

ISLAND LIFE

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Attacks provide many with reason to reach out to others

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Psychologist Sunny Massad calls it part of the way people alleviate self-pity after a tragedy, part of the way they take back power and control in their lives.

"Any opportunity to make someone else feel better, will make you feel better," said Massad, who has offered her own services to numerous community groups seeking to cope with a vast array of feelings.

"We feel better about ourselves when we're giving," said Massad. "If you know that the woman next door is old and lives alone, and if you go knock on the door with some cookies and to chat, you'll

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go home feeling like there's more meaning in your life."

Massad said on Sept. 11 the whole country went through a collective "near-death" experience. "All of a sudden, we were forced to look at 'what am I doing with my life?'" she said. As a result, people started looking at their values.

Cynthia Derosier has done just that. As the horror unfolded in New York — where she went to college and lived for several years — she spent the day on the phone with friends and relatives who were there and going through it. By the next morning, she was picking up the phone and calling the Red Cross, becoming one of 180 new volunteers being trained in the wake of the attacks.

Psychologist Massad explains it more fully: "Excitement and fear are the same emotion. It's only what you do, in your mind, that determines what it's going to be experienced as. Those who are saying 'The sky is falling, what if ...' are living in anxiety. Their world is getting smaller. They're not going to dinner. Not socializing. And the economy is reflecting that.

"We have to turn our fear into excitement. As long as we can keep giving, we can. How can you tap into your own passion and make meaning of your own life? By touching someone else's."

Derosier agrees. "If one person and one group can do something so horrible, then one person or one group can do something good to make up for it."