

HEADLINERS

The day America fell

A Belfast bureau reporter offers a personal perspective on the terrorist destruction of New York's World Trade Centre.

Belfast bureau reporter Orlaith Graham Wood, 13, offers a personal perspective on the terrorist destruction of the World Trade Centre in New York.

Now is not the time to judge but instead learn that lives, whether they are Palestinian, Bosnian, Indian, American, Irish, French or whatever, are all of equal value.

Just a little more than a month ago, I was up in the World Trade Centre towers looking out at Manhattan. To see them disappear in a waterfall of concrete, dust and bodies is like seeing your past disappear.

I had been there and I've seen how many tourists visit. They come from every corner of the world, old and young. It's just horrible to think of the parents who have lost their children and the children who don't have mothers or fathers anymore.

Add all the business people who worked in the buildings, to the death toll and anyone can see that major tragedy has occurred.

It's been 13 years since I was born, a lot has happened since then but this is the biggest event in history that's happened since I was born.

There have been some positive things, and some negative things.

Not long after I was born the Berlin Wall came down, then there was release of Nelson Mandela from prison and of course the Good Friday Agreement. Those were good things in most people's eyes.

Then there were the bad things.

The genocide in Rwanda, Bosnia, the Gulf War were all awful catastrophes that have happened in my lifetime. At the time, the Omagh bomb seemed disastrous.

But yesterday a major event in history shook the way a lot of young people thought.

This morning my friend came rushing up to me in the playground and told me in a deeply worried voice how she'd be heartbroken if they sent her father to war if this act of terrorism began World War 3.

This is a girl who usually worries about her nail polish cracking off or her hair being lop-sided.

I was shocked at how seriously a lot of my school friends had been taking the events; they really understood what was going.

Later in English class, we discussed the attack on The World Trade Centre twin towers with our teacher.

We talked over how we would feel if, in 15 years time, Northern Ireland would be under terrorist attack.

Suddenly, all our teenage worries disappeared. People on the other side of the world were lying dead under piles of concrete and rubble, or even worse, people were lying there waiting to die.

When I found out about the attack I was in shock for a long time. Part of me of course empathizes with the ordinary families who have lost their nearest and dearest but I have to reluctantly admit that I feel such an attack was only a matter of time in coming.

America's hands have been soiled with blood from nearly every corner of the world.

This does not mean that innocent people should die, suffocating under tons of debris and rubble or crashing to their deaths on a plane. But we can't ignore the truth that successive US governments have gained a multitude of enemies.

Now is not the time to judge but instead learn that lives, whether they are Palestinian, Bosnian, Indian, American, Irish, French or whatever, are all of equal value.

People deal with tragedy in different ways. At school, we were joking about how people were abseiling down the skyscraper with toilet paper.

Most people laughed but one girl burst into tears. Most people thought she was being unreasonable because she had no relations or friends in New York, but I understand that she was feeling the pain of the victims.

So, young people here have been affected by this tragedy, in different ways. Some have lost friends or relatives, others like me have not heard from aunts and uncles living New York.

Some young people don't realise how heavily they may be affected by this.

If the worst comes to worst, and World War 3 starts, the UK and Ireland could be involved.

All we can do is listen and wait for George Bush's response, and hope that it doesn't start a 'You hit me so I'll hit you back' situation like we have in here.

We don't want a catastrophic version of the trouble here in Northern Ireland.

About the team

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