

ORANGE PEEL

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WHAT HAS CHANGED?

On this, the anniversary of September 11, 2001, we all reflect on what transpired that day. We can all remember where we were when we first heard of the terrible news that a plane had hit one of the Twin Towers. We can all recall the emotions that ran thru us. First shock, as we heard the news of not one but two planes. Then anger when we realized that this act was a result of cowardly terrorism. Then the immense pain and grief as we watched the towers fall and realized that possibly hundreds of our Brother firefighters were lost. For some of us this pain was indescribable. For some of us this pain was unbearable. But this pain led us to join together and fight for what we thought was being attacked. We joined together in cities and towns and conducted boot drives and fund raisers and raised millions of dollars for what we knew was going to be countless widows and orphans. We joined together and sent USAR teams to help with the recovery effort. We reached out and attempted to help out the overwhelmed FDNY with finding their 343 Brothers. We went to numerous memorials of our lost Brothers and cried and felt empty as the bagpipes played.

As the weeks followed government agencies nationwide took this opportunity to praise us for what the 343 had done. This new admiration with the fire service spilled over into every little town that had a fire company. The country fell in love with us. We were Heroes. We were the recipients of gratitude that the entire nation wanted to bestow on our brother FDNY but could only reach us. The mayors, city council members and even governors went on and on how proud they were of us. Those who made law were ready to aid the firefighters across the country with what we really needed, funding. Those who on September 10th would have vetoed increased funding for a new firehouse or equipment or manning were now backing us with whatever support they could “verbalize”. In essence we were their ticket to re-election. How could somebody not vote for a politician who backed us?

Back at home we appeared to be changed too. We were determined to honor the 343 with hard work and a renewed interest in training. We were striving to be better then we were before so that when tested we would respond as they would have. “FDNY”, “Never Forget” and “343” were written on our helmets as we showed the world that we were as proud of the 343 as they were. Members of our departments, who had lost faith in the fire service, were once again leading the charge to make it better. We truly were stepping out of the shadows and moving forward with 343 souls looking over us.

Now a year has passed. What has changed? What are those politicians doing for us now? I know that in Buffalo they tried to close the firehouse of 22 Engine. I know that the President vetoed a bill that was supposed to grant us billions of dollars. These dollars were supposed to help bring all of us to an acceptable level, acceptable in respect to manning, equipment and training. I know that in my state a budget deficit will result in millions of dollars loss from our fire budget. I know that since September 11th the Line of Duty deaths have continued. Brothers in New York, New Jersey, Florida, Colorado and Kentucky have paid the ultimate price and have joined the 343. And all the while government officials are patting us on the back with one hand and trying to close firehouses with the other.

What has changed in you? Are those letters that once read FDNY on your helmet now fading, and with them your renewed sense of duty? Is complacency starting to creep back into your daily routine? Is rest replacing rehearsal? Only you can answer those questions. It was easy to get fired up to do your job when every day you saw pictures of brothers working at Ground Zero. It was easy to say, "Today I will strive to be better" when you saw another memorial service happening.

But what will you do now? What will you carry over from September 11, 2001?

What will you do, if anything, to honor those 343? What has changed?