

• Chapter Eight •

Project 2002

For Rebecca Distler, September 12, 2001, promised to be an extra special day. Not only was the sixth-grader turning eleven years old, but she had just started at a new school.

Rebecca told her mom, Joanne Lipman, a senior editor at *The Wall Street Journal*, that she'd like refrigerator magnets for her locker.

Growing up in East Brunswick, New Jersey, Lipman was a serious student of the viola, playing in a string quartet and subsequently studying at the Yale School of Music. In one of Lipman's earliest front-page stories for the paper, published October 7, 1983, she wrote a humorous first-person account of spending a day as a street musician, playing in Times Square, in front of the New York Stock Exchange, and in the concourse of the World Trade Center.

The story's denouement was that Lipman earned more fiddling on a per hour basis than she was making as a reporter.

Ten-year-old Rebecca was now the one taking violin lessons.

Before work on the morning of September 11, Lipman was browsing the aisles of the Lechters Housewares store located on the concourse of the World Trade Center. When she spotted a violin-shaped magnet, she knew it would be perfect for Rebecca. The novelty had a button in the middle that, when pushed, played a little tune. Lipman pressed it idly while waiting to check out.

I hope this will be a gentle reminder to Rebecca to practice for her violin lessons.

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For good measure, Lipman also grabbed a magnet in the shape of a flip mobile phone.

It happened that on her way into Lechters that Tuesday morning, Lipman ran into Joe Dizney, the paper's design director and one of her best friends.

Before the day would end, they would both play key roles in producing the next day's edition of the Journal after its nearby newsroom was destroyed.

Lipman and Dizney had been meeting daily for the better part of the past year in a cloistered conference room at the paper's headquarters, where they were working on a top-secret restyling of the Journal, the first in 60 years. Each morning, he would stop by Lipman's office first thing, coffee and muffin in hand, and check in.

Dizney joined Lipman at the cash register. The two planned to walk together through the World Trade Center concourse and over one of the West Street pedestrian bridges to the World Financial Center.

As they waited to pay, they could hear a commotion coming from the corridor. The two witnessed a security guard shooing a crowd of people toward the Church Street exit on the east side of the Trade Center complex.

The Lechters cashier was concerned.

Everybody's running. Maybe we should get out of here.

Lipman pushed the two magnets forward.

Once again, the anxious cashier looked apprehensively toward the concourse.

We've got to leave.

Lipman was and is an exceptionally congenial individual, but she didn't rise to the upper echelons of the journalism profession without knowing how to stand her ground. All the more so when the cause was Rebecca's birthday.

Lipman rolled her eyes at the nervous cashier. After all, she and Dizney hadn't heard anything. The commuters being steered to the exits looked more annoyed than worried. She figured whatever it was, it was most likely a false alarm.

Ring this up first. I'm not leaving until I pay.

Lipman handed the cashier a \$20 bill to cover the two five-dollar magnets. Adding in the 83 cents in sales tax, the cashier returned \$9.17 and a receipt. It was time-stamped 8:55 a.m., nine minutes after American Airlines Flight #11 struck the North Tower, 90-plus floors above Lechters.

The cash register stub was one of the last, if not the very last, receipt to be generated in the World Trade Center complex before the concourse and everything above and in proximity to it was annihilated.

Lipman and Dizney surfaced on Church Street. Always elegant, Lipman, 40 years old, slender, and fit, was wearing a skirt suit and high heels.

When she'd entered the World Trade Center complex, it had been a picture-perfect, late-summer morning. Now it was snowing. In Lipman's 2013 biography of her childhood music teacher, *Strings Attached: One tough teacher and the gift of great expectations*, co-authored with Melanie Kupchynsky, Lipman recounted the apocalyptic scene that she and Dizney encountered.

At least it looked like snow, as pulverized plaster drifted down from a brilliant blue sky, pinging metallically when the flakes hit the sunglasses perched on top of my head. Hundreds of papers — blank financial order forms — were wafting through the air. Above us was the unimaginable sight of the World Trade Center on fire, smoke billowing out of an ugly gash in the upper floors. In front of us, cars were pulled up at crazy angles on the sidewalk, abandoned. One was crushed by a giant chunk of concrete. There must have been sirens, and maybe there was shouting, but it was as if it were a dream: every sound was muffled and every action in slow motion.

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The scene turned ghastly when Lipman and Dizney — trying to make their way to the office — turned onto Liberty Street, at the south end of the World Trade Center complex. Liberty Street ran east-west from Church Street to the West Side Highway and its pedestrian overpass to the World Financial Center tower housing the Journal's newsroom.

On a typical day, walking from Church to the bridge took five minutes at best.

This day, however, would take infinitely longer, and the memories of what they witnessed would remain with them for a lifetime.

Everything on Liberty Street was aflame. Rows of burning airline seats were spread out in the middle of the road, along with what looked like a jet engine. Lipman and Dizney moved one block further south to Albany Street, which runs parallel to Liberty Street.

Human carnage, raw and red, was splattered thickly across the pavement and the sidewalks. We picked our way through an indescribable hell, our heads down, stepping gingerly and trying not to look at the gruesome vista spread out in front of us. When we reached the West Side Highway, across from our building, we swerved to avoid a headless corpse on the sidewalk that someone had inadequately covered with a restaurant napkin. Waiting at a red light, we stood next to a businessman with a head wound streaming blood onto his white shirt collar.

When the second plane, flying just overhead, hit the South Tower at 9:02 a.m., Lipman and Dizney were staggered.

The crash was like a sonic boom, a deep, deafening, cataclysmic eruption that went on and on, layer after sickening layer of destruction... Like everyone else there, I assumed I was about to die.

In September 2000, Joanne Lipman was promoted to deputy managing editor, sharing the title with Stephen Adler, Byron E. “Barney” Calame, and Daniel Hertzberg. Her elevation made her the highest-ranking woman on the newsroom's organization chart and one of the few women in any senior newsroom position at the Journal.

When Paul E. Steiger, the managing editor, was away, it was Calame who was left in charge. Often, even when Steiger was on site but otherwise engaged, Calame ran the entire paper.

Every evening, one of the four deputy managing editors would be responsible for conducting a final review of the next day's edition before the presses began to roll.

As a teen, Lipman often would join her father, a business executive, on bus commutes from East Brunswick to Manhattan, reading his copy of the *Wall Street Journal* along the way. She took a liking to the paper, especially the quality writing on Page One, and set her mind to working for the paper someday.

It was my goal in life.

As a junior at Yale, Lipman interned for the Journal, which proceeded to hire her in New York shortly after her graduation in May 1983. Laurence G. “Larry” O’Donnell was the managing editor at the time. Shortly thereafter, Steiger returned to the paper as an assistant managing editor, working for Norman Pearlstine, who succeeded O’Donnell in September of that year.

Steiger, who also graduated from Yale, had been hired by the Journal in its San Francisco bureau in 1966. He left the business daily two years later to join the *Los Angeles Times*, where he distinguished himself. Steiger later became a Washington, D.C.-based economics and finance correspondent. He was serving as the Times’s financial editor when Pearlstine wooed him back to the Journal.

Steiger and Lipman, in time, would transform the paper in ways that it’s unlikely either of them could have imagined in their first few years on the Journal’s staff.

Initially, Lipman was assigned to cover the insurance industry and real estate, neither of which was considered a prestige beat. Nonetheless, she impressed Steiger with her ideas and writing skills.

Lipman broke from the pack in 1989 when Pearlstine and Steiger tapped her to create a regular advertising column, conceived in large part to draw readers and advertisers away from the rival *New York Times*.

The Times’s reign as the paper-of-record covering the advertising business was deeply entrenched, dating back more than 50 years. Beginning in October 1966, its stewardship fell to Philip H. Dougherty, who, writing a daily column, became a highly influential figure in the advertising world.

Dougherty’s column was considered a must-read by Madison Avenue’s cognoscenti. At his peak, he helped make or break the careers of key advertising executives. He also served as a semi-official barometer of the creative success, or lack thereof, of major advertising campaigns.

When Dougherty died in his sleep on September 27, 1988, at age 64, it left a void in the world of advertising journalism.

Lipman soon filled the vacuum.

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Her four-day-a-week column was a departure from what Daugherty had done. An aggressive and well-sourced reporter, she was driven to break news. Rather quickly, Lipman won over Dougherty's influential readers and the lucrative advertisers that his column had attracted.

She became a Journal star, punctuated by her winning the prestigious John Hancock Financial Services Award for Excellence in Business and Financial Journalism.

Lipman's fast-track career almost derailed with the birth of her two children; Rebecca in September 1990, and Andrew in October 1992.

I was having a hard time being away from home. I would have quit if I could have afforded to, or gone part time.

She shared her struggles with Steiger, who wasn't about to lose one of his most promising editors. He recalled his response, which not only kept her on the staff but led Lipman to much greater achievements at the paper and in her post-Journal endeavors.

I said, "No, Joanne, you're not going to quit. You're going to become an editor, and that will allow you to get control of your schedule."

Steiger reached out to John Brecher, his Page One editor. It was Brecher who led the team of elite journalists that had oversight of the three daily features that ran on the paper's front page: Two comprehensive stories, known in Journal jargon as "leders," that appeared in the right- and left-hand columns, and the so-called "A-hed," the quirky fourth-column story that mostly eschewed serious topics. (The "A-hed" was supposedly so named because, in the eyes of some, the stacked headlines that ran above the article had a passing resemblance to the capital letter A.)

John, have I got a deal for you. You're going to get Joanne Lipman. But there are a couple of provisos. She's going to work from home every Friday unless she has a story going for Monday, and you're going to be really sensitive to her needs to be doing childcare stuff and various other similar things, because you know she'll work from 10:00 at night to 3:00 in the morning if she has to [in order] to close the gap.

Brecher was delighted. He was already an admirer of Lipman's writing. Moreover, he and his wife, Dorothy Gaiter, who also worked for the Journal, had children of their own and could readily relate to Lipman's struggle to manage both kids and career.

Lipman remained on the Page One staff for five years, editing, and conceiving major news and feature stories. One series of articles that she nurtured, written by Ron Suskind about inner-city honor students in Washington, D.C., won the 1995 Pulitzer Prize for Feature Writing.

Steiger's admiration for Lipman continued to grow.

Joanne became one of the greatest editors we ever had.

The Wall Street Journal was published in a single section from its founding in July 1889 until it added a second section in June 1980. Beginning in 1988, the Journal expanded to three sections, Monday through Friday.

The first section delivered major corporate and economic news, as well as the Editorial and Op-Ed pages. The second section, dubbed *Marketplace*, encompassed news and features on careers, entrepreneurship, personal technology, law, health, and other matters directly affecting readers' working lives. The third section, *Money & Investing*, provided comprehensive content for both personal and professional investors.

The Friday editions of *Marketplace* featured weekend-oriented coverage, including an expanded personal finance column, a residential real estate page, and articles on sports and travel. The content was designed not merely to help readers navigate the "business of life" but also to attract more consumer-oriented advertisers.

In 1996, the Journal began planning a fourth section to appear on Fridays. The as-yet unnamed addition ultimately became *Weekend Journal*. Steiger turned to Lipman to flesh out the concept and oversee the project.

At the time, the paper was heavily reliant on financial advertisers, technology ads, and corporate imaging messages. Although the dot-com bubble was generating plenty of ad lineage from investment banks and newly public companies, wiser heads at Dow Jones recognized the sensibility of broadening the paper's base of advertisers. Hence, *Weekend Journal* would focus on readers' passions, including entertainment, food and wine, cars, style, art, sports, and real estate.

On the day that *Weekend Journal* debuted, March 20, 1998, Lipman wrote a "Welcome" letter to readers.

In the 15 years I've been with the Journal -- as a real-estate reporter, creator of the Advertising column and a Page One editor -- I've watched the paper evolve along with our readers. The Journal has always been essential reading when it comes to daily business. Now we hope we can become just as essential in helping you manage your personal business.

Besides, I can't even count the number of times that I've heard, "The paper would be perfect, if you just added a sports page and a crossword puzzle."

Well, now you have both.

The immediate success of *Weekend Journal* accelerated Lipman's ascension as a star.

Roughly the same time that *Weekend Journal* went live, the senior executives at Dow Jones turned their attention to a much more ambitious project, a three-year, \$232 million overhaul of the entire paper. The initiative involved the installation of new printing presses and related production facilities, designed to increase the daily page capacity of the Journal from 80 pages to 96 pages and to triple the number of pages containing color — including for the first time, on the front page — from eight to 24.

Dubbed “Project 2002,” the plan was to roll out the “new” Wall Street Journal in April 2002, including the first redesign of the front page since 1941, and the addition of a new section, *Personal Journal*, to run each Tuesday, Wednesday, and Thursday.

Appointing Lipman to oversee the design elements of “Project 2002” and to develop the editorial vision for *Personal Journal* was an easy choice for Steiger and his bosses, following closely on her success with *Weekend Journal*.

Lipman assembled a tiny team to create the prototypes for the enhanced *Wall Street Journal* and *Personal Journal*. She looked to Dizney, and his key lieutenants, David Pybas and Dona Wong, to take the lead on the redesign. In addition, she retained the well-known newspaper and magazine designer, Mario R. Garcia, and one of his senior people, Ed Hashey, to assist.

Sequestering themselves in an 11th-floor conference space away from the main newsroom, only Lipman, Dizney, Steiger, and a couple of others had the special key card needed to unlock the room.

They jokingly referred to their workspace as the “Skunk Works,” a reference to the secret R&D team at Lockheed Aircraft Corp. that during World War II, working from an odorous rented circus tent, rapidly developed a jet fighter for the United States.

So thorough were their efforts to keep their project under wraps that the Lipman team did not network their computers with those of their Journal colleagues, keeping all of their work strictly localized on their computer hard drives.

Lipman and Dizney considered and focus-group tested various concepts, especially what the new front page might look like. As they pared the field, what emerged was a subtly fresh look, featuring color and including an update to the iconic “The Wall Street Journal.” nameplate. Their new logo retained the superfluous period that has adorned the newspaper from its first day of publication and remains a fixture to this day. The iconic period makes no sense, of course, since “The Wall Street Journal” is not a declarative sentence requiring a punctuation mark.

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[Design and grammatical historians note that many newspaper nameplates during the 1800s and a good chunk of the 1900s placed periods at the end of their titles, including *The New York Times*, which waited until a February 1967 redesign to put an end to its period.]

When Lipman began work on “Project 2002,” the Journal’s existing design relied on entrenched templates that provided virtually zero flexibility to accommodate variances. As Lipman discovered, even minor tweaks required a major effort.

Every little change was a completely different animal, even though to the naked eye, it looks like a very small change. [It was] the same as if you had torn out the whole thing and did it all over again.

Design reconfigurations also required adapting the content. One example was the paper’s daily front-page “10 point” column. The decades-old feature provided a short summary and menu of the day’s most important business and finance stories.

As part of Lipman and Dizney’s new format, the six columns on the front page were each narrowed slightly, which meant that the copy editors who crafted the daily “10 point” would have fewer characters with which to brief subscribers.

To gauge reader preferences, Lipman and Dizney hosted three focus groups, the last of which they conducted in San Francisco the weekend before 9/11.

On their return to the office on Monday, September 10, Dizney recalled he and Lipman were upbeat.

We were feeling very proud of ourselves.

The walls of their small conference room were draped in page prototypes.

Reflecting on all the work the pair had put in and the many, many iterations they had developed, Dizney felt a foreboding that he couldn’t explain.

For some reason, I wanted to back this stuff up, you know, just in case. I burned it to DVDs — everything I had — and took the copies home.

The next morning, as Lipman and Dizney were picking their way through pools of blood and piles of ash, debris, and body parts, it did not immediately dawn on them that much of what they had labored on for more than a year remained locked away in their fortress-like conference space, offline, and now utterly inaccessible.

September 11 would prove a considerable setback to “Project 2002,” but thanks to Dizney’s sixth sense, at least the team wouldn’t have to start again from scratch.

The thought kept running through Lipman's head.

I've got to get to the office. I've got to get to the office.

Lipman's and Dizney's recollections of their exact locations when the second plane hit and what transpired in the immediate aftermath differ.

According to Lipman's version, she and Dizney had navigated across the West Side Highway to the southside of 200 Liberty Street, where the building's parking garage entrance was located. When the second plane crashed into the South Tower, catty-corner to their position, Lipman recalled that instinct kicked in.

It was just primal. Everybody ran and flattened themselves against a building. It was not a conscious thing.

Dizney remembered it differently, placing the two of them still on the World Trade Center side of the West Side Highway, where they braced against the 39-story Deutsche Bank Building.

Which version is correct is a distinction without a meaningful difference.

What they both agree on is that their subsequent attempt to return to the office proved fruitless because the Journal's building was already locked down. So the two joined a parade of others — including some of their colleagues — walking west toward the Hudson River promenade and then uptown past both blazing towers.

Joe Dizney and his wife, Jessie Woeltz, resided in a Greenwich Village apartment, located on the fourth floor of a nine-story, early 20th-century building. Located on 6th Avenue near Washington Square Park, their home was roughly two miles from the World Financial Center.

Streams of pedestrians, some covered in soot, also were maneuvering to the Village and points north. Military helicopters circled overhead. Dizney watched as one chopper landed in a park. Soldiers in full camouflage carrying semi-automatic weapons jumped out. A woman on a bicycle pressed aggressively through the crowd against the flow, furiously ringing her bell for those walking to clear a path.

The air was choked with the stench of smoke and concrete dust. People were lined up at payphones by the dozens, hoping to reach their loved ones because most cell phones proved useless. On the streets, strangers huddled around vans and other vehicles, listening to radio news coverage of the terrorist attacks. It's how Lipman and Dizney first learned that the Pentagon also had been hit.

Lipman and Dizney made it safely to his apartment just as the South Tower fell.

Although telephone landlines continued to operate on September 11, the circuits were overwhelmed. Try as she might, Lipman was unable to reach her husband, Thomas Distler, an entertainment attorney, to let him know she was safe and uninjured.

He was convinced for that first hour-and-a-half or two hours that I was dead. He was sure because he saw what was going on and he couldn't reach me.

Somehow, Lipman managed to get a call through to her parents in New Jersey, and she implored them to contact her husband and alleviate his fright.

At Dizney and Woeltz's apartment, Lipman was first able to monitor the rapid-fire exchange of emails that was taking place between the various dispersed Journal editors and reporters, many of whom were filing personal accounts of their travails as well as raw reports of interviews they had conducted with eyewitnesses and survivors. Since none of those afield knew who precisely to address their emails to, much of the correspondence was copied to anyone and everyone they could think of.

No one knew Paul Steiger's whereabouts or if he had survived.

Lipman wanted to get home, and she wanted to join her fellow deputy managing editors who were assembling at the Upper West Side apartment of Barney Calame, not far from her apartment on 87th and Broadway.

Fortunately for Lipman, she and Woeltz had similar shoe sizes, so Lipman borrowed a pair of sneakers and began the several-hour walk on her own from Greenwich Village to her apartment.

Lipman saved her debris-coated high heels as a remembrance, although she never wore them after September 11.

She also made sure that she wouldn't be caught flat-footed going forward.

After 9/11, everybody I knew went out and bought a pair of "fleeing sneakers" to keep in the office in case we ever had to flee again.