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One year after the 9/11 attacks, NBC's Sara James interviews a survivor who is still in the hospital recovering from her injuries. The story of this woman, who doctors first knew only as Jane Doe #1, is a tale of hope.

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MLA
"Profile of a World Trade Center Survivor." Sara James, correspondent. NBC Today Show.
Transcript
Profile of a World Trade Center Survivor
MATT LAUER, co-host:
It's hard to believe that there is still one 9/11 survivor in the hospital still recovering from her injuries a year later. But the story of this woman, who doctors first knew only as Jane Doe #1, is a tale of hope. A story of one woman's determination that no matter how long it took, no matter how painful, she would walk again. Here's "Dateline NBC"'s Sara James with the latest on the story NBC first broadcast almost a year ago.
SARA JAMES reporting:
She was a mystery woman. On that chaotic morning, all anyone at New York University downtown hospital knew for certain was that she was young and horribly injured, her legs nearly severed in the terrorist attack. The emergency room nurses, expecting more victims at any moment, labeled the unidentified woman Jane Doe #1.

What did you think when you saw this young woman?
Dr. NELSON BOTWINICK (Orthopedic Surgeon): That she was going to die.
She had no pulse. Her entire blood volume was on the floor. Her legs were hanging on by threads.
JAMES: There were so many patients, so little time, and Jane Doe's injuries were so severe. One doctor wanted to amputate.
Dr. JERRY GINSBURG (Plastic Surgeon): One of our superb surgeons came in, well trained in trauma, and said, in his Australian accent, “For God's sakes, cut them off. We've got to get going.” And that was actually superb trauma training.
JAMES: But orthopedic surgeon Nelson Botwinick argued his team could save Jane Doe's life and limbs.
Dr. BOTWINICK: My feeling was, “What am I saving here?” I mean, if we were going to save her, let's save everything.
JAMES: For eight hours, doctors reconstructed her legs and feet and wondered, who was this mystery woman?
Dr. GINSBURG: And I'm looking at her and I'm saying what is she going to do with these feet? Here I'm fixing--reconstructing this woman and I'm desperate to know, who is Jane Doe #1?

JAMES: Jane Doe #1 survived the surgery and even managed to whisper a name and phone number. The man who answered was Greg St. John, her fiancé.

Mr. GREG ST. JOHN: I waited about eight hours through the day until the surgeons called me and they asked if I would possibly know Jane Doe #1. They think she is a Debbie.

JAMES: Thirty-year-old Debbie Martinfeld of Manhattan. An American Express employee, she was on her way to work when she was hit by a piece of the second plane that slammed into the World Trade Center. NBC first spoke to Debbie last September 14th.

Ms. DEBBIE MARTINFELD: I'm so thrilled, I'm so impressed with the people who have spent time with me. They've changed my life all for the better and I love them.

JAMES: In a season of heartache, Debbie Martinfeld's survival was a rare miracle, worth celebrating.

Dr. GINSBURG: She's in the ICU the day after this amazing trauma. She's had, at this point, 30 units of blood, the tube between her vocal cords who can't speak. The devastating injury and the fact that we've changed the shape of her back side and put it back on missing certain parts and she's desperate to grab a tablet to write to me, “So Doc, my butt's smaller?” I said, “My kind of woman.”

JAMES: And doctors were optimistic about her wedding plans in the fall of 2002.

Dr. GINSBURG: At her wedding, she will dance on her own feet and not on prostheses.

JAMES: But as the reality of Debbie's recovery set in, it became clear the wedding would have to be postponed. Eight months passed and Debbie was still in the hospital unable to stand on her still healing legs.

Ms. MARTINFELD: I was Jane Doe #1, I was the first person in, you know, and I'm the last person out.

JAMES: Then in June, almost nine months to the day after she nearly lost her life, Debbie marked an amazing milestone. Debbie was standing.

Ms. MARTINFELD: Oh, my God. Thank you so much. That's what I wanted to happen.

JAMES: Within weeks, with the help of a walker, Debbie took her first steps and now Debbie's greatest desire seems tantalizingly close.

Ms. MARTINFELD: Didn't realize it would be--take such a long time, but I know I'm walking out these doors.

JAMES: Have you fantasized about that? Have you imagined what that's going to be like?

Ms. MARTINFELD: It's not like I'm going to be walking, you know, all the way home. But, you know, I see the doors opening and just walking through the doors onto the street.

LAUER: Doctors say Debbie could be walking out of the hospital doors as early as next month. She is still thinking about the wedding and what she'll wear, but those plans are still on hold for now. She's literally taking life one step at a time.