

Steadfast Survivor

A month after the Twin Towers fell during the September 11 attacks on New York City, workers digging through the rubble had lost all hope of finding anything alive in the smoldering debris. But they unearthed a tree, a callery pear planted on the eastern side of the World Trade center complex, crushed and burned almost beyond recognition to a blackened eight-foot stump. Only one branch remained alive, and many of its roots were broken. Still, crews dug it out of the pile and transferred it to the New York City Department of Parks and Recreation, which brought it to the Arthur Ross Nursery in the Bronx's Van Cortland Park.

There, horticulturalist Richie Cabo tended to the tree, planting it in rich soil and regularly fertilizing its roots. By the following spring, new shoots of green began to poke their way through the trunk, and despite Cabo's initial doubts, he knew the tree would survive.

After nearly a decade of care, the tree was returned to its former home as part of the National September 11 Memorial & Museum in December 2010. At that point, it had reached a height of 30 feet and has continued to grow and flourish. Says Mayor Michael Bloomberg, who attended the replanting, the survivor tree is a "testament [to] our ability to endure, the symbol of our unshakable belief in a brighter future."

—Danielle Taylor