

**2024 “Reclaiming the Sky” Resiliency Program
First Place
Susan M Baer Award**

**Eric Caplan
Sustainability and Resilience Program Director
Tampa Int’l Airport**

Through this experience with “Reclaiming the Sky,” I have been able to revisit a deeply impactful time in this Country’s history, as well as in my life, and in a way that I haven’t before.

Through this revisit of the events of 9/11, the accounts of several aviation industry heroes of that day, and stories of how they moved forward, I have gained invaluable insight and a perspective. In the following paragraphs, I will describe the personal ways that reading “Reclaiming the Sky” has impacted me and provided me with a perspective that I intend to take with me in both my career and in my life.

The collective of stories that make-up “Reclaiming the Sky” affected me deeply in many ways. I believe the purpose of this book is multi-faceted, with various intended takeaways. First, I believe this book is meant to bring you back to relive September 11th, 2001, as reminder of just what occurred that frightful day. This is one of the most traumatic days in United States history. However, as time moves forward, many of us move on and continue to become more disconnected from the gravity of just what truly occurred. For some, this book will serve as an introduction to 9/11 itself, and the flood of emotions felt by citizens all over the world. Some reading may have not been old enough, or even alive, to fully experience these emotions.

A new generation of aviation leaders may not understand “why” the industry operates the way that it does now, and how 9/11 was the conduit for so much change. I believe through the reading of “Reclaiming the Sky”, we are transported back in time to experience these events in a way in which we may need.

In addition to revisiting the events of 9/11, I believe that this book is also designed to share how certain aviation heroes launched into action, to serve as both inspiration and comfort for those around them. This is how Sue Baer’s story resonated with me. On September 11, 2001, Sue Baer was serving as Airport Manager for Newark Liberty International Airport. As Sue was arriving for her usual Monday “Senior Staff” meeting, she was made aware of the attacks that were starting to take place. As she looked over at the billowing smoke pouring from the World Trade Center, where many of her Port Authority of New York and New Jersey colleagues were located, Sue sprung into action without a second’s hesitation.

Sue formed her own operations center within the office, worked to understand other potential threats while leading the closure of Newark, JFK, and LaGuardia airports, all while providing comfort to her staff whose loved ones were unaccounted for, and for her own family. This may

be the single most frightening day of an airport manager's career, and Sue steadily met every obstacle. As someone who also works at an airport, I could almost see what Sue saw as she glared out the window toward the World Trade Centers, and feel the stressful office environment as those events were occurring. The way Sue handled herself, her staff, and the situation at-hand is exactly how I would hope to and left me deeply inspired.

Lastly, I believe "Reclaiming the Sky" is intended to provide a greater perspective in how to move forward following adversity. This is where Marianne and Anne McFarland's story resonated with me. The book shares a beautiful story of a mother (Anne) and daughter (Marianne) who were true best friends that did everything together. When Marianne, a customer service agent at Boston Logan International Airport, tragically passed away on United Flight 175, Anne did not become debilitated in her grief. Anne immediately created a support group for other grieving family members at Boston Logan, and eventually took a job as a customer service agent there, like her daughter. When asked how Anne was able to move forward and provide so much support for others, Anne explained that she actively made the decision to focus "outward" and not "inward." I believe this is a very valuable lesson in that grief and adversity do not define us. There are many things that are out of our control, but what is in our control is how we respond to them. Anne chose to respond by being a source of light and comfort to others, which has inspired me to be the same.

The experience of reading "Reclaiming the Sky" and this 2024 Resiliency Project has had a profound impact on me. I am grateful for being a part of this cohort and have become ever more inspired to be part of the aviation industry. I appreciate your consideration for this essay contest.

**2024 "Reclaiming the Sky" Resiliency Program
Second Place
Marianne MacFarlane and Jesus Sanchez Award**

**Fabian Guevara
Analyst II
Connico LLC**

The book "Reclaiming the Sky" by Tom Murphy narrates the stories of aviation heroes from the horrific incident we know as 9/11. Among these inspiring individuals, the one I resonated with the most is John Duval in Boston.

On the day of the event, John was faced with the daunting task of managing the chaos that ensued, making quick decisions to ensure the safety of passengers and staff. His path to recovery was tumultuous, filled with a mix of emotions, a profound sense of responsibility, and the struggle to reconcile his professional duties with his personal grief. John found strength within his community and the solidarity of his colleagues.

Regular gatherings and support groups within the aviation community were pivotal in his healing process, allowing him to share experiences and draw strength from others. Eventually, John found a renewed sense of purpose and became involved in initiatives to improve safety and preparedness in the aviation industry.

John's journey deeply resonates with my own life experiences. Born in the United States but raised in Mexico, I decided to return to the U.S. at the age of 17 after graduating from high school. Initially, I believed the transition would be straightforward—attend college, obtain a degree, secure a job, and be set for life. However, the reality was far from what I had imagined. Leaving my home for another country at such a young age was challenging. I left behind friends, family, and everything familiar with the sole purpose of finding a better future for myself and my family.

The first few months were a constant mental battle. I often questioned my decision and even considered returning to Mexico. It was during this period that I truly understood the importance of mental health and sought help from others. Support groups at school became my lifeline, allowing me to share my story, thoughts, and feelings while learning from the experiences of others. This support network was crucial in helping me see the light at the end of the tunnel, and I began to smile again. Like John, I eventually found a sense of purpose, which made navigating school, making friends, and life in general much easier.

Seven years have passed since I made that life-changing decision, and I can confidently say that I do not regret it. I have built great relationships, created lasting memories, and experienced some of the best years of my life. This journey has shaped me into the person I am today, driving me to give my all in everything I do. I find passion in challenging myself, as this is how we learn and grow into better individuals both personally and professionally. After graduation, I was proud to join the aviation industry by becoming a part of our great company. Being part of this goal-oriented team, which seeks the best for everyone every day, has been incredibly fulfilling.

Everyone has a unique story and faces tough times throughout their lives. It is crucial that we act with resilience, much like the heroes profiled in “Reclaiming the Sky.” The lessons I have learned from John's story, particularly the importance of community support and finding purpose, have been instrumental in enhancing my resilience. These lessons have helped me perform at my peak and meet challenges head-on, both personally and professionally. Embracing resilience and perseverance allows us to navigate the most challenging circumstances and emerge stronger, ready to contribute positively to our communities and industries.

By reflecting on John's experiences and my own journey, I have come to appreciate the power of resilience and the importance of supporting one another. These insights not only help me face my own challenges but also inspire me to be a source of strength and support for others. The stories in “Reclaiming the Sky” serve as powerful reminders of the human spirit's capacity to overcome adversity and find renewed purpose, a lesson that I carry with me every day.

**2024 “Reclaiming the Sky” Resiliency Program
Third Place**

Ken and Jennifer Lewis Award

Megan Adair
Administrative Assistant
Departure Media

Reclaiming The Sky by Tom Murphy taught me multiple life lessons and opened my eyes to a new perspective on how to navigate life. By reading about the heroes of 9/11 and their selflessness, I was left feeling inspired to go out and live my life for others instead of solely focusing on myself.

I am very grateful to have read this book. As someone born in 2000, I truly have no memory of 9/11 and reading this book made me realize how uneducated I was on the topic. This book was able to open my eyes and teach me endless lessons about both life and myself. Because of reading *Reclaiming the Sky*, I have promised myself to wear my kindness as much as I can, give and accept comfort where needed, and to think of other people's needs before my own. This book lit a fire in me, and it has inspired me to take back my life and reclaim my sky.

At the age of 24, I feel extremely blessed for many aspects of my life: I have a job that I love, a cozy and safe apartment to go home to every day, and amazing friends who make sure there is never a dull moment. That being said, my life is not perfect. The universe has certainly thrown some curveballs in my path and navigating these hardships is tough and confusing. On January 5th of this year, I lost a dear friend. Corey Zachary Skinner passed away after suffering from a heart attack a few days earlier. On January 4th, I visited him in the ICU. I never could have predicted what would happen the following day, but I am thankful I got to see him one last time. The biggest question I struggled with is why did this happen? Why do bad things happen to good people? And how do you just go back to normal after a loss like that? Corey is someone I used to see every single day. He always had a huge goofy grin on his face and he was always warm and welcoming to everyone. He never met a stranger.

In the week after he passed, I shut myself off to the world. I was so angry and confused and I could not make sense of why this had happened. I didn't really have anyone to blame so I guess you could say I was mad at the universe. I was mad at life, and I held onto this anger for as long as I could but one day, I woke up exhausted! This is getting me nowhere. I had to learn to forgive, I forgave the universe for this horrific outcome, for taking my friend away. I thought long and hard about the kind of life I want to live, and I decided I wanted to live more like Corey, exuding kindness to everyone I encountered. The book reinforced this idea that wearing kindness on your sleeve is a great place to start your healing journey.

Moving forward, I would like to think about the needs of others more often and try to put them before my own. The feeling of being able to help someone is truly priceless. As Sue Baer said, "When you're hurting, look for something you can do for someone else and then do it, nobody heals alone." I will implement this mentality into my life. I am great at counting my blessings and taking time to be grateful for all the amazing people in my life, but I need to spend more time thinking of those who are not as blessed as me and then try to identify how I can help.

Grief is not linear. Everyone has a different healing journey, and that journey is continuous. Instead of thinking about what I have lost, I ask myself, what can I learn from this and what is the gift Corey has left for me? Corey taught me many things, how to not take everything so seriously, how to give yourself grace, and how to have fun (which I still find myself forgetting how to do sometimes). The gift I am taking out of this is that I will live my life forever inspired by Corey's character. Our time on earth together was not nearly long enough, but I am grateful to have been able to call him my friend.

After reading *Reclaiming The Sky* by Tom Murphy, I have learned to lead a life full of kindness, consider the needs of others before my own, and let go of built-up anger. Most importantly, I have learned that it is never too late to take back hope and it is never too late to reclaim your sky.