

Nine, Ten: A September 11 Story

By Nora Raleigh Baskin

Everyone will mention the same thing, and if they don't, when you ask them, they will remember. It was a perfect day.

More than eight million people lived in New York City that year, so of course, not everyone's day started perfectly. There was excitement and pain, anxiety and boredom, love and loneliness, anger and joy. But everyone who looked up that morning must have marveled, whether noting it out loud or not: What a perfect day.

The sky was robin's-egg blue. There were one or two fluffy, almost decorative clouds. It was late-summer warm, so the air was still and clear, not the least bit humid. Warm the exact way you would set the temperature of the earth, if you could. Clear, with just enough breeze so you knew you were outside, breathing fresh air. People would

remember that day with all sorts of adjectives: serene, lovely, cheerful, invigorating, peaceful, quiet, astounding, crystalline, blue.

Perfect.

Until 8:46 a.m., when the first plane struck the North Tower of the World Trade Center and nothing would ever be the same again.

But that has not happened yet.

September 9, 2001

O'Hare International Airport

At that moment the girl turned toward them as if she had heard them talking. Her head scarf completely covered her head and neck, all the

way down to her shoulders. Like a child's drawing, her pale face was floating in a sea of brown fabric. Her lips pressed together. Her brow furrowed. Her eyes were blue, like the Mediterranean Sea.

"Hey, man. Let's go," Sergio said.

It was so not cool to stare.

Naheed was used to it. Being looked at. She was used to people asking if she was wearing a costume. Or saying:

"I didn't know you were Arab."

"Can you belly dance?"

"Do you believe in God?"

"Do you really not eat for a month?"

She wasn't Arab. She was Middle Eastern. Well, she was American, born twelve years ago in Columbus, Ohio and she had never lived anywhere else. She had never once been to Iran, where her Persian mother and father had grown up. She couldn't belly dance either.

But she was used to people staring.