

POINT OF VIEW

# Healing is a shared experience

By Peggy A. Rothbaum and Jill C. Howard

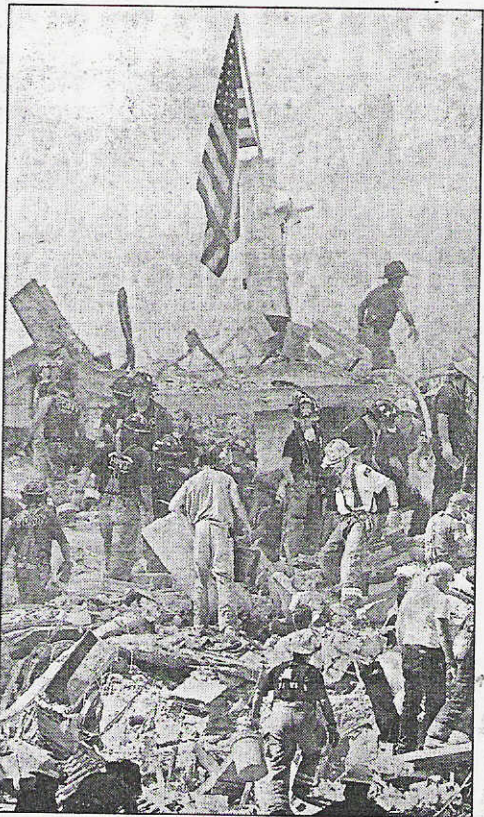
ON SEPT. 13, 2001, an ad ran in The New York Times that said, "New York City and Washington D.C.: Oklahoma cares. You stood with us in our darkest hour. Now we stand with you." It was signed by "The people of Oklahoma and the Oklahoma City National Memorial."

Did we stand with them? We all saw graphic depictions of the physical and emotional devastation wreaked on the people of Oklahoma City on April 19, 1995. As psychologists with a particular interest in trauma and chronic emotional pain, we thought we understood how they felt.

However, it was not until this summer, as the two of us contemplated the second anniversary of Sept. 11 and our own memories and losses, that we realized we didn't really understand what the people of Oklahoma City must have felt. Time goes on, but closure is only an illusion. When is it ever really over?

For a brief period after Sept. 11, the country gathered around New York City (and the other sites), just as was done for the people of Oklahoma City. But by Sept. 22, Bill Keller had published an article in The New York Times lamenting how the typical immediate unity after tragedy soon degenerates into bickering over possessions, the nature of a monument or rebuilding, who has suffered the most and how to tell the very story itself.

Recent news stories in relation to Sept. 11 attest



AP ARCHIVE PHOTO

An American flag is posted in the rubble of the World Trade Center in this Sept. 13, 2001 file photo.

to this phenomenon locally as well as nationally. The initial impact of trauma isn't hard to understand; the unfolding of emotional pain over time is harder to convey.

Clinical evidence and research teach us about the now familiar picture of physical symptoms, depression, divorce, impaired job performance, substance abuse and suicide that's often seen over time as a result of the failure to acknowledge, talk about and understand trauma and losses. The profound impact of childhood trauma is often not revealed until much later in life.

Our own personal experiences have taught us that we don't always understand the suffering of others. Does understanding only truly come for each of us after we, too, have been the target of the same devastation? How do we convey the complexity of unfolding feelings without creating anger, boredom, helplessness or exhaustion instead of under-

standing?

The shared experiences of the people of Oklahoma City and New York City have shown that sometimes the best way to heal is to help others to do the same. To the rest of the country we ask that you continue to stand with us, remember our past and help us move forward as we rebuild our city and our lives.

To the people of Oklahoma City we say this: We finally stand with you.

**Rothbaum is a psychologist in Westfield, N.J. Howard, also a psychologist, is an adjunct full professor at Long Island University in Brooklyn.**

POINT OF VIEW

# Recovery a trip to richer lives

By Ben Brown

IF WE POLLED people in recovery, it's doubtful any ever planned to grow up to become alcoholics or drug addicts.

They are responsible employees, spouses, parents, siblings and friends. Many are at the height of their professions as doctors, lawyers, business

Who wouldn't be better off living a life that includes honesty, forgiveness, acceptance, tolerance and dependence upon a higher power? Who wouldn't be