

Commentary**9-11 Widows Want All Our Safety; Let's Listen Up**

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By Kimberly Gadette  
WeNews commentator

The "World Trade Center" movie is showing amid a heightened terror alert, shaky ceasefire in Lebanon and relentless bloodshed in Iraq. What the world needs now, says Kimberly Gadette, is more attention to the policies the 9/11 widows fought so hard for.

**Editor's Note:** The following is a commentary. The opinions expressed are those of the author and not necessarily the views of Women's eNews.

(WOMENSENEWS)--A lovely blond mother of four folds a load of clothes.

A spunky dark-haired woman in her third trimester is surrounded by her multi-ethnic, loving family.

The camera cuts away to the husbands buried in rubble; then back to the wives waiting at home, tears glistening.

The blond does more laundry. The expectant mother tucks her cherubic 4-year-old daughter into bed and proclaims that the name of her next child will be just as her husband had wished.



Kimberly Gadette

Loving, supportive and pretty to boot. These women are creamy-skinned angels. Upon closer examination, there just may be soft-lens halos hovering over their heads.

The women, played by Maria Bello and Maggie Gyllenhaal, are featured in Oliver Stone's, "World Trade Center," which debuted nationwide August 9. In real life they are Donna McLoughlin and Allison Jimeno, wives of the two Port Authority policemen who were buried under the collapsed buildings of the World Trade Center, the last two men to be pulled out alive.

Switching scenes: A quick cut to "The Today Show" of last June 6.

Host Matt Lauer is trying to get a word in edgewise while right-wing pundit Ann Coulter is busy skewering Lorie Van Auken, Kristen Breitweiser, Mindy Kleinberg and Patty Casazza, the four 9-11 widows who dedicated themselves to fighting for the enactment of a bi-partisan, 9-11 Commission.

"I've never seen people enjoying their husbands' deaths as much as the widows of victims of the Sept. 11, 2001, terrorist attacks," Coulter hissed.

**'Limelight-Seeking Harpies'**

The "Jersey Girls"--self-named since they all lived in New Jersey at the time of the attack--are, by Coulter's estimation, "self-absorbed, limelight-seeking harpies," and "the witches of East Brunswick."

When she repeated the label of "harpies" a second time, I decided to look it up:

"Harpies, in Greek and Roman mythology, are loathsome, voracious monsters with the heads of old women and the bodies of vultures," reads the entry in the Encyclopaedia Britannica. "Swift fliers, the Harpies snatch up mortals and take them to the underworld . . . Harpies may originally have been conceived of as ghosts."

Stone gives us angels in the guise of the wives of the trapped Port Authority policeman. Coulter calls women pressing for real-world change underworld monsters, doing the devil's work.

It's always easier to depict motherhood as seraphic perfection.

But take these same women and involve them in grubby politics?

From the manicured lawns of suburbia to the sprawling lawns of the White House, there's a whole lot more dirt involved. And when they open their lightly-lipsticked mouths too wide, or let their dulcet tones get a touch too strident, making demands without so much as a "please," suddenly those halos start to slip out of place.

"They once caught Congressman Porter Goss hiding behind his office door to avoid them," Gail Sheehy wrote in an August 2003 article for the New York Observer.

**Deciding to Press the Case**

The widows--mothers of seven children in all with various credentials beyond homemaking--decided to take matters into their own hands.

Breitweiser--a Seton Hall Law School graduate who'd practiced for only three days before pulling a u-turn from the profession--dusted off her legal training to become the group's spokesperson. Kleinberg, a former CPA, became the organizer. Van Auken, a part-time graphic designer, was the designated researcher, while Casazza acted as liaison for other 9-11 families. "You either remain a victim . . . or you say to yourself, 'No more,'" Casazza proclaimed.

The women studied everything they could about 9-11: affidavits, government reports, obscure footnotes. Breitweiser put enough tough questions about informational failure to the joint House-Senate investigation in September 2002 that the White House stopped stonewalling and agreed to form the 9-11 Commission.

But the Jerseys Girls still had to take on more. Over the next 20 months, they took on battle after battle, pushing for funding for the commission, for an extension once the funding threatened to run out, for Condoleezza Rice to testify publicly about the 9-11 attacks, and for the appearance of Bush and Vice President Cheney, who relented up to a point; they appeared together for one hour, off the record.

**41 Recommendations**

The commission's 41 recommendations created the basis for a thoroughgoing international security agenda: dismantling the al-Qaida network; preparing against future terrorist attacks, which included strengthening relations with Arabic countries; funding better intelligence and improving screenings of all transportation systems.

In reaction to the 9-11 Commission's report, on Sept. 24, 2004, President Bush stated the following: "They've done a really good job of learning about our country, learning about what went wrong prior to September 11th, and making very solid, sound recommendations about how to move forward. I assured them that where government needs to act, we will."

Fine words, but when the commission issued its Dec. 16, 2005, follow-up "report card" summarizing the administration's actions the grades were shocking: five Fs, 12 Ds, nine Cs and one A-minus. The biggest failures were in Aviation Security (F), Public Safety Communications (F) and Homeland Security Funding (F).

That "F" in Homeland Security Funding is further reflected by the latest slashing of New York City's share of anti-terror funding on May 31, 2006. It was slashed by 40 percent.

After last week--when 24 people were locked in Scotland Yard on suspicion of terrorism and the death count in Lebanon and Israel rose to a cumulative total of more than 900 dead--we can hardly imagine that the world, despite the current and uncertain ceasefire in Lebanon, has become any safer.

Instead, here we are, all over again. Back at Square One . . . Red Alert, Orange Alert . . . Ground Zero.

With the fifth year anniversary of 9-11 approaching, it's time to give the Jersey Girls some backup.

Since they are merely mortals--neither angels nor devils--their only "superhuman" power was in their tireless commitment to a cause.

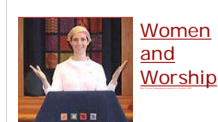
Donna Quixotes, all of them, and to borrow a lyric from The Man of La Mancha: "willing to march into hell for a heavenly cause."

But the cause is ours; our safety, our country, our lives.

If four beautifully ordinary women from the Garden State could break through, just think what 4 million could do. Or even more.

*Kimberly Gadette is a writer based in Portland, Ore. While working on her second novel, she's currently juggling seven columns in publications from the West Coast to the East, as well as internationally.*

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