

**Lorie Van Auken** is Co-Chair of the September 11<sup>th</sup> Advocates and founding member of the 9/11 Family Steering Committee, whose members were instrumental in the creation of the 9/11 Commission and in pressing the commission to oversee a thorough and credible investigation.

Eleven years ago, on September 11, 2001, my husband, Kenneth Van Auken, was murdered in the North Tower at the World Trade Center. Ken was only 47. It is astounding to me that 9/11 occurred over a decade ago, when it still feels like just yesterday. Our children were twelve and fourteen at the time of Ken's death. They are adults now. There are kids alive today who don't even remember that fateful day. To them it is just another historical event that they learn about at school.

For many people who lived through the events of September 11th the day has receded into the background. For others of us it remains in our lives on a daily basis. All of our experiences get viewed through the 9/11 "lens". This focus makes us see the world very differently than others do, and differently than we ourselves used to.

Take the invasion of Iraq, for example. We were told over and over again that Saddam Hussein had Weapons of Mass Destruction. Colin Powell testified at the United Nations with George Tenet, then head of the CIA, sitting behind him presenting an image of credibility and certainty. We were shown diagrams and photographs of where these WMD's were hidden. None of it was true. Not a word. Yet we invaded Iraq based on these falsehoods. We were also told that Iraq might have played a role in the events of 9/11, which was later shown to be untrue as well. What was the real reason for the invasion of Iraq? That question has never been adequately answered. Prior to September 11th I wouldn't have paid much attention, believing what I was hearing on the news. Post 9/11, I question everything that I am told.

Guantanamo Bay in Cuba is a stain on the reputation of the United States. The U.S. has tortured people whose guilt has never been proven. I was under the mistaken impression that America was to be the standard bearer in times of war and peace. Instead torture, extraordinary rendition, and assigning guilt without proof have become commonplace. These are terrible things that other countries might have done, but never the United States, or so we were led to believe.

There are many ever-evolving and unanswered questions with regard to the day of September 11, 2001. The 9/11 Commission did not satisfactorily address the central issues, nor did The National Institute of Standards and Technology in its investigation into the World Trade Center collapses. Those are the politically influenced "investigations" into September 11th, which the American people and the world have had to live with for over a decade. A real investigation with evidence and experts is still needed if we are ever to understand what really happened on that tragic day. Sadly, until that time it is likely that September 11, 2001 will continue to be used as an excuse to justify more outrageous and unconscionable actions by our government.

Lorie Van Auken