



## Phil Reisman: 9/11 victim a woman for all seasons



Phil Reisman, preisman@lohud.com 8:16 p.m. EDT October 13, 2014



(Photo: submitted)

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On Monday I received a special book in the mail titled, "Amy's Greenhouse, Learn & Grow."

It is written for young children, but it is for all of us. This is a book about remembrance and the lovely cycle of life — perfect for mid October, as the leaves begin to turn.

Only 58 pages, it is a celebration expressed in simple words and pictures.

With apologies to the author, Karen Hessel, and portrait photographer, Anna Pilerio, I will give away the ending. It goes:

*"We love to visit Amy's Greenhouse all year at Barnard School. We learn about plants and flowers and watch things grow.*

*"Come and visit Amy's Greenhouse. See the plants and flowers inside the building. Sit in the gazebo and read a book. Walk on the patio and see the engraved bricks. Learn and grow!*

*"Remember Amy O'Doherty."*

On Sept. 11, 2001, about 8:50 a.m., Amy O'Doherty phoned the Henry Barnard Early Childhood Center in New Rochelle and left a reassuring message for her mother, who was a pre-kindergarten teacher.



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"Tell my mom I'm safe and OK, a plane hit the tower."

Amy, 23, worked at Cantor Fitzgerald and, tragically, she wasn't safe. Sitting in the school auditorium minutes later, her mother watched on television as the Twin Towers at the World Trade Center collapsed.



Amy O'Doherty, a 9/11 victim who is remembered by Amy's Greenhouse at the Barnard School in New Rochelle. (Photo: courtesy photo)

Amy, who was born in Pelham, was one of 2,753 people who died during the terrorist attack on the trade center. Nearly one-quarter of the victims were Cantor employees; the firm's offices covered four floors of the North Tower.

Condolences poured in.

"Everyone was sending the mother flowers," Hessel said in a phone interview Monday. "She was completely despondent. She started telling people to stop sending her flowers because she decided she wanted to build a greenhouse at the school for the children. Her daughter loved sunflowers and children."

With help from friends and family, Amy's mother, Geraldine Davie, raised enough money to build the greenhouse along with a prim gazebo, amphitheater and a commemorative brick patio inscribed with the names of donors. Many of the bricks have messages about lost loved ones, but others carry a universal sentiment. One says, "Make each moment count, Sofia 2011."

Amy's Greenhouse was formally dedicated in 2005. Dozens of children attended the dedication, holding hand-made sunflowers representing Amy's spirit. Each year since, 600 students from pre-K through second grade participate in garden projects that are appropriate for the season.

Right now, the hot topic is pumpkins.

Pumpkins are weighed and measured. Some are carved and painted for Halloween. Pumpkin seeds are planted or baked for eating.



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Pumpkin seeds are planted or baked for eating.

Hessel poses a rather provocative question in her book: "What would you do with a pumpkin?"

The book was released last month on the anniversary of 9/11, but Hessel is only just beginning to get the word out.

"The reason I wrote the book is because so many parents work and they don't know what goes on there," she said. "And New Rochelle has seven elementary schools, two middle schools and one high school. There are 77,000 people in New Rochelle and not enough people know about it. It's a unique thing. It's very beautiful."

And it operates exclusively on contributions and volunteer assistance. Hessel, who is not a writer by trade but an engineer for a shopping center developer, wants to sell the book for \$10. All the profits will go to Amy's Greenhouse activities.

The book's dedication was written by Amy's mother who has since retired from Barnhard.

In it, she writes of Amy at age 4. "I simply knew she was going to be a special person."

She had a peaceful nature. There was an "aura" about her.

"Through all her childhood, her particular message was, 'Come along, share this wonderful life with me.'"

Visit [amysgreenhouse.com](http://amysgreenhouse.com) to order a copy of "Amy's Greenhouse, Learn & Grow."

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