

Lessons from 9/11 reviewed at event at SUNY New Paltz

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NEW PALTZ — Bruce Springsteen's bruised but muscular voice sounded the keynote at the opening of a conference about the lessons learned from 9/11 at SUNY New Paltz Thursday. The two-day conference was sponsored by the Institute for Disaster Mental Health at SUNY New Paltz.

"You're Missing" is an elegy for someone who's never coming home:

"Pictures on the nightstand / TV's on in the den / Your house is waiting, your house is waiting / For you to walk in, for you to walk in / But you're missing, you're missing."

Springsteen's song played out against projected images of 9/11 — a sobbing woman comforting a child, a firefighter brushing away a tear, a single rose floating in a reflecting pond. The Hudson Valley lost 54 people in the terrorist attack.

The presentation Thursday was geared to members of the helping professions. But psychologist Monica Indart, who's had 25 years of experience in crisis intervention in such places as Rwanda, wanted her audience to understand what's sometimes forgotten in the professional's world of "outcomes" and quantifiable results.

To that end, she said, the people charged with helping the victims of disasters such as 9/11 could take a page from supposedly "primitive" cultures.

Even the animal world has something to offer those who would help survivors of catastrophe.

Indart spoke of the need for those victims to simultaneously remember and forget — "to hold on to what was and to move on."

Increasingly, she said, she's come to see that the trauma that follows a catastrophe such as 9/11 isn't something that can be addressed solely on an individual level — that families and social networks that emerge from catastrophe are invaluable to recovery.

Science has a role, she said, but a limited one.

"Science is only useful if we can do something with it," Indart said.

Under a projection of several penguins, she said penguins know the value of looking out for each other — the group protects the coldest members by surrounding them, then those penguins, once warmed, move on to protect other members of the group.

Afterward, Indart summarized her message.

"Cultures like Rwanda's have known for centuries they need each other at times of grief, and it's not just getting but giving that matters," she said.

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