

Let them Eat Cake – Even on 9-11

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By the time this column runs the day will have passed, but today is my husband's birthday.

I stayed up late last night to bake a spice cake with chocolate cream cheese icing. If it were my birthday, the cake would be chocolate too.

But it's not my birthday, nor is it any longer my husband's day just to celebrate his blessed life.

Five years ago September 11th took on a new meaning for our family—and the entire world.

Like a woman who has labored to give birth, is there anyone out there who doesn't feel compelled to reminisce about where they were, what they were doing, what it felt like when the pain set in?

Talking about life's dramatic experiences brings us closer together, builds understanding, and enriches our own perspectives.

When the unthinkable brought down thousands of lives, engulfing the tallest buildings in New York in flames and a nation in the deepest heartache it has endured in recent history, people needed to talk. They still do. They probably always will.

And so do I.

Five years ago to the day, I was shopping at Spinneys, our favorite grocery

store in Abu Dhabi.

A British chain, it was largely staffed with smiling Sri Lankans who offered up a satisfactory selection of North American products.

If you dared to cough up the courage and the cash, you



Photo Paul Linden

could even lift the rope to careen your cart where no Muslim's trolley has gone before—the pork section. There you could buy a package of bacon for \$20 and if it was a special day, a ring of European Salami for a little more.

The bakery wasn't half bad either. We often took their wicked brownies home but on that day I was there to pick up a cake. I still recall placing it, wrapped like a gift in its protective box, in the back of my 4x4, hoping the AC would kick in quickly so the dessert wouldn't melt between the store and our apartment.

The local top 40 station droned on, competing with the buzzing blast of my air conditioning, but when the DJ broke broadcast to bring shattering news, the radio volume went up, and the AC went down.

A passenger plane had crashed into one of the World Trade Center Towers and the ensuing chaos catapulted New Yorkers, just beginning their workday, into the conflict that continues to challenge our concept of freedom and peace today.

I remember being stunned but naive in my first assumption of why such a horrific accident had happened. How could a competent pilot go so far off course?

When I rushed into our apartment, placing the cake on the counter and tuning the television to CNN to see a second plane hitting a second tower, I knew. It wasn't an accident.

When we first announced to our families and friends that we were leaving Canada to live and work in the Middle East most supported us with insatiable curiosity but some wanted to know why we were risking our children's lives, taking them to live with the terrorists.

Where to begin with that? The Western media's slant, along with our society's naïve presumption that there is no distinction between borders and beliefs in the Middle East perpetuates that myth, but the irony of our timing did not escape us. We'd been in the region a year when the tragedy of 9-11 struck and we had no idea what it meant for us.

Nor did we know what Paul's birthday cake tasted like. It sat, untouched, for days.

None of us—at home or abroad—were left untouched by 9-11.

It may not have been a Happy Birthday for Paul in 2001 but the world moves along and people find reasons to sing.

I try to look at 9-11 as a day to celebrate the gift of life, honoring those whose stories ended that day but also those who welcome a new chapter in theirs.

The main courses of life can serve up some unpalatable dishes but the beauty of it all is that there's always room for desert. And this time it won't get left on the counter.