



## Living with 9/11: the charity worker

After losing her brother, Edie Lutnick found that caring for others helped her to heal



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guardian.co.uk, Monday 5 September 2011 15.00 EDT



Edie Lutnick still wears her brother's socks. Photograph: Dan Callister

For many months after 9/11, Edie Lutnick went to work in her dead brother's clothes. A slim woman with a mane of curly hair, Lutnick was swamped by his sweaters. Ten years on, her baby brother's knitwear has gone back in the closet but reminders of her loss go with her everywhere. Around her neck she wears a broken heart pendant, given to her by her boyfriend in exchange for the sweaters. On her wrists three bangles commemorate the day that she lost Gary Lutnick and 657 colleagues at Cantor Fitzgerald, the Wall Street firm hardest hit by the terrorist strike.

Today she is wearing a sleek black suit Gary picked out for her. Sometimes, she says, she still wears his socks.

"When you lose somebody, they are always present," says Lutnick. "The world around you continues. You make new memories that the person you lost isn't a part of any more. You have birthdays and you go to anniversaries, you get a new job. There is no closure. Ten years is a milestone but it's not an ending."

All the Lutnicks worked in tower one of the World Trade Centre. Edie Lutnick had a law office on the 101st floor and was at home when the planes struck. Howard Lutnick, chief executive and chairman of Cantor Fitzgerald, the next youngest in the family, was taking his son to his first day at kindergarten. His office was on floor 105.

Gary, a partner at Cantor, was on 104. When the terrorists hit tower one the initial damage spread from the 92nd to the 98th floor, trapping people on the floors above. Friends and colleagues bombarded Edie with calls as the tragedy unfolded. When Gary

got through she assumed that he, too, was out of the office. "But Edie, I am here," he said.

On September 13 2001, Howard Lutnick called his sister and asked her to run a charity he was setting up for Cantor's families. "My initial thought was that he had lost his mind, that there were so many other people more qualified to do this. When I started thinking about who all those people were, I realised that they were all gone."

In the last 10 years the charity has distributed more than \$180m (£111m) to the families of Cantor's former employees and raised another \$65m (£40.4m) for charity from an annual fundraising day. It has also made Edie Lutnick one of the most powerful voices representing the relatives of the 9/11 dead.

"Howard said, 'It takes a broken heart to heal a broken heart.' My heart was broken. And so were the hearts of all the families. Every bit as much as I was able to help them, they were able to help me," she says. Ten years later she remains intimately involved in the lives of the relatives. They call when their children marry, when they graduate. Some are now working at Cantor. "There's no hard and fast rule as to where people are. Some of the widows and widowers have remarried, some have started dating, some would never contemplate dating as long as they live," she says.

Lutnick has chosen the anniversary to release *An Unbroken Bond*, her memoir of 9/11 and its aftermath. "One of the main reasons I wrote the book is because there are lessons that need to be learned. I want people to know what the story of 9/11 is," she says.

"As I look back on that first year ... it's hard for me to imagine how much we accomplished. I really just wanted to crawl up in a ball and not move. Having a purpose larger than myself – caring for our families – was the only thing that kept me going. I never actively thought about what I was doing or how it would turn out. I just reacted, over and over again. It was never about strength. It was always about survival not just mine and Howard's, but all of ours," she writes in the book.

The terror attack wasn't Edie Lutnick's first brush with tragedy. Both of her parents died of cancer while she was a teenager, leaving her to take care of the two younger brothers and especially Gary, five years her junior. "I think it made me somewhat more uniquely qualified," she says. "I had lost my parents, I also raised Gary. In essence I had lost my child as well. I understood loss and pain, and the upheaval this would cause, emotionally and financially. The whole issue of stability around a family."

Many of the relatives' initial problems were financial. They needed to pay next month's rent, their medical bills. And the pressure to make that happen while saving the firm soon catapulted Howard Lutnick, Cantor's notoriously hard-driven boss, from hero to villain.

Howard had become the face of 9/11 when he broke down in a TV interview aired shortly after the disaster. He talked about his brother, still unaccounted for, and sobbed as he recalled "...so many people, so many names ... so many people that I loved ..." The firm pulled out all the stops to get up and running. Then on 15 September Lutnick cut off the paychecks of the missing, a move he said was essential to save the company.

"Howard had to make tough decisions. He had to save the firm. And I think that the fact that we are here today shows that he was right. We would not have been able to give all that we have given without Howard making those decisions," says Edie.

Controversy has continued. Lutnick's memoir documents her clashes with New York mayor Mike Bloomberg over the legacy of the 9/11 site and its memorial. Bloomberg told Lutnick the "size of the memorial ... should not overshadow the needs of downtown

residents and businesses,' and went on to say that it shouldn't feel like a cemetery because it will hurt the real estate market."

She is still unhappy that the memorial has no context and that the names of the firms where the dead worked are missing. She was against the building of a mosque near the 9/11 site, a decision she says was down to "sensitivity not religion". Sensitivity can be in short supply as memories fade, she says.

"I once went to a panel discussion where somebody asked some college students what 9/11 meant to them. One of them said that it meant hassle at the airport. We need to educate our children about 9/11 and about civic responsibility," she says. "How we remember our dead says a lot about who we are as a society."

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