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## Sept. 11 Victims' Relatives Losing a Private Memorial

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The September 11 Family Room, a private viewing space for relatives of victims, is set to close when the National September 11 Memorial Museum has its debut in May.

The room was given to mourners seeking to watch recovery efforts as the weather turned cold in the weeks after the terrorist attacks. They left behind photos, teddy bears, wreaths, notes, books, report cards and other tributes, which over the years lined the walls, windows, ceilings and floors. Hidden from the public on the 20th floor of One Liberty Plaza, the space had plush sofas, toys for children and a sacred sense of reverence.

Now the room is being dismantled, inviting controversy and renewing a sense of loss for the families.

Makeshift shrines once filled the streets of lower Manhattan, but the Family Room is the only memorial created by grieving relatives for themselves and for each other. It is also the last one standing.

The Family Room was never meant to be permanent. But with the delayed opening of the memorial museum, it seemed to many that the room might never close. As families visited year after year on anniversaries and birthdays, they left behind mementos until the room was papered over with the objects of loss and love. For many relatives of the more than 1,000 victims whose remains weren't identified, it was the only place to grieve in the absence of a gravesite.

Families have jealously guarded the privacy of the room, keeping press out, but in recent days parents, spouses and children have started retrieving the tributes to their loved ones. As the room slowly reverts back to its original state as a humdrum floor in a downtown office building, The Wall Street Journal was invited in.

"It is such a crime that the serenity and peace of this room is going to be destroyed," said Sally Regenhard, who visited the room last weekend to collect pictures of her son, Christian, a firefighter who died at the World Trade Center. Someone had tacked a black memorial ribbon and palm frond to his photo, which she removed as well, careful not to disturb the mementos of other victims surrounding it.

Relatives were surprised to learn last week that the space would be disassembled so soon. [Brookfield Office Properties \(javascript:void\(0\);\)](#) is reclaiming it for commercial use, a spokesman said.

The 9/11 foundation isn't curating the artifacts from the Family Room for its permanent collection. They will be archived in Albany at the New York State Museum. There are no plans to display the collection, family members said. Spokesmen for the 9/11 museum wouldn't comment on the decision.

The move has sparked criticism from families of the nearly 3,000 victims. "This is a judgment on the different ethnicities, diverse cultures, other countries and big, effusive families" of Sept. 11 victims, said Diane Horning, who lost her son Matthew. "It is a big messy room and it reminds people of the ugliness of grief, the untidiness of it."

It isn't the first controversy affecting the families who have been vocal advocates for the size, shape and meaning of the memorial. From the placement of the names on the plaza's waterfall pools to the interment of unidentified remains in a subterranean vault in a flood zone to executive pay at the nonprofit's foundation, little has escaped the censure of family members.

The museum will open on May 21 and will extend seven stories below ground. Its collections include artifacts from Ground Zero and kiosks devoted to telling the story of victims' lives. The museum will have a private room for families overlooking the plaza's memorial pools in the tower footprints. Families may bring tributes to the new room, but it is smaller and has less wall space than the current room.

Families were notified that the Liberty Plaza room would close on June 15. Volunteers have offered to retrieve the items of relatives who don't live in New York.

Items left behind in the Family Room will be cataloged and archival images have already been taken, but many relatives voiced frustration that the space wouldn't be wholly reconstructed elsewhere.

"It would be wonderful if we had a benefactor come down and say we're going to donate this room to history," said Charles G. Wolf, whose wife, Katherine, died in the attacks.

From its start, the Family Room had the status of a sacred space. It replaced the family viewing platform on the corner of West and Liberty streets in November 2001, said Tara Snow Hanson, who was then vice president of the Lower Manhattan Development Corporation and the government's liaison to victims' families.

Port Authority employees and family volunteers removed the platform's plywood walls papered with missing-person posters, then reassembled the planks indoors. The fabric screen from the platform, which was signed by President George W. Bush and visiting dignitaries, was hung on one wall. Posters and cards were all painstakingly replaced.

As recovery gave way to rebuilding, the rise of 4 World Trade Center across the street obstructed views of the twin towers site. Soon after the windows, too, were papered over with pictures, T-shirts, flags, flowers, mobiles, birthday presents and thousands of origami cranes.

"Nothing will tell the history of 9/11 more than that room," said Ms. Hanson.

Over time, the walls and memory books became a way for families to communicate, they would leave notes and presents for each other as well as for loved ones. The LMDC did light housekeeping, removing flowers and food, but otherwise the spontaneous tribute was left as the relatives built it, an archeological record of their grief.

John Cartier was among the family volunteers who helped move memorabilia from the viewing platform after his brother, James, died in the attacks. He meticulously reconstructed the placement of notes and posters, staying until 4 a.m. to finish the job. "To everyone else it's just a room, to us it's everything," he said.

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