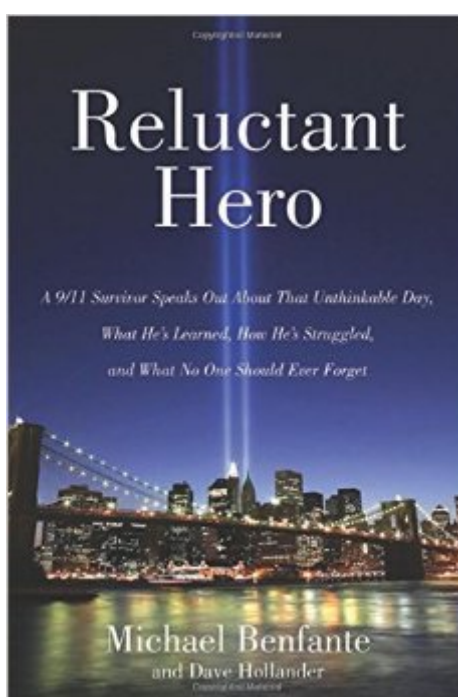


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# Reluctant Hero: A 9/11 Survivor Speaks Out About That Unthinkable Day, What He's Learned, How He's Struggled, And What No One Should Ever Forget



## Synopsis

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.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

The church library where I work recently had the opportunity to host Michael Benfante as a speaker.

Many members of the congregation read the book before he came to town, and virtually everyone tore through it in one or two days. All those who came to return their copy to the library walked in open-mouthed, saying the same thing: "Wow." We own 25 copies of the book, and haven't been able to keep them on the shelves. The first part of the book lays out Benfante's journey through hell on 9/11 in such unflinching detail that the experience felt immediate -- so much so that my heart was pounding and my hands were shaking. That being said, the real story follows what happens to Michael after the 9/11 media storm dies down. As a reader, this part of the book was equally gripping as Michael struggles through frustration, self-annihilation, anger and despair described in his down-to-earth, take-no-prisoners voice. I won't give anything away here, but Michael goes down a heartbreaking, dark path that has you pleading with him to return to the confident, charismatic, successful guy he was before 9/11, wrapping up the whole thing in a pretty bow at the end. But life is not a Hallmark card; his eventual redemption, still a work in progress, lies in a simple yet powerful message he discovers in one small, beautiful moment with his young son. Michael's hour-long presentation at my church left his audience transformed -- a powerful word, but the only way to adequately describe his influence. People stayed behind long after Benfante departed simply to discuss with each other how affected they were by his story and his not-preachy-but-nonetheless-spiritual message. He states that writing this book was simply meant to be a cathartic exercise for him; he seems genuinely surprised by a generally-cynical public's positive embrace. Do yourself a favor and read this book.

Having worked for Mike at the office in the World Trade Center and knowing him as a person before and after 9/11, I thought that I had an understanding of what he had went through on that day in 2001. This book not only expanded on his life and feelings during that experience, but also shared the sometimes painful reality of living in a post-9/11 world and how to cope and move on within it. This is a story that explores deep areas of the human soul and provides inspiration and hope for a brighter tomorrow. I highly recommend this book and express my gratitude to Mike for having the courage not only on 9/11 to do what he was nationally acclaimed for doing, but also to compile his story into this novel to share with the world and deliver a powerful message that has been lost and that many of us have since forgotten over the past 10 years.

On September 11, 2001 Michael Benfante reported to his job as a manager at a telecommunications firm on the 81st floor of the World Trade Center. When the planes crashed into the building, Benfante and his co-workers started working their way down the stairs. When they

reached the 68th floor Benfante and one of his co-workers encountered a woman in a wheelchair. There were female co-workers staying with her but it was impossible for them to carry her down 68 floors. Benfante and his co-worker carried the woman down to the bottom and out of the building. 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 is Benfante's account of not only what happened to him on that tragic day, but what happened to him in the ten years since September 11th, 2001. Benfante became a celebrity for his actions on September 11th; he was showered with awards, feted on the Oprah Winfrey Show, and mentioned in a speech by the President of the United States. Almost one year to the day Benfante got married with the woman in the wheelchair as a guest at his wedding. But while all this was going on, Benfante was grappling with Post Traumatic Stress Syndrome. He refused to go get therapy and kept his feelings inside. He resorted to alcohol and other ways to keep his demons at bay. This book is gripping. I really felt as if I was on the journey with him down the stairs of the World Trade Center. I was shocked when I realized that even after they got out of the building, he was almost killed by the tower collapsing. For some time he had no idea what had happened to the woman in the wheelchair. Benfante has written this book as a kind of catharsis to finally come to grips with what happened on that day. The book is touching and he is unflinching as he admits that he hasn't always handled things very well.

This is a beautifully written book that really nails the human condition. This should be required reading for everyone.

I tend to shy away from non-fiction because I find it either boring or too sad. In this case, I was very wrong. I was so glad I read this book. Michael Benfante is a storyteller, and the book reads that way. I was inspired. This book is the story of a man reluctant to be called a hero but incapable of acting otherwise. He was, simply, raised right, and reacted in the only way he knew how to someone who needed help. He says anyone would have done the same (oh, how I want to believe him). What touched me about this book was the author's openness. He exposes his own life and thoughts without flinching, even if he is not shown in a favorable light. This willingness to lay himself bare rings very true as does his story of the day the towers fell and the aftermath in his own life. This book feels like a conversation with the author. Well done.

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