



# **Reluctant Hero: A 9/11 Survivor Speaks Out About That Unthinkable Day, What He's Learned, How He's Struggled, and What No One Should Ever Forget**

*Michael Benfante, Dave Hollander*

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On Tuesday, September 11, 2001, Michael Benfante went to work, just like he had day after day, at his office on eighty-first floor in the World Trade Center North Tower. Moments after the first plane struck, just twelve floors above him, Benfante organized his terrified employees, getting them out the office and moving down the stairwells. On his way down, he and another co-worker encountered a woman in a wheelchair on the sixty-eighth floor. Benfante, the woman and Benfante's co-worker then embarked on a ninety-six-minute odyssey of escape—the two men carrying the woman down sixty-eight flights of stairs out of the North Tower and into an ambulance that rushed her to safety just minutes before the tower imploded.

A CBS video camera caught Benfante just as he got out the building, and almost immediately, the national media came calling. Benfante sat on the couch with Oprah Winfrey, where she hailed him as a hero. Almost one year to the day after 9/11, Benfante got married and the woman in the wheelchair sat in the front row.

That's the storybook ending. But in the aftermath of 9/11, Benfante began a journey fraught with wrenching personal challenges of critical emotional and psychological depth in *Reluctant Hero*. Benfante shares the trappings of his public heroism, the loneliness of his private anguish, and the hope he finds for himself and for us. Because all of us—whether we were in the towers, in New York City, or someplace else—we are all 9/11 survivors.

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