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## The Falling Man

**(Documentary -- Discovery Times Channel, Mon., Sept. 10, 9 p.m.)**

By BRIAN LOWRY

Produced by Darlow Smithson Prods. Executive producers, Sue Bourne, John Smithson, Julian Ware; producer-director, Henry Singer; based on an article by Tom Junod.

**Narrator:** Tim Hopper

Six years later, there are relatively few ways to revisit Sept. 11 that don't feel well-trodden or arbitrary, but Discovery Times marks the anniversary with an engrossing 90 minutes that manages to be as intellectually provocative as it is emotionally involving -- inviting questions about taking one's own life and journalism's role in presenting painful images that compel us to look away. Built around Richard Drew's seminal photo of an unidentified victim plummeting from the smoldering World Trade Center, "The Falling Man" captures the horror of "an impossible decision," in a manner that proves thoughtful and, ultimately, ennobling.

Drew, an Associated Press photographer, took the shot of a shadowed figure seemingly frozen in space alongside the building, as those trapped in the upper floors faced a terrible choice to "burn alive or go quickly," as the husband of one jumper puts it.

Whether to run the photo prompted a fierce debate at newspapers, especially since broadcast TV wasn't showing any of the footage. (Video outtakes, however, reveal these harrowing scenes, with a voice grimly intoning "numerous people jumping" in the background.)

Those papers that did use the picture -- such as the Morning Call in Allentown, Pa., whose staff is featured here -- faced a barrage of vehement criticism, with many accusing journalists of callously invading the victim's privacy in the aftermath of his death.

The special then becomes something of a mystery, unraveling who "the falling man" might have been, which attracted the attention of a Canadian journalist and then Esquire writer Tom Junod, whose piece provides the foundation for the special. In the process, their reporting zeroes in on the day's horror by putting a face on one victim, in much the way the New York Times' capsule obituaries resonated long afterward.

Granted, the practice of commemorating tragedies (Sept. 11, Princess Diana's death, Hurricane Katrina) with TV specials has clearly gotten out of hand, as if these historic moments blend right in with "very special" holiday fare. To its credit, "The Falling Man" illuminates those very concerns, and -- in a sober, methodical and poignant way -- rises above them.

Camera, Richard Numeroff; editors, Alan Mackay, Ben Stark; music, Dario Marianelli. 90 MIN.

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