



Curating Trauma and Violence: Preparing and Caring for Communities and Staff

AAM Annual Meeting May 18, 2024

Memorial Museums and Trauma

Exploring the Impact of Trauma on Workers at Memorial Museums





LET'S TALK
#WorldSuicidePreventionDay

Veterinarians & Vet Techs
are 2.3-5x more at risk for suicide than the general population.

Why?
exposure to death, access to drugs, poor client interactions, compassion fatigue, student debt.

MYTH: Talking about suicide or asking someone if they feel suicidal will encourage suicide attempts.
Ask, listen, support, refer.

You are not alone.

Resources
Call or text 988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline
Text TALK to 741741

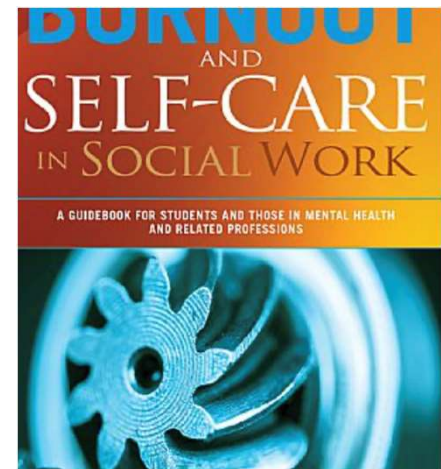
Compassion Fatigue Do's and Don'ts for ministers

DO

- Find someone to talk to.
- Understand that the pain you feel is normal.
- Exercise and eat properly.
- Get enough sleep.
- Take some time off.
- Develop interests outside of the church.
- Identify what's important to you.

DON'T

- Work harder and longer.
- Self-medicate.
- Neglect your own needs and interests.



THE WORK HAS A COST

CENTERING THE WORKERS

Survivors (35%)

Family Members (35%)

Community Members (30%)

Workers Are Invisible Until Called Upon

BEARING WITNESS

The Wounds of Mass Trauma
at Memorial Museums



Stephanie N. Arel

It's about giving these workers a certain status by saying this person exists...

I do exist.

*People know about it,
and I can see how hard it is.*

I can talk about my hardship, and someone will listen.

Genocide survivors that work in museums, I know that every single time they talk about their experience, they do so with passion. But I also know how tired and exhausted and stressed they are. If they are connected, they can share experience. I am sure that if someone from Srebrenica connects with someone from wherever, Auschwitz, this person can say it is difficult for me.

People have certain responses which they can share. Maybe we will have a manual. Someone will say like, "This is how you can protect yourself. This is how you do your work."

Then from there is a community.

It's about solidarity.

It's about support and encouragement that we keep going.

Velma Šarić

RECOMMENDATIONS

Transparency and Acknowledgement
Training: Psychoeducation and Skill Building
Construct Community

Curating Traumatic Heritage

A Practitioner's Experience & Reflections on Empowering the Museum Community



National September 11 Memorial Museum

New York City




United States Holocaust Memorial Museum

Washington, D.C.

Key questions

What ethical implications arise when professional museum practices intersect with the vulnerability and unpredictability of human grief?

What structures can museums put in place – or rethink – to support the wellbeing of the museum worker, the donor community, and the institution, when grappling with difficult and traumatic history?



84th floor
west office
12 people trapped



Randolph Scott on his motorcycle
September 8, 2001

Courtesy of the Family of Randolph Scott

There is no museum studies program out there that trains a person for this kind of workplace experience, yet those of us who work at museums that contain material tied to personal or large-scale traumatic episodes **confront it regularly and in many ways.**

It is a defining aspect of our work that can make for a precarious workplace scenario at times, as it has the potential to open up a wellspring of human emotion, as much as it may serve to help suture it.

United States Holocaust Memorial Museum

Washington, D.C.





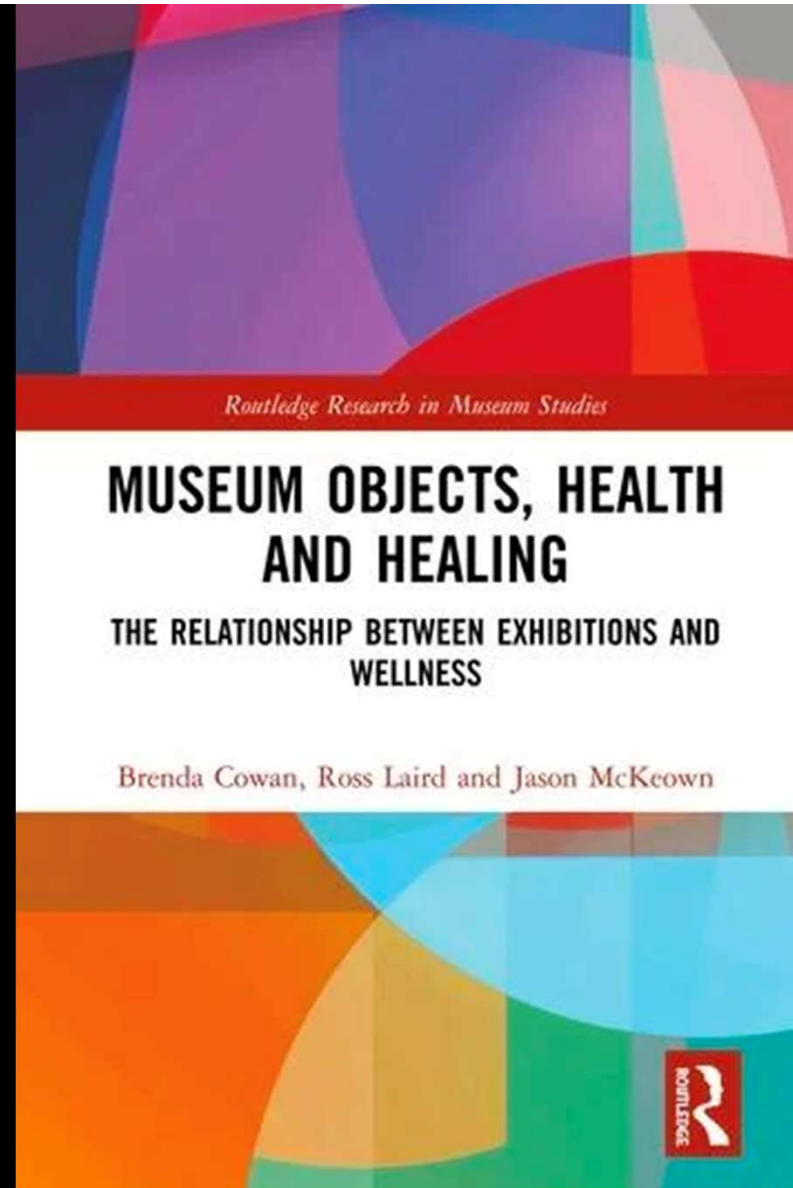
Child's romper worn on Kristallnacht

United States Holocaust Memorial Museum
(Under acquisition consideration)

Museum as a “therapeutic ally”

- From “Case Study with Object Donors to The National September 11 Memorial & Museum”

Brenda Cowan, Associate Professor, School of Graduate Studies at SUNY/FIT
Ross Laird, PhD, Interdisciplinary Creative Process, MA, Counseling Psychology
Jason McKeown, MS, LMFT, CPE, DDC, Dir. of Clinical & Family Services Trails Carolina





MANCHESTER
1824

The University of Manchester

The University of Manchester Research

Psychological Impact of Spontaneous Memorials: A Narrative Review

DOI:

[10.1037/tra0000565](https://doi.org/10.1037/tra0000565)

Document Version

Accepted author manuscript

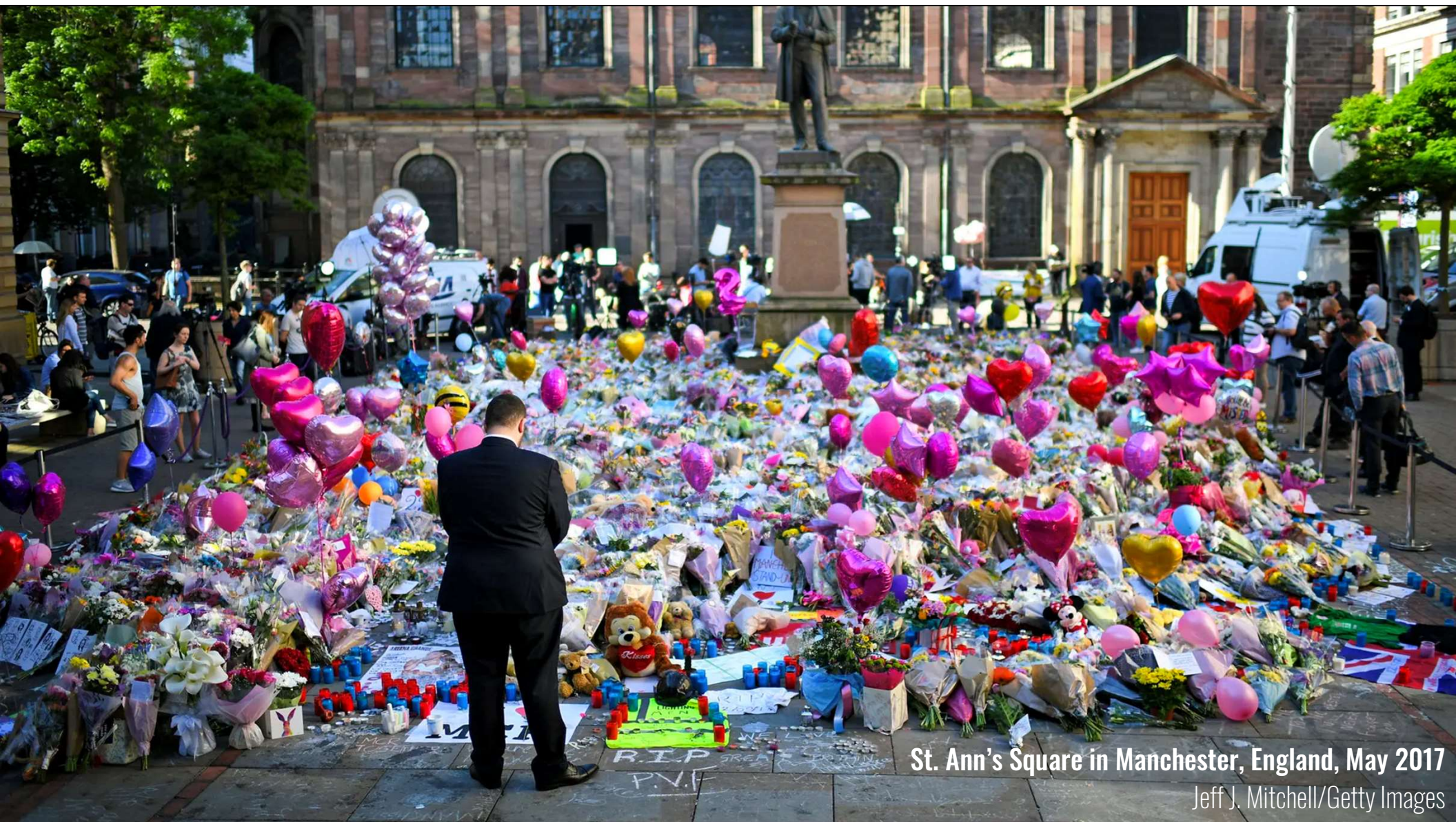
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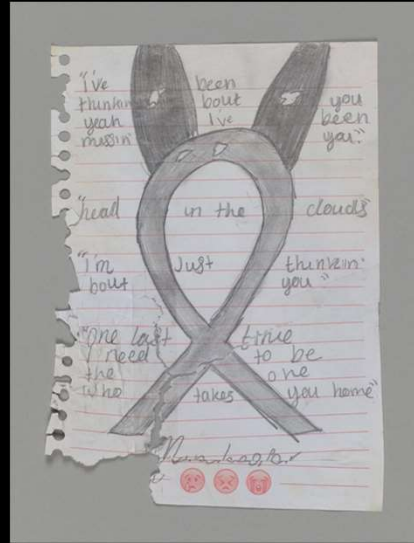


St. Ann's Square in Manchester, England, May 2017
Jeff J. Mitchell/Getty Images



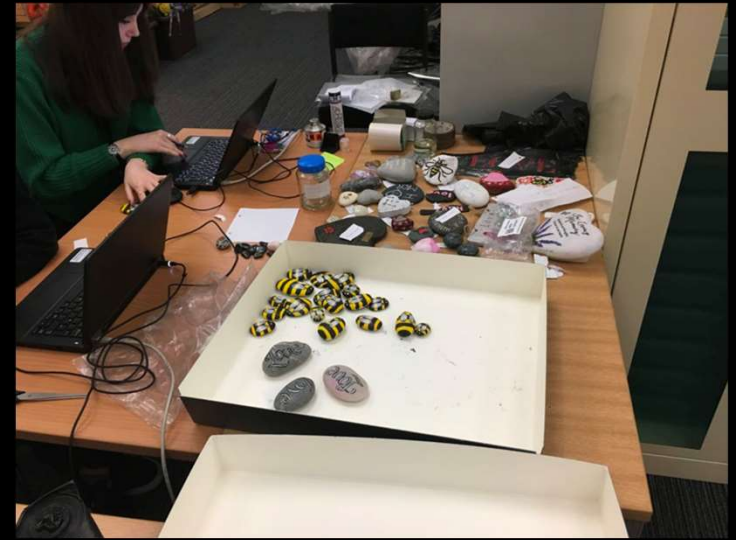
Guitar with message

Manchester Together Archive



Handwritten Ariana Grande lyrics and bunny ears

Manchester Together Archive



Postgraduate students documenting objects in Manchester Together Archive

Courtesy of the University of Manchester

Conclusion

Part of the charge of stewarding the material evidence of trauma is negotiating the intimacy of confronting human grief with institutional dynamics – two forces that are fundamentally at odds.

What museological structures and technical practices can be mobilized to protect and empower the worker and donor, cultivating a healthier relationship between museums and the communities they serve?

Preservation of Traumatic Heritage

Principles and Practices

Preservation of Traumatic Heritage: Principles and Practices

Sensitivity to Trauma ■ Respect for object authenticity ■

Preserve historical context ■ Minimize intervention ■ Consider cultural values ■

Unique value stored in material fabric ■ Community-centered approaches



Joanne Capestro's shoes
Collection 9/11MM, C.2009.405.4



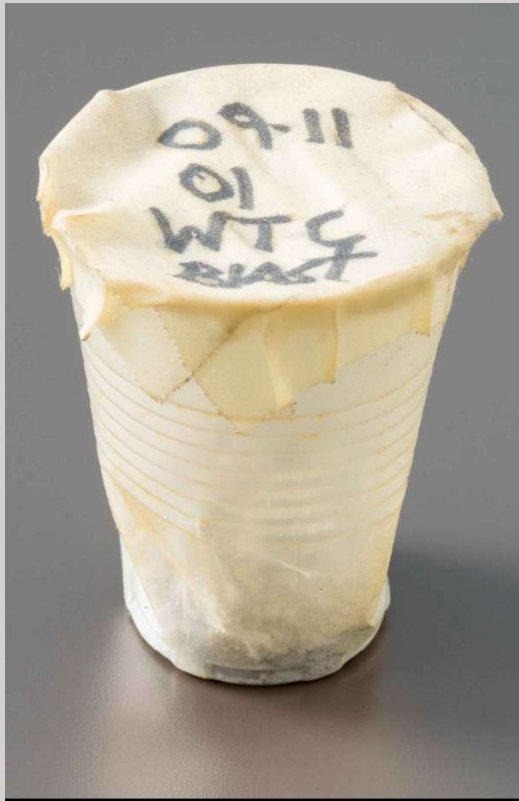
Credit: Erik Tischler
Collection 9/11MM, C.2011.1419.261



Recovered Little Red Doll
Collection 9/11MM, C.2006.6.1



World Trade Center Dust: Navigating Hazards and Value A People-Centered Approach to Preservation



Collection 9/11 Memorial Museum



Credit: Video Clips, Objects and Memory

World Trade Center Dust: Navigating Hazards and Value A People-Centered Approach to Preservation



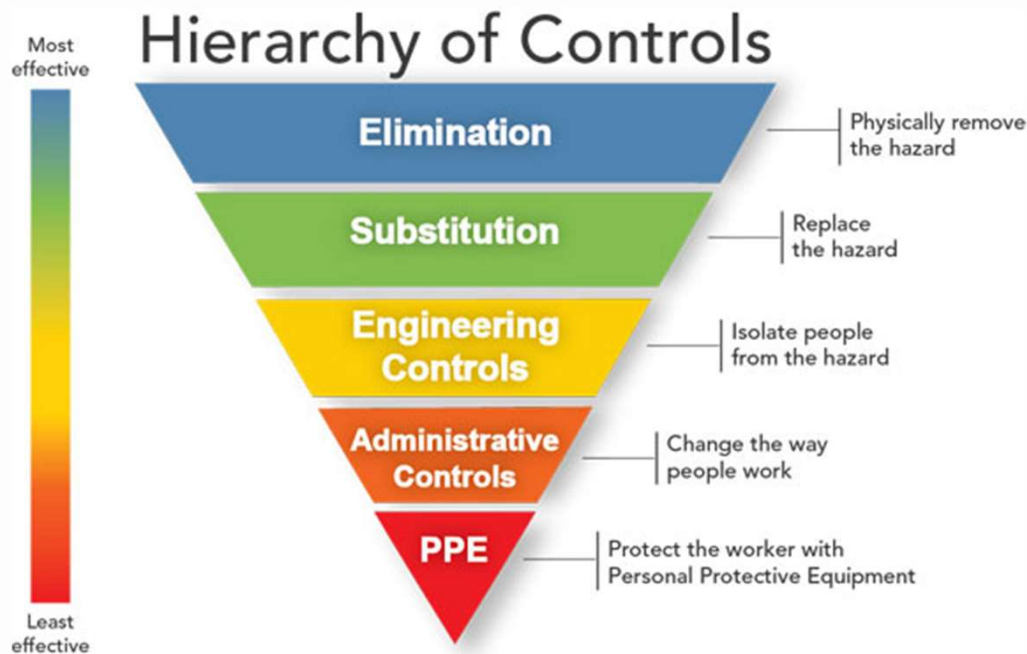
Boots worn by Steve Saymon while working at Ground Zero
Collection 9/11MM



Credit: Catalogue El archivo del polvo
Elena del Rivero
Caniche Editorial, S.L., 2020

Contrasting Approaches:

Hazards in Industry or the Home vs. Museum Collection Management



Preservation over Elimination

Isolation/Restricted Access

Substitution/Replication

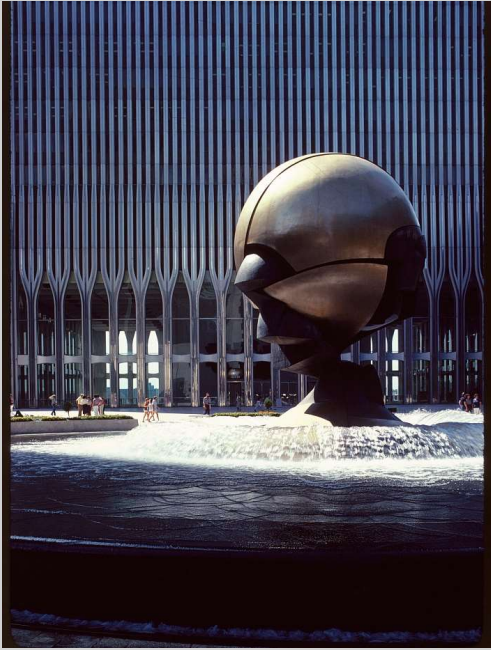
Heavy Reliance on PPE

Collection Priorities

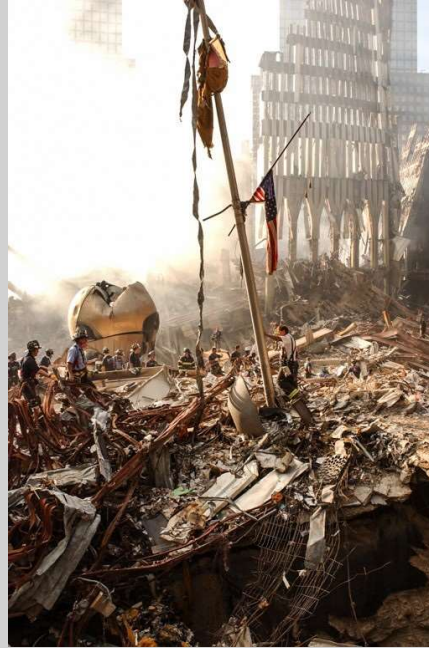
World Trade Center Dust: Navigating Hazards and Value A People-Centered and Bias-Aware Approach to Preservation



Tea set belonging to Elaine & Ron Williamson, Residents of Lower Manhattan
Credit: Edward Keating, NYTimes (left) ; Collection 9/11 Memorial Museum (right)



World Trade Center, 1976
Credit: Balthazar Korab, Ltd. 248-641-8881



World Trade Center, September 16, 2001
Credit: Andrea Booher/FEMA



Metal Fragment, 2022, Collection 9/11MM
Credit: Maria Olivia Davalos Stanton



Liberty Park, 2021
Credit: Camilo J. Vergara

Fritz Koenig's *The Sphere*

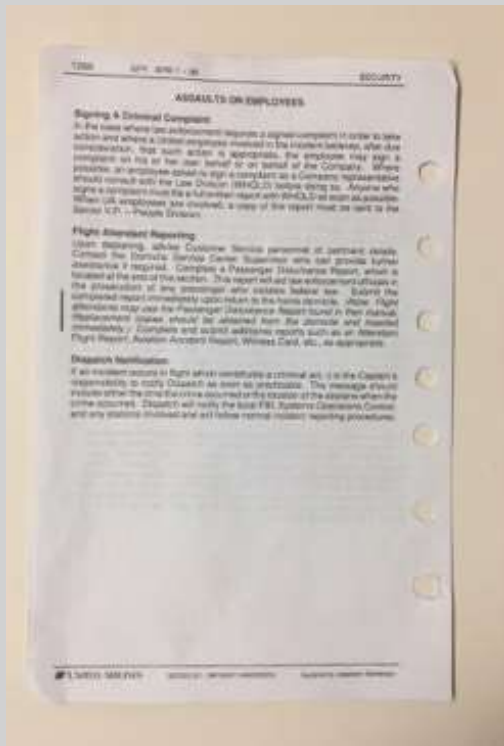
Respecting Object Biography: Exploring Value in Conflict-Related Damage;
Navigating Ethical Considerations in Research and Conservation

Navigating Facsimiles for Traumatic Heritage: Balancing Authenticity, Material Value, and Stakeholder Input

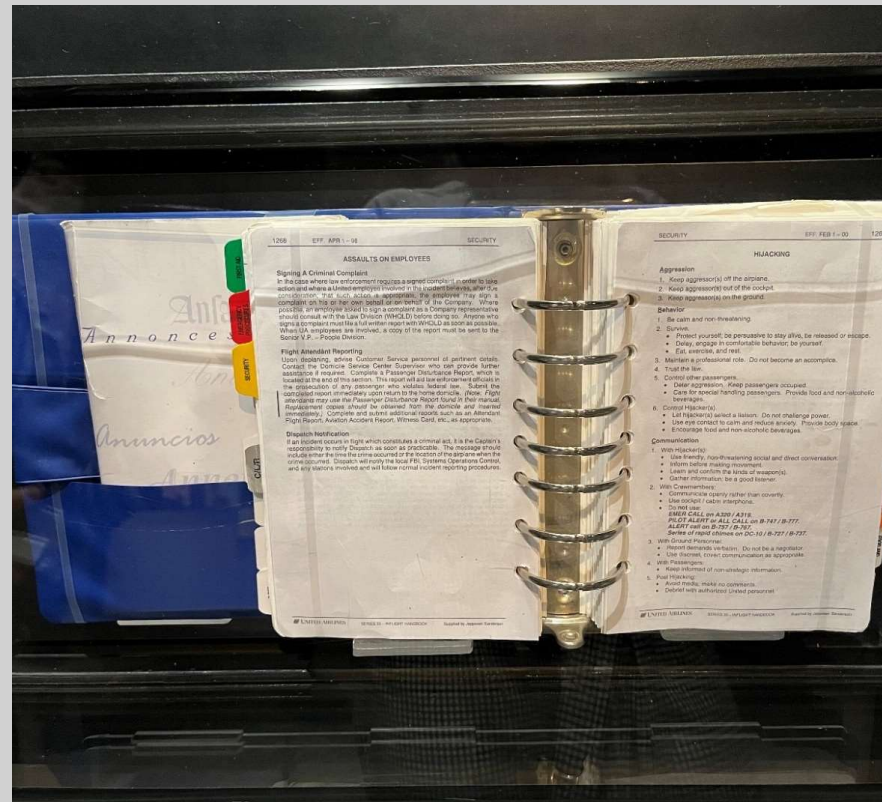


Tributes, including a jar of sand from Mālaekahana Beach, HI, left on the 9/11 Memorial Plaza in 2011 in memory of Maile Rachel Hale by her two sisters, Marilyce Rattigan and Martha Hale Farrell.

Navigating Facsimiles for Traumatic Heritage: Balancing Authenticity, Material Value, and Stakeholder Input

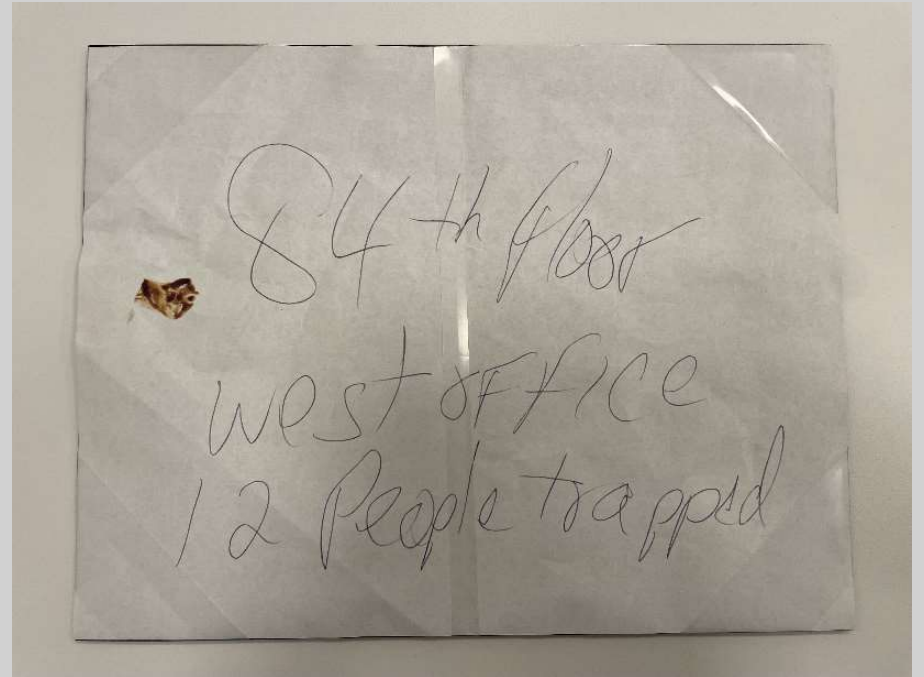
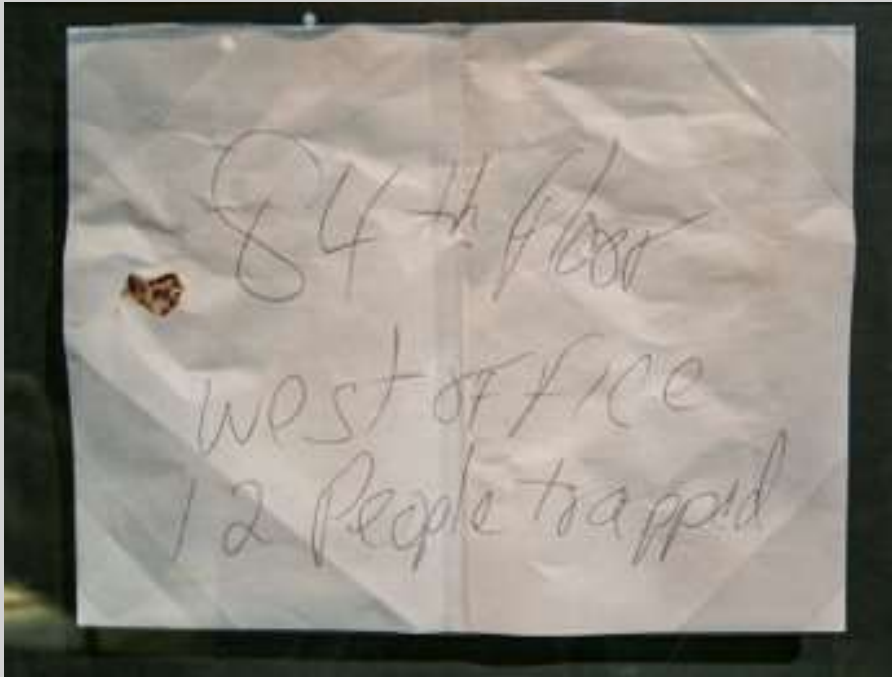


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Historical Exhibition, United Airlines, Flight Attendant Manual
Collection 9/11 MM, CT.2009.106.1

Navigating Facsimiles for Traumatic Heritage:
Balancing Authenticity, Material Value, and Stakeholder Input



Reminders Linger After Trauma Ends

Continued From First Science Page



Steve Hart for The New York Times

For Elizabeth Bakalar, left, and Zoe Risutto, just hearing an airplane or stepping out of a subway station can be a haunting reminder of Sept. 11.

their home on a rainy day.

It is no accident that the memories associated with a traumatic event can be summoned so vividly. Strong emotions release a flood of stress hormones in the body, including adrenaline and cortisol, said Dr. James L. McGaugh, director of the Center for the Neurobiology of Learning and Memory at the University of California at Irvine. And the presence of high levels of stress hormones, studies by Dr. McGaugh and others have shown, promotes the formation of memories that are long-lasting and easily recalled in the amygdala, a brain structure centrally involved in emotional response.

"I know what I was doing the day that Kennedy was shot," Dr. McGaugh said. "I remember what I did the day my father died. And the emotion no doubt played a role in creating the strength of the memory."

The images of the planes hitting

pers say, is not to avoid situations that recall the events — a strategy that can make symptoms worse — but to limit exposure when possible.

Watching the news on television or reading the newspaper, for example, might be restricted to one hour a day, and avoided just before bedtime. And places that stir upsetting memories — buildings, elevators, airports — may become less anxiety-provoking if a friend or family member is there to offer support.

But the capacity of reminders to plunge people back into distress can make their presence an issue for communities as well as for individuals.

Asked if he would attend the memorial service held at ground zero on Oct. 28, for example, a father told a television reporter that the site of his still-missing son's death was the last place he wanted to be. Yet other family members flocked to the service and found comfort in visiting what might prove to be their loved

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Moving Forward: Navigating Growth Opportunities in the Preservation of Traumatic Heritage

Support Strategies

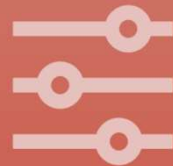
Ways to Care for Staff, Vendors, and Stakeholders

Ways to Support Staff



Be upfront during onboarding

to take care of oneself, resources available, how longer-serving staff can be resources



Set boundaries

to avoid being vessels for other people's trauma



Manage expectations

appreciate spheres of control and influence (what can I do, what can our team do, what can the institution do)



Acknowledge exhibition capacity

unable to be encyclopedic, curatorial choices not dismissive but representations to best engage public



Limit oral history and imagery

of traumatic events to staff who can handle, may not be best for interns or new staff right away—takes toll

More Ways to Support Staff



Prepare staff

to be representatives of institution and recipients of others wanting to share their stories



Network

with counterpart colleagues at other institutions to share resources and strategies



Involve staff in evaluation

to see impact of their work on visitors, same for stakeholder meetings



Solicit feedback

direct and anonymously, to learn and assess issues and trends



Secure leadership buy-in

for resources such as trainings, external facilitator discussions, or other support services

Ways to Support Vendors



Provide pre-visit preparation

about what will encounter, if any media will be on, etc.



Make space

for them to engage, may share their own relevant stories if affected by content

Ways to Support Stakeholders



Invite representatives

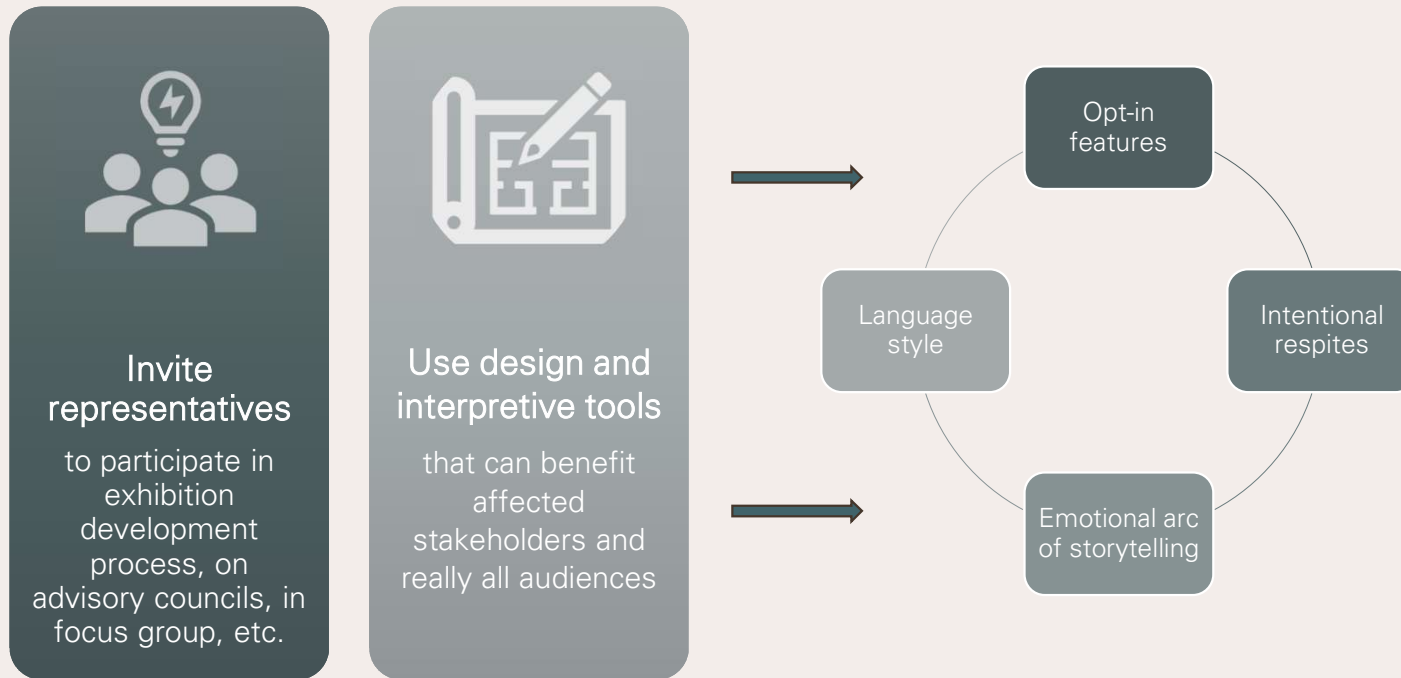
to participate in exhibition development process, on advisory councils, in focus group, etc.



Use design and interpretive tools

that can benefit affected stakeholders and really all audiences

Ways to Support Stakeholders



Navigating the Human Element





Concluding Thoughts and Q&A

Preparing and Caring for Communities and Staff

Thank You

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