SAMPLE CHAPTER

Hard Faith

Sample Chapter — Chapter 8, “9/11”

by Ray Lopez

I’m in the field that Tuesday morning in the government car doing a home visit in Danbury with a guy who pled guilty to a conspiracy to traffic in counterfeit currency. Dan is a middle-aged, single white male with no kids, living alone in his deceased parents’ home. It’s a fairly large case in which he worked with a younger Latino woman with excellent computer skills. They sold thousands of dollars in counterfeit twenties to some Latin Kings from the Bronx. It’s a jail case. I’ve got the mobile phone with me, which is a corded phone and base station weighing about five pounds. We are years away from getting our BlackBerrys. If you can’t call 911 quick enough you can always use it as a weapon. Dan is a strange guy. He claims to be a black belt in Tae Kwon Do and a trainer for the Danbury Police Department. He gives me a tour of the large Victorian house that was built around the turn of the 20th century. It looks like he’s a borderline hoarder with stacks of books, magazines, tools, clothes, and knick knacks piled throughout the home, which is otherwise unkempt and in need of a good cleaning. The lawn needs mowing, and it doesn’t look like any landscaping has been done in over a decade. During every home visit you reach a point when you know it’s time to go. I am nearing that point when Dan shows me his father’s World War II service medals, including a Bronze Star and Purple Heart. He’s got his father’s DD-214 in one hand, the federal indictment in the other, and starts getting teary eyed as he laments over the shock reverberating in his mind from when he heard the charges read out in Court: “The United States of America v. Dan John.” He is ashamed of himself and knows his father, the war hero, must be rolling over in his grave. It’s 9:00 am when my phone rings. It’s my coworker Mike Guglielmo telling me that some nut case just flew a plane into the World Trade Center. “Ok Dan. I need to get back to the office. We’ll talk soon.” As I walk toward the car, I look up and appreciate the clear blue sky and think, what a great day for some lunatic to fly into a building. I hope there aren’t too many people injured. It’s just another crazy day in Metropolis. I’m in the car driving back to Bridgeport on Route 25 when Paula calls. She’s hysterical and can’t put a sentence together. I tell her I’ll call her back when I get to the office in about 25 minutes. All I can think is that my mother-in-law died. I couldn’t have known that my mother had called Paula to tell her to put on the T.V., and together they watched in terror as hijacked jet, Flight 175, flew into the second tower at 9:03. I get back to the federal courthouse in Bridgeport in time to see the South Tower collapse at 9:59 and the North Tower go down at 10:28. We start to understand that it’s a massive terrorist plot involving Al Qaida, and there might be other targets such as courthouses, train stations, and schools. The courthouse remains open until 4:00 pm that day. I can’t understand why. Tebben starts noticing that her fourth-grade classmates and other students are being called down to the principal’s office, starting first thing in the morning and continuing throughout the

day. She overhears teachers in the hallway talking quietly about terrorists and the possibility of schools being attacked. She is angry with the terrorists and angry with her parents for not coming for her. Paula picks up Tebben and Jesse after school and brings them home. She's been sitting in front of the television all day watching the horror, speaking with family on the phone and crying. I try unsuccessfully to get a hold of my buddy, Steve DeLuca, who's a New York City firefighter. It's a week before I find out he's ok.

Kingdom Bound gets invited to sing in front of the Trumbull City Hall that Friday at noon. There are a few thousand people there. The healing has already begun all over the country. We sing America the Beautiful a cappella, followed by God Bless the U.S.A. by Lee Greenwood, which will become the new national anthem in the weeks and months to follow. There are some federal clerks at the gathering. Word gets around and Kingdom Bound starts singing at naturalization and award ceremonies. After the group breaks up a few years later, I keep singing patriotic songs at these events. Judge Stefan Underhill organizes the 9/11 ten-year memorial in front of the federal courthouse in Bridgeport. I sing the The Star-Spangled Banner and Where Were You When the World Stopped Turning by Alan Jackson. After that, Jeff Bingham from the IRS joins me with his acoustic guitar and backup vocals, and we are the band until retirement and beyond. This is just a small change in my life after 9/11. We are still "America Divided," but for the next few months we come together. Love overcomes our fear and prejudices. We are united. We look each other in the eyes. We talk to strangers. We pray in public. We are changed, but the love doesn't last. We remember what happened, the death toll, where we were and whom we were with. We remember how it made us feel, but not how we felt toward each other. That is but a vapor a mist. "Why, you do not even know what will happen tomorrow. What is your life? You are a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes." James 4:14