

# The Day Everything Changed

Remembering September 11

When terrorists flew airplanes into the World Trade Center on Sept. 11, 2001, Art Spiegelman watched in horror from his neighborhood just a few blocks away. The looming black buildings—icons of the New York City skyline—glowed bright red and orange, like skeletons against the backdrop of a deep-blue sky. Then, within minutes, they came falling down.

In the days that followed, Spiegelman, a Pulitzer Prize-winning artist and author, was haunted by the image of the “north tower’s glowing bones just before it vaporized.” In a recent interview, he told

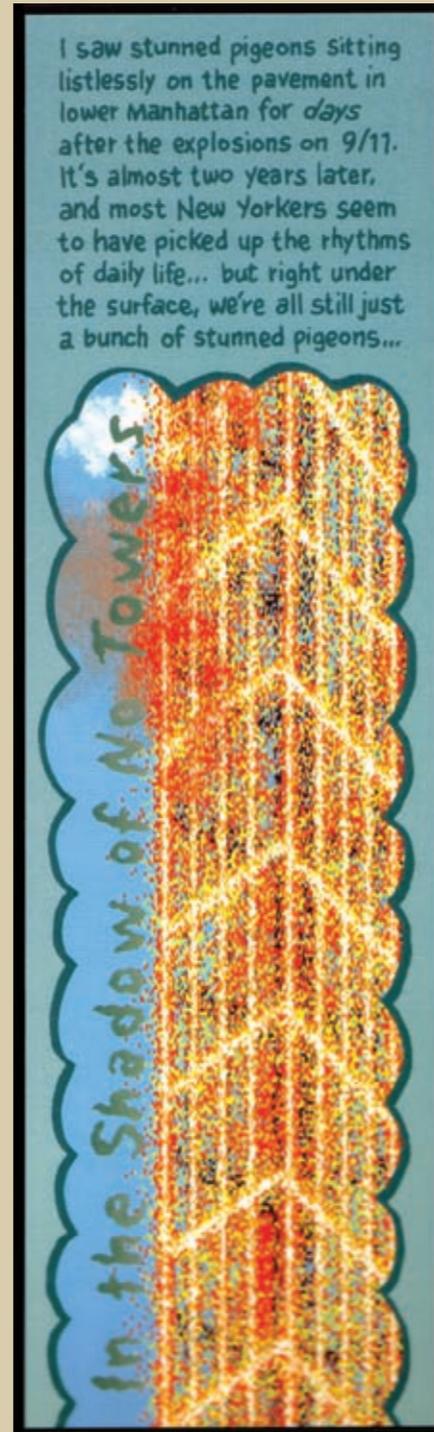
victims of the Holocaust and received a Pulitzer Prize in 1992. After September 11, Spiegelman turned to the thing he knows best—comics—to help him work through his trauma and disillusionment.

For the next two years, Spiegelman created a series of comics about the terrorist attack. He wrote and drew about his personal experience; about the image that was imprinted on his mind; about the reactions of people around him; and about the politics of the event. Through art, he attempted to understand what was happening in his neighborhood—and in the world.

Comics don’t have to be funny. Since the Revolutionary War in America, when Benjamin Franklin used satirical cartoons to tackle political topics in *Poor Richard’s Almanac*, comics have addressed history, politics, current events, and culture.

In the immediate aftermath of the attacks, Spiegelman’s comics were seen as controversial political cartoons and received a lukewarm response in the United States. When they were published as a book in 2004, however, the American Library Association called *In the Shadow of No Towers* “a strikingly vivid response that is at once heartfelt and thoughtful.”

This year, on the fifth anniversary of the September 11 terrorist attacks, *In the Shadow of No Towers*—a montage of graphic novel, commentary, and reproductions of classic cartoons—offers us one man’s gripping perspective on an event that changed life in the United States.—Sandhya Nankani



I saw stunned pigeons sitting listlessly on the pavement in lower Manhattan for days after the explosions on 9/11. It's almost two years later, and most New Yorkers seem to have picked up the rhythms of daily life... but right under the surface, we're all still just a bunch of stunned pigeons...



Writing about the aftermath of the attack. “Everything changed that day,” he said. “I couldn’t let it go, so it became—bit by bit—the only thing I could think about.”

Spiegelman has been drawing cartoons since age 11. He is best known for his graphic novel *Maus: A Survivor’s Tale*, which depicts the experiences of

## Perspective Matters

Art Spiegelman’s wife, Françoise Mouly, and their daughter, Nadja Spiegelman, were also eyewitnesses to the September 11 attacks. Their memories teach us an important lesson about perspective: We all have eyes, but each of us remembers things differently.

**Françoise Mouly:** “Normally, at that time in the morning [Art and I] have gone our separate ways. But that day, we were walking together ... when we saw an airplane going into the World Trade Center.

“From that moment, I wanted my daughter out of school. I literally grabbed Art and said, ‘Let’s go.’ And I paid attention to absolutely nothing until we got our daughter out. ...

“It felt like when you are in a car accident and time slows down. It was a split second that felt like forever.”



**Nadja Spiegelman:** “On September 11, the world came crashing down around me. The buildings that had always been part of my skyline, so permanent that I barely noticed them anymore, fell as I stood and watched. The cloud of smoke overtook my school, and I thought all of my friends were dead. That was the first and only time I’ve ever been in hysterics. ...

“I couldn’t process what was happening. I looked out the large library windows and saw a huge hole in the side of the World Trade Center. I thought I was looking at some sort of complex movie set. Nothing registered. ...

“The large disaster was too much to understand. I couldn’t handle *Two planes just crashed into two buildings, something must be wrong*. But I could handle *My dad is inside my school, something must be wrong*.”

**Your Turn**  
This year marks the five-year anniversary of September 11. What do you recall about that historic day? What do your parents remember? What do your friends remember? Interview three people about their memories of 9/11, and compare their perspectives. How do they differ?

Illustrations © 2004 Art Spiegelman, from *In the Shadow of No Towers*, published by Pantheon Books.