

Miracle Amidst the Rubble

by Kristin Witt

It would have been a day like any day for 27-year veteran NBC cameraman, Jeff Scarborough. He was on his way to cover a breaking story with reporter Rob Morrison, Scarborough driving as was protocol for a camera and reporter team. It was one of the prettiest days he'd seen in a long time, and again, it would have been much like other days on the job except for two things. Jeff Scarborough was driving to a scene in the heart of New York City and the date was September 11th, 2001.

"This wasn't the first time Jeff had been called to the World Trade Center in the midst of calamity. In 1993, Scarborough was the one cameraman allowed into the parking garage of the North Tower after the Al-Qaeda bombing attack where eight people were killed. He was charged with getting video of the destruction for all of the news stations during a VIP tour of the site."

Scarborough made his way across 49th Street onto the Westside Highway, where he pulled into a convoy of emergency vehicles, all responding to what NBC Control thought was a small plane collision into the North Tower of the World Trade Center. Pulling into

the convoy of police and first responder vehicles guaranteed Jeff and his reporter premier access to the story, as they blew through lights and traffic — and in their business it was all about who got there first.

The convoy was about 60 seconds from the front door of the North Tower when Jeff looked up to see a football field-sized hole near the top of the tower. News came over the radio that the South Tower had been hit by a second plane, and at that moment Jeff Scarborough knew. "They finally figured out

how to bring the towers down," he said, as he yanked his car out of the convoy and pulled back several hundred feet.

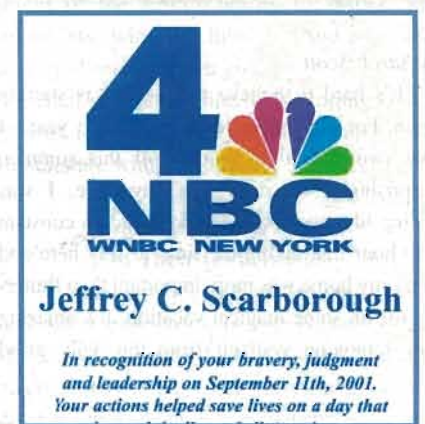
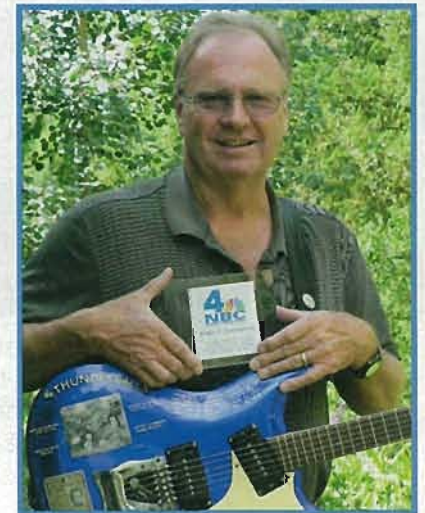
This wasn't the first time Jeff had been called to the World Trade Center in the midst of calamity. In 1993, Scarborough was the

one cameraman allowed into the parking garage of the North Tower after the Al-Qaeda bombing attack where eight people were killed. He was charged with getting video of the destruction for all of the news stations during a VIP tour of the site. He filmed as they all filed in and walked the perimeter of a building-sized crater that had been left by the truck rigged for destruction. As the group assembled in the questionably safe structure, Jeff was instructed to turn off his camera and told that if he revealed what he was about to hear he would be jailed, and until restriction was lifted, he never told a soul.

The truck bomb had been placed in an area that the terrorists hoped would do enough damage to topple the North Tower of the World Trade Center. The tour leader then explained that, if the truck had been only nine feet closer to the corner support on the edge of the crater, it would have destroyed the concrete pillar and the North Tower would have toppled into the South Tower, bringing both buildings down. Had this plan — and the guide assured his entourage that it was the plan — been successful, more than 50,000 people would have been killed inside the towers as they came down, and close to 50,000 more in the fallout.


Jeff Scarborough readily admits that, if, on that fateful September 11th, he had not been privy to that particular piece of information, it would not have occurred to him that this was a terrorist attack and that Al-Qaeda was about to succeed in bringing the World Trade Center to the ground. In a matter of seconds, the scenario flashed through his mind, and he made the decision to pull away from the caravan. With his reporter cursing him for ruining their chance at getting in before the police tape barred them from the scene, Jeff radioed his command center at NBC telling them to set up the live feed truck 500 feet behind his location and to keep reporters behind that line of demarcation. When a reporting team is the first one in on-site in a crisis, they become the "boss" as it were, trusted with decision making for every reporter that will enter the scene. In this case, though the reporter should have been in charge, Jeff trusted his instinct and overrode Morrison's desire to pursue. Though he insists that he was just doing his job, Jeff Scarborough is credited with saving the lives of many reporters on that day, including Morrison's.

Jeff stepped out of his vehicle and began filming the devastated towers as a crew prepared the live feed. The tight shots he was able to capture were the most gut-wrenching he had ever taken, a couple holding hands and crossing themselves just before they jumped, film that he chose not to release out of respect.




Jeff Scarborough displays his award for recognition of his bravery, judgement, and leadership on September 11th, 2001

When Scarborough and a new reporter began a live feed to the station, the reporter's back was to the scene as he tried to explain the chaos of two planes embedded in the upper stories of the Twin Towers. In the midst of the broadcast, Jeff motioned to the reporter to turn around. The South Tower was beginning its descent, the first of the two towers to come down. The reporter dropped his microphone and took off, while Jeff instinctively carrying his camera, literally ran for his life towards the van that housed the live feed equipment and his co-worker, Eddie Alonzo. Scarborough actually pulled Eddie from the van and told him to run as far from the towers as he could, as fast as he could, but Eddie hesitated. Scarborough was already exhausted from his sprint and didn't look like he had much more in him, but Jeff assured his friend that he would take shelter behind a nearby building and urged him to run for his life. Reluctantly, Eddie took off like a track star, while Jeff moved behind a building just as the impenetrable cloud of dust raced down the




Need a Great Elementary School?



Rocky Mountain Academy of Evergreen

Tuition Free Public Charter School
 Class Size: Maximum of 24 in K-2nd with 25 in 3rd-5th
 Core Knowledge achievement-oriented curriculum
 Individual attention
 Highly qualified committed teachers
 Strong parent involvement
 A John Irwin School of Excellence

Come experience the unique community that students and families enjoy at RMAE!



Kate Collier 303-670-1070 ext. 100 kcollier@rmae.org www.rmae.org



“At the heart of things, Jeff wants readers to know that he is a musician, and he has moved on with his life. He loves his music and the privilege he has of playing with some very talented people here in the mountains of Colorado. The Scarboroughs found themselves embraced by the community almost upon their arrival, and Jeff says that returning to his roots as a musician has gone a long way towards helping him heal.”

street, flinging deadly debris in every direction. When Jeff emerged, covered in gray dust from behind the “shelter” building, he had no idea that the car he had been driving just 1500 feet in front of him was now partially hidden under the wheel of a Boeing 767.

Staggered, Jeff emerged, carrying on his shoulder a \$50,000 piece of equipment, not counting the attached mega-lens. His camera allowed him to focus on the North Tower, which was still standing, though in flames and missing a good portion of several floors. Knowing the incident wasn’t over, Jeff instinctively started to film, thinking that his might be the only camera getting the footage that would record for the world the events of the catastrophic day. And he was right. Scarborough’s footage is what all of us have seen time and again, our understanding of September 11th. His are the tight-in shots of the steel beams in the upper stories literally beginning to melt. Seeing this, he realized that the thing nobody thought possible was about to happen for a second time that day, as the North Tower began to come down on itself. The cloud of dust that had not completely settled from the South Tower was now growing at an enormous rate, as Jeff once again took shelter behind the building he now thought of as his safe harbor.

When the deafening roar lessened and the eerie silence of a graveyard overtook the streets, Jeff Scarborough stepped out from behind the “shelter” building. He was coated in several layers of gray dust, his breathing was shutting down from the oxygen deprived atmosphere and the particles of debris that he had actually pulled into his lungs, he was going into shock and he was utterly alone. Nowhere to go and no idea how to get there, he looked up to discover yet another of the many unlikely miracles of the day. The crew from his station that he had worked with enough times to think of

them as family were suddenly there beside him and together they began the two-hour trek to safety, plucking him from what might have been his own demise.

It was two years before Jeff’s respiratory system cleared enough to call his breathing “normal,” although he still struggles from time to time with a cough. The day was physically debilitating enough that Jeff was not allowed to go down to Ground Zero in the aftermath, so NBC assigned him to St. Patrick’s Cathedral, covering the memorial services of the fallen firefighters, which were coming at three and four a day. After a time, Jeff and his wife Alice decided it was enough, and they moved to Conifer, Colorado, where they live today.

At the heart of things, Jeff wants readers to know that he is a musician, and he has moved on with his life. He loves his music and the privilege he has of playing with some very talented people here in the mountains of Colorado. The Scarboroughs found themselves embraced by the community almost upon their arrival, and Jeff says that returning to his roots as a musician has gone a long way towards helping him heal.

We are honored to remember with Jeff and Alice Scarborough the horrific events of September 11th, 2001 and grateful that they have chosen to share their story, especially as the Big Chili Cook-Off approaches. The Big Chili is all about thanking our mountain-area Volunteer Firefighters, and this, the 10th anniversary of the event, happens to land on the 10th anniversary of the day our country was attacked by a terror we simply would never have believed. In that attack, 343 firefighters lost their lives as they ran into the fray in hopes of saving others — and the Big Chili has the privilege of remembering them and their sacrifice this September 11th. When you join us at the Lake House on that

Sunday, you will enjoy Jeff’s band, the Bucktones, as well as Joe Bye and Friends who will be featured on our second stage at the entry gates.

Jeff Scarborough graciously recounted for us the difficulty of that impossible day, and when he was done, he showed us an award he received from NBC. On it these words are inscribed.

“In recognition of your bravery, judgment, and leadership on September 11th, 2001. Your actions helped save lives on a day that changed the lives of all Americans.”

“I’ve received much recognition for my work as a cameraman, including several Emmy Awards,” Jeff says solemnly. “But none of them hold a candle to this one.”



Discover Evergreen’s Other Middle School

Rocky Mountain Academy of Evergreen

A place they can grow responsibly

- Tuition Free Public Charter School
- Comprehensive High School preparation
- Highly qualified committed teachers
- Maximum class size 25 students
- Strong parent involvement

A place to call their own



Kate Collier 303-670-1070 ext. 100 kcollier@rmae.org
www.rmae.org