

9

SINCE
SEPT.Website keeps
a permanent
digital archive
of the attacks

After nine years, the war that was precipitated by the attacks on the World Trade Center, Pentagon and the skies over Pennsylvania rages hotter than ever in Afghanistan.

It's a frightening reality that a small group of fanatical terrorists, armed with box-cutters and a diabolically ingenious plan, spawned two wars, world-wide economic chaos and a restructuring of the U.S. government. They also murdered nearly 3,000 innocent people. The man who was behind the cowardly attacks, Osama bin Laden, is still alive and free after nine years of intensive hunting by the most powerful nation on earth.



KEVIN O'NEILL
InSites

As we mark this somber anniversary and honor the fallen, it's important that we don't let the sharpness of the pain felt that day become too dull with the passage of time. Letting down our guard would be an invitation to our enemies to attack again.

While few who witnessed the towers fall, live or on television, will ever forget it, life does go on. However, we should still remember the lessons of the day if we don't want to live it again.

There are many websites devoted to Sept. 11. An inordinate amount seem to be devoted to conspiracy theories that reveal the "truth" about the attacks. In response, there are also a lot of "debunking" sites shooting holes in the conspiracy theories. The government has an official Sept. 11 Commission site, and, of course, there are sites voicing the opinions of those on the left and right of the political spectrum.

Preserving the memory

The September 11 Digital Archive, 911digitalarchive.org, is a website devoted to preserving the history of that day, and the response to it, with no apparent political agenda. The site's stated goal is "to create a permanent record of the events of September 11, 2001." The Library of Congress has added the site to its collection, which should ensure its permanence.

The site contains a variety of media that help to preserve the events of that infamous day. Stories from survivors, and others who felt compelled to share their experiences, have been collected from submissions to the website, and through the site's partnerships with the Smithsonian Institution, the Red Cross and other organizations. The recollections are in both written and audio formats. The people sharing their stories come from all walks of life and put a human face on the horrific events of the day.

Collections of e-mails sent by people to friends, family and co-workers on Sept. 11 and the days

LONG
YEARS
HAVE
PASSED

immediately after give a glimpse of people's mindset. The rawness of the emotions is evident in these spontaneous, informal communications exchanged as smoke still poured from the rubble, the sky was free of aircraft and there were more questions than answers.

Documents from the New York fire department, the National Guard and other agencies and organizations are preserved on the site as well. There's even a collection of flyers, posters, cards, programs and more from the streets of New York from the day of the attack up to a year later. Transcripts of interviews with people of middle-eastern ethnicity who were affected by the Sept. 11 backlash, some who suffered mild harrassment and some who were arrested and had their lives turned upside down, reveal some of the ugly internal conflict that ensued.

Scenes you'll never forget

Of course there are lots of visuals on the site. That day provided some of the most dramatic images that most people will ever see, and they were replayed again and again until they were seared into our brains. Looking at the photos of the towers being hit, burning and finally falling, and then the ghostly, dust-covered aftermath brings back some of the emotions of the day. Shock. Disbelief. Fear. Anger. I know some people who claim they have never been able to bring themselves to watch video of that day.

There are more uplifting images on the site as well. Photos of rebuilding, American flags, couples posing in front of the "old" skyline, as well as artwork celebrating America are mixed in with the more somber pictures. Animations from diverse political views attempt to use humor to deal with the tragedy.

There's also a section for researchers, a section to contribute your stories, documents or images, a "Frequently Asked Questions" section and links to other Sept. 11-themed sites.

The navigation and organization of the site are fine, but the design is not very visually compelling. While the site is intended to run forever, it's creators stopped updating it in 2004. They still collect submissions to the site and add them to the digital archive, but they don't post any new items on the site itself.

The content on the site comes unedited from people with varied backgrounds and beliefs, and the links lead to sites both reputable and ridiculous. The result is a neutral collection of information that gives a broad, nuanced view of an historic, world-changing event. It will also leave you with tears in your eyes.

KEVIN O'NEILL is a graphic artist for The Times-Tribune. Contact him at koneill@timeshamrock.com with links to your favorite websites.