know, it's funny, Amy and I were talking earlier, not every publisher was ready. Some, you know, there was a huge rush of 9/11 books in the immediate aftermath. And then publishers said, you know, "We're good."

Amy Weinstein: "It's enough."

Mitchell Zuckoff: Yeah. And, and then, but that didn't feel right to me, because there wasn't one book that tried to capture the entire narrative. And so when I had that idea and I had these opportunities, and then you realize, and it's already happening, people are going to pass. Two enormously important sources for me, Jerry Henson, whose story I mentioned to you, who was trapped in the Pentagon, Jerry died last April. And his wife, Kathy, called me a month later and told me.

00:55:10

And I just was in touch with her a few days ago. He's going to be buried next week, because it takes... you know, because Arlington Cemetery burials are really backed up. Jerry's going to be buried in Arlington on May 10. Um... and so no one's going to get his story again, sorry to say. So what's there is there. And, and Lee Hanson, who... you know Lee. And his family was aboard Flight 175. His son, Peter, daughter-in-law, Sue Kim, and granddaughter Christine, were on 175.

00:55:46

And Peter got off a call to Lee, got off two calls, in fact, to Lee, from the plane. And the first plane he's telling Lee, "Call the police. Call the, call the airline. Tell them what's happening." And then he calls back and reaches his father as the, the plane is, is approaching the, the, the South Tower. Lee died in November.

00:56:10

I, I shared a book with his, his widow. I was in their home, and Lee and Eunice invited me up to Peter's boyhood bedroom. And so I'm, I'm... you know, I'm spending a very long day, a 12-hour day, with these people.

And then following up with multiple calls and emails and fact checks. And, tragically, Lee's gone. And so if I don't do this, it... there's an awareness of a story like this. It's not that someone else couldn't have done it, and I hope there will be future versions of this story. But it can't be like this. Thank you, Liz.

00:56:52

Amy Weinstein: I'm wondering if Jay or Cece or, or Elaine, if any of the people that you spent so many hours interviewing, if they have any questions that... that they would like to ask you. Or Chris?

Mitchell Zuckoff: Or Brian? Oh, yes, sir.

Amy Weinstein: Oh, Brian, okay.

Mitchell Zuckoff: Brian has a question.

Brian Clark: What's next?

Mitchell Zuckoff: Oh, jeez. He's sitting right behind my publisher. So I know they put him up to this.

(laughter)

00:57:22

Mitchell Zuckoff: It is... I'm actually very happy to say that this is the first time in my... in 20 years where I'm taking a little bit of a, a gap. This book is, is so meaningful to me, that it was the, the, the kind of book where, despite Richard's encouragement to, to get on to something else, this one I'm going to sit with for a while. And I've been chasing stories for 35 years. I'm going to let one find me next.

00:57:56 Amy Weinstein: Well, maybe that's a nice transition moment. Is there one more question? Okay.

Mitchell Zuckoff: This is another former student. I train my students to ask questions.

Amy Weinstein: Okay.

(laughter)

Amy Weinstein: As long as you didn't plant the question.

Mitchell Zuckoff: I did not, no, no, I have never seen this woman before in my life.

00:58:16 Woman: Hey, I'm Katelyn Shiffer. I am a former student. So I wonder, just because in today's day and age, with the news cycle, there seems to be so much news that's in the same vein as 9/11 emotionally, where you have, like, the Sri Lanka bombings that happened recently. You have the New Zealand shooting that happened recently. So I wonder, how do you think we can maintain the emotional resonance of events like this and that are similar in, you know, emotional impact to society across, you know, future generations?

00:58:52 Mitchell Zuckoff: That's a great question. I wish I had the answer. It troubles me. I mean, how many, what of... somebody correct me if I'm wrong. The numbers from Las Vegas, 58 and 500? Like, 58 dead, 500 injured by gunshot. And we're not even talking about Las Vegas. I mean, is... like... so I'm not sure what the answer is.

00:59:14 I'm troubled by it, that, that are we becoming inured to these kinds of tragedies? Will it take, I mean, Lord forbid, will it take a number like

3,000? Or will it take the kind of live pictures that we had on 9/11 to, to, to wake us from the torpor? I hope not.

00:59:36

Um, and maybe that, maybe that answer really comes back to where you and I met, where... as, as journalists, or as, as training journalists, to be thinking about that thing, that question. How do we make sure that we're not just sort of, you know, feeding into the news cycle and, you know, and it's just more coal into... and then, you know, it burns up quickly, and then we, we feed it in again, and it just keeps an engine running. But, but nobody comes away any smarter or any, any different. So I, I think it's the right question. I, I'm not sure I have an answer.

Amy Weinstein: I think the mic is coming from that side.

01:00:27

Man: You touched on it a little bit. How did you get these brave heroes that ran into the building, the Port Authority, the police, the fire, the first aiders, to talk about their story? I know I've talked to World War II veterans, Vietnam veterans, and they all say, almost to a person, "I did what I had to do, I came home. It was no big deal." And we all know it was a big deal, because a lot of them saved the world for democracy. How did you get these people to finally open up and admit what they did maybe is a big deal?

01:01:03

Mitchell Zuckoff: Thank you, Neil. I.... I... Jay, will you be mad at me if I put you on the spot? What, what made you decide to talk with me? I, I, I wish I knew.

Jay Jonas: You hounded me.

(laughter)

Mitchell Zuckoff: I, I, I can't deny it. You were, you were hesitant.

Jay Jonas: Uh, yeah, yeah, I was. Just, you know, it was, "I got all this to do. Now I got to speak to this guy."

(laughter)

01:01:33 Jay Jonas: And, um... but, you know, I was, I was wondering a couple of questions back, talking about the... the emotional aspect of, of the book, you know. With so many compelling stories that you were going through. I know when I write, you know, stories about fires that have been, have happened in the past, I kind of immerse myself in it. I become part of that story, you know, while I'm writing it. Did you find yourself doing the same thing?

01:02:09 Mitchell Zuckoff: That's a great question. I, I did, absolutely. Jay writes a training manual that I love reading. He sent, he's included me on his list, and I, I get these, these incredible stories of how fires were fought and details and I just, I love when the...it pops up from Captain Jay in my email.

01:02:29 And he does that, he makes you feel what it was like to be in that fire, in a tenement building or in a housing complex or in a bodega, and he does a marvelous job of it. Uh... you, you definitely... more and more journalists are talking now about this idea of secondary trauma, about taking in these, these stories and, and living with them.

01:02:55 You know, I, I have always hesitated to talk about it, because, I mean, I know that I didn't experience anything like what you did, what Elaine, what Chris, what Brian, what Cecilia, of course, did. And so I, I'm very careful about not coming close to equating it.

01:03:15 But, but certainly, I think in a way I almost feel like my wife would answer the question better, because more, more nights than I care to describe, I would be on the phone with somebody late at night or... and, and we'd both be weeping and, and going over a, a, a fact check or telling a story.

And so, yeah, it's in you. But, but I, I manage it I guess I would imagine the way you do, only mine is smaller.

01:03:49

Jay Jonas: Yeah, well, you know, kind of just for everybody to know, the day that we scheduled this, I made sure my calendar was clear, and we had a terrific, a terrific day together.

Mitchell Zuckoff: Thank you. I felt that.

Jay Jonas: And so, and we corresponded since. So it's, it's very... very rewarding for me.

Mitchell Zuckoff: That means the world to me, Jay, thank you.

Amy Weinstein: I think that's maybe a good place to end. I know, I want to give people a chance to... some people have already bought the book, but to buy the book, to, to, to read, and so thank you very, very much for...

Mitchell Zuckoff: Thank you so much.

(applause)