

Renfrew-area native recalls all the horror of last Tuesday

SEPT. 11, 2001

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Renfrew — While some New Yorkers struggled to come to grips with the horror of the terrorist destruction of the World Trade Centre, others rebounded more quickly from the initial shock.

Among the former was Catrin Beck-Glasgow, who grew up on a farm in Admaston Township and was educated in Renfrew. Ms. Beck-Glasgow, the daughter of Reinhold and Hedwig Beck, now resides in West Orange, New Jersey, about 15 miles "as the crow flies" from Manhattan.

"But I can see the Manhattan skyline from where I live," Ms. Beck-Glasgow said last week.

Her husband, Mark Alexis Glasgow, is a computer technician working for Nortel in New York. His job entails installation and maintenance of computer systems, and he works during the night when offices are closed. Much of his work is in Manhattan.

"He had worked in the vicinity of the World Trade Centre Monday night, and finished work about 5 a.m. Tuesday," said Ms. Beck-Glasgow.

"He was asleep at about 9 a.m. Tuesday when his sister called from Brooklyn and left a message saying she wanted to know if he was okay," said Ms. Beck-Glasgow. "He couldn't figure out why she would wonder if he was okay, and tried to call her back but couldn't get through."

Ms. Beck-Glasgow, a clothing designer, is in the process of launching her own business and works out of her home. Puzzled by her husband's inability to complete the call, she called the operator.

"I asked why we can't get through to Brooklyn," she said. "The operator just said 'turn on your TV.' We turned it on just before the second attack.

"We were just stunned," she said. "We didn't move from the TV all day."

It was 3 p.m. before they were successful in contacting her sister-in-law to reassure her.

On Wednesday morning, Mr. Glasgow was called to go to work.

"They picked him and a couple of other people up to go to work in the Verizen Building, right next to the World Trade Centre," she said. "Phones were still down in the southern part of the island, and they were going in to work to restore communications."

She explained that the World Trade Centre and some of the surrounding buildings are a hub of communications infrastructure.

"Normally Alexis works with a much larger crew," she said. "But they wanted only a few of the most experienced people in there. They issued them gas masks and protective clothing, and took them in with a police escort, because access was restricted to the public. He took a change of clothes, because they told him he could be there overnight."

She was concerned about his safety.

"I hope the buildings have been checked, and they let them go in there only if they are safe," she said. "The glass has been blown out of the windows in some of the buildings near the World Trade Centre, partly because of the heat and also because of the concussion when the buildings fell. It was like an earthquake."

As it turned out, by Monday Mr. Glasgow still hadn't had the opportunity to do any work to restore the damage.

"He goes there every day, but he hasn't been allowed in yet because the buildings are very unstable," she said on Monday. "He's just on standby — sitting there waiting. He's getting very frustrated. I understand the Verizen building has a huge hole in it on the ninth floor where all the switches are. Now they're thinking of going to another site and installing all new switches."

Conditions in general at the scene of the disaster are poor and are deteriorating.

"When I was driving Alexis to meet his colleagues, we had to stop in Jersey City when his beeper went off so he could make a phone call," she said. "Even on the other side of the river, his eyes were watering from the fumes."

She said there were also concerns about asbestos in the buildings.

"They think there might be long-term repercussions from the asbestos," she said. "The best thing to do is to keep your mouth and nose covered, but for so many of the people running from the buildings it was a matter of life and death, and they didn't take any precautions."

Ms. Beck-Glasgow said that in the 24 hours following the attacks, it was difficult to realize their full impact.

"Alexis kept saying 'I'm waiting for this to hit me. I keep feeling as if I've just watched a movie like Independence Day.' I know he was anxious to go in there and be helpful, but a part of him also wanted to go and see it so he could understand it better."

The task facing the rescuers is also getting increasingly frustrating and unpleasant.

"They haven't pulled anybody out since Wednesday, so it's very discouraging," she said. "They're tunnelling now, looking for pockets," she said. "They've gotten as far as the Path Train, which is the train to New Jersey. People are wondering why they don't go in through the subway, but I've heard that it's full of water."

She explained that the various subway and train lines converge on the World Trade Centre.

She had to drive through Manhattan on Sunday on her way to a friend's birthday celebration.

"Everyone is struggling to get back to normal, but it's difficult," she said. "The traffic's not flowing well, and when I went through the police were checking about every third car at the tunnel."

She said the mood in the city is "very wierd."

"You look at those tall buildings and wonder if one of them could come down," she said. "You go in there with a completely different sense of awareness. There's still that electrical and fuel smell in the air."

Added to that now is the smell of decomposing bodies.

"The husband of one of many friends is a policeman," she said. "They send so many from each precinct in on rotation. He doesn't even want to go in when his turn comes again."

She said that during the day of the disaster she spoke to few local people, although she had calls from Canada, her native Germany, where she lived until the age of 9, and from colleagues and friends in Spain, Italy, and France.

"Everything was shut down, and everybody was inside," she said. "People over here are having so many different reactions. They just don't know how to compute all of this."

She said some people are so distraught that they are physically ill.

"A friend of mine doesn't know anyone who is killed or injured or missing, but she is so upset she has been throwing up," she said. "She has two teenage sons, and is just so worried about what the future will hold for her kids."

She said the cleanup is not only unpleasant, but a painstaking task, because of the large numbers of people who are missing.

"People have loved ones in there," she said. "They will have to move every single piece of rubble individually."

So much uncertainty remains.