

# THE CHANGE AGENT

Adult Education for  
Social Justice: News,  
Issues, and Ideas

## Spared on 9/11, A Restaurant Worker Fights for Justice

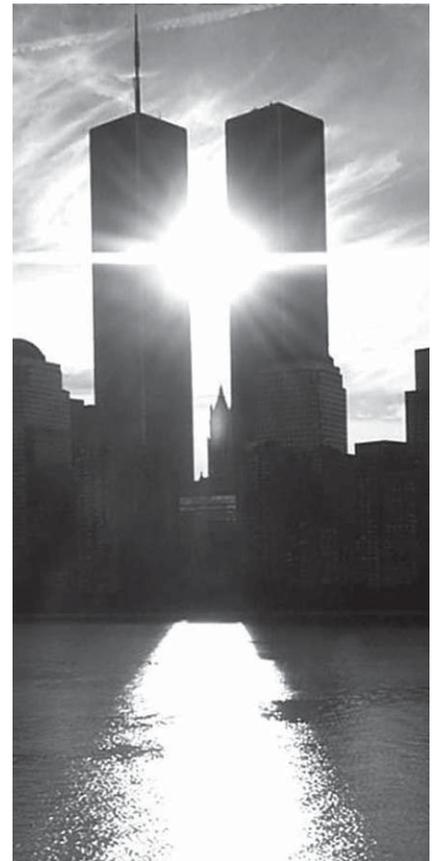
*Fekak Mamdouh and Rinku Sen*

At 8 a.m. on September 11, 2001, 40-year-old Fekak Mamdouh was asleep. He had worked the night before at Windows on the World, the luxury restaurant on the 107th floor of the World Trade Center's North Tower.

Mamdouh's sister called. "Listen, brother, there was a plane that just crashed through the Twin Towers." Mamdouh and his wife, Fatima, turned on the TV. They were shocked by what they saw.

Without eating, Mamdouh left their house. He went to the offices of his union, Local 100 of the Hotel Employees and Restaurant Employees (HERE). He and other union members began searching for the restaurant staff that had been working that morning. They visited all the hospitals, but they did not find any restaurant workers. Mamdouh headed to the morgue on First Avenue and 30th Street, and he stayed there until 3 a.m.

*continued on p. 22*



### PEACEFUL TOMORROWS

Spared on 9/11, pp. 1 and 22-23; My Brother "Chelo," p. 3; Background on 9/11, pp. 4-6; Ripple effects of 9/11, pp. 12-13, 16, 17, 28, Ordinary Heroes, pp. 8-9, 18, 19, 20-21, 24-25; A 9/11 family member travels to Afghanistan, pp. 14-15; Memorials, pp. 26, 27; Paying Tribute through Service, p. 29; "We and They" (a poem), p. 30; Fear, p. 31; Forgiveness, pp. 32-33; U.S. government responses, p. 7, 34, 50, 51; Seeking justice via the rule of law, pp. 35-37; 48-49; Post-9/11 anti-Muslim discrimination, pp. 10, 11, 38-39; Rejecting retaliation, pp. 40-43; USA Patriot Act, pp. 44-45; Detained and Tortured, pp. 46-47; What is Terrorism? pp. 52-53; Resources for Action and Reflection, p. 54.

*continued from the front cover*



*Mamdouh in New York City. Photo by Brian Palmer.*

For the next five days Mamdouh ate and slept very little. He spent many hours in the morgue's lobby carrying a sign: "If you know anyone who worked at Windows or if you worked at Windows, please call the union." Finally, on September 12th, Mamdouh found Mario Peña, who worked behind the bar at Windows on the World. And then, a week later, he found cashier Faheema Nasar. But in the end, 73 of his co-workers died in the terrorist attacks of 9/11. (See pp. 4-6 for background information on the events of 9/11.)

A couple of days after the attack, Mamdouh and Fatima went to the grocery store. She had covered her head in *hijab*.<sup>\*</sup> The store was not crowded. They were the only people wanting to buy fish. But Fatima could not get the fishmonger's attention. Eventually, Mamdouh said to the fishmonger, "Hey, she's trying to talk to you."

The fishmonger said, "Don't you know what you guys did?"

"What?" asked Mamdouh.

"The World Trade Center," replied the fishmonger.

Mamdouh felt very angry. He said: "What are you talking about? I lost 73 of my friends there." The clerk backed up from the counter while Mamdouh yelled, "I want to see the manager!" The manager apologized. Neither Mamdouh nor Fatima would ever return to that store.

Something changed for Mamdouh that day.

<sup>\*</sup>*Hijab refers to the head covering that Muslim women sometimes wear.*



*Mamdouh helped start the Restaurant Opportunity Center after the restaurant he worked at was obliterated in the attacks of 9/11.*

He suffered for the loss of his colleagues. And he was shocked that someone would associate him with their deaths because he was Muslim. Mamdouh had been a lucky immigrant. He had good jobs that paid well. He had not noticed too much discrimination. But after 9/11, he noticed that some people were blaming all Muslims for the actions of a few Muslims. He decided to join with others to help restaurant workers and immigrant workers who were suffering from discrimination. (Read more about his work on p. 23.)



*Mamdouh and Rinku Sen at a book signing.*

*Fekkak Mamdouh is from Morocco. He is married, has three children, and works with the Restaurant Opportunities Center <[www.rocunited.org](http://www.rocunited.org)>. Rinku Sen is the President of the Applied Research Center (ARC) and Publisher of Colorlines.com. This article was excerpted (and adapted) from An Accidental American.*