

A Finger

After most of the bodies were hauled away and while the FBI and Fire Department and Transportation Safety were still haggling about who was in charge, as smoke cleared, the figures in Tyvek suits came, gloved, gowned, masked, white ghostly figures searching rubble for pieces of people, then sending the separate and commingled remains to the autopsy-and-mortuary set up on site. This is where the snip of forefinger began its journey.

Not alone, of course, but with thousands of other bits not lost or dumped at the city landfill or in the tonnage barged out to sea. A delicate tip, burnt, bagged and marked “finger, distal” and sent on to the Bio Lab, bar-coded, then on to Bone and Tissue where forensic anthropologists sorted human from animal bones from the Trade Center restaurants, all buried together in the Pompeian effect of incinerated, compacted dust.

The bit of finger (that might have once tapped text messages, potted a geranium, held a glass, stroked a cat, a lover’s face, tugged a kite string along a beach) went to the Medical Examiner’s where it was profiled, re-coded, and shelved in a Falcon tube in Memorial Park, that is to say: the parking lot behind the ME droning with generators for the dozens of refrigerated trucks filling with human debris, while over on the Hudson at Pier 94 families brought toothbrushes or lined up for DNA swabbing.

As the weeks passed, the unclaimed remains were dried out in a desiccation room--humidity pumped out, heat raised high--shriveled, then vacuumed sealed.

But the finger tip found a DNA match in a swab from her brother. She was English. 30 years old. She worked on the 105th floor of the North Tower. The *Times* ran a bio. Her friends posted blogs. Her father will not speak about it. Her mother planted a garden in Manhattan. In that garden is a tree. Some look on it and feel restored. Others, when the wind lifts its leaves, want to scream.