

The twin towers fall again -- and again -- and again

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I just returned from a family pilgrimage to New York City where I took my nephew Daniel to celebrate his graduation from high school. Daniel is the youngest of all the nieces and nephews, so I have now completed my auntie duties in that regard, but with my daughter Kirtley having gone to college in Manhattan and now working there, I don't really need any excuses to visit the Big Apple.

I have always loved New York City and the bustle and energy of the city that never sleeps. I'll never forget the morning when Kirtley, then a sophomore in high school, and I watched the planes hit the World Trade Center from our house in Dallas.

We felt, as did all Americans, the personal assault of that morning and the days to come as the city reeled while reclaiming its dead and injured.

I have never wanted to see ground zero on my many trips to New York. It just feels too painful. But on this trip I couldn't avoid it when a cab ride took us past the site enroute to the southern end of the island. In addition to the sadness this brought up, it also made me angry, because in the ensuing years since the towers fell I have come to see them as a symbol of a very different kind of death and destruction.

We lost 3,000 people the day the towers fell, a number we lose every two days to cancer in this country. In the four days I spent in New York with my nephew, the towers fell twice in the deaths of men, women and children to cancer. Today and tomorrow the towers will fall again, and then again, and then again.

I in no way want to diminish the loss of life we experienced in the twin towers – what I want is the same kind of outrage at the loss of life to cancer. And the same dollars used to avert it.

I don't even know how many billions we have spent on airport security and homeland security since 9/11. I don't want to. I do know that every time I get screened at the airport, I am reminded that my tax dollars are being spent for people who spend their days looking for water bottles and nail clippers – all while many a person has made a point of their inadequacies by going through with guns and all kinds of sharp objects.

What if we had spent that money on cancer screening?

Every day 1,500 Americans die of cancer – men, women, and children. Until the towers fell I used the image of the Titanic going down every day. Now it's more appropriate to think of the towers falling. It's a devastating image to maintain.

I only wish it made everyone else as angry as it does me.

