


## A Day in September

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## A DAY IN SEPTEMBER

It was supposed to be a great day. My mother and cousin were visiting me from Northeastern Ohio, where I was born and raised. I was going to work and my family was going to sightsee. We were going to meet at lunch, then attend a Broadway show. The day didn't come close to what we expected.

We were running a little late that Tuesday morning. My daughter would not stop whining and begged to come with us, as we were headed for a fun day. Thank God for her whining. We ended up missing my normal bus and had to take a later one, which put us in New York City around 8:00 a.m. My mother had a fractured foot from a previous injury and wore a support device. She realized she needed thicker socks, so we had to make a stop in Century 21, a department store directly across from the World Trade Center complex. Another stop was made in the lobby of WTC 2 at the security desk, which was put in place after the terrorist bombings of 1993. Everyone had to have the name of someone that they were visiting in the building and a valid picture ID. A picture was then taken of the visitor and placed on a plastic pass for the day. My mom and my cousin have a souvenir of that day with their picture on it—September 11, 2001.

We finally got into my office on the 48<sup>th</sup> floor of WTC Tower Two around 8:20 a.m. I introduced my mom and cousin to my co-workers and was telling them how to get to Ellis Island and a nearby donut shop, when the first airplane hit Tower One. The lights flickered, the building shook, and we saw chunks of concrete the size of tires, flaming objects, and tremendous amounts of paper flying past our windows. Someone yelled, "what the HELL was that?" I remember yelling to my mom and cousin to stay by my desk, then ran to the west-side of my office that faced the Statue of Liberty to look out the windows. Another person screamed to stay away from the windows, as we did not know what had happened yet. A normally quiet co-worker wasted no time in gathering all employees to the center of the office away from the windows. I ran to the other end of

the office where there were still employees looking out at the falling debris. They did not hear what was being said and I yelled to them that they must get away from the windows and grab their belongings as we were evacuating. I told my mom and cousin we would take the inner stairwell and proceeded with the rest of my co-workers. As soon as we opened our front door to the corridor, there was an intense smell of gas, one that you could almost taste. It was jet fuel, but we were not aware of that at the time.

I was so scared for my mother. She had turned white as a sheet and could not walk quickly with her fractured ankle. We made our way slowly down the yellow stairwell with my mom supported between my cousin and me. At times we had to move over so others could get around us, but all were orderly and quiet. We heard from someone who had entered the stairs at a lower floor that Tower One had been hit by a small aircraft. This had happened before and wasn't cause for worry. After we had made it down about 15 floors, my mom started to feel faint. I tried to encourage her and give her strength. I had a bad feeling in my stomach that we were in grave danger. We managed to walk down to the 29<sup>th</sup> floor and heard a public service announcement saying, "Building Two is stable. An airplane has hit Tower One, but we are stable. You may return to your offices." I remember looking at my mom and cousin and telling them that there was no way we were going back. Everyone knows that you are supposed to get out of a building filled with gas fumes. There were people that did go back. Since we assumed we were okay, I told my mom that we would go down the rest of the way on an elevator. The 27<sup>th</sup> floor was a re-entry station, so we managed our way down to the ground floor on a shaky elevator.

Security directed us to move quickly from the street level of Tower Two through the concourse under the complex. A quick glance out the glass doors showed a street filled with bright orange fire and paper. We were shuffled towards an exit on the Liberty Street side of the concourse. I told my mom and cousin that I had to stop and make a phone call so that I could let my mother-in-law, who was watching my two children at home, know that if she heard something on TV, we were okay. Thank

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God I made that phone call. My daughter Hope answered the phone and wanted to know what was wrong because I sounded funny. I asked her to please get Grandma, as I had something important to tell her. I don't recall speaking to my mother-in-law, because the second plane hit Tower Two as I was on the phone. It hit about 64 floors above us on the side of the building where we would have made our exit several minutes earlier. Fire and debris were piling up outside the glass doors from above and people turned and stampeded back the way we had come. Pandemonium then hit as dark gray smoke started pouring through the vents and people started screaming and running. I pushed my mom and cousin against the wall to my right so they would not be trampled. We were herded by security through the mall area to the opposite side of the concourse, and up an escalator to the plaza level outside. Police steered us under eaves so that falling debris would not hit us. A female police officer was crying as she worked and told us not to look, to stop walking and run as fast as we could.

I had to look. It will be something that will stay in my memory forever. There were three to four-foot chunks of concrete everywhere and things burning, much like a movie scene of the end of time. I looked up and I cried. My building, the one we had escaped from less than 10 minutes before, was in flames. Huge balls of fire were coming out of a gaping hole, and people were screaming and crying.

I told my mother and cousin that we had to get away as quickly as we could, heading east. We got a block away and passed by a poor man lying in the street who had been hit in the head by debris, whose life was running away from him in puddles down the street. The paramedics could do nothing, and officers were telling us not to look, just to keep moving. My mom needed to sit down. I pushed her for another block and found a place for her to sit inside an office building. It hit me then that I had not seen my best friend from work after we got outside, and I felt a sudden urge to find her. I looked up and saw her passing by the floor level window outside the building with two other co-workers. I ran out the door and started screaming her name. We hugged and went back for my mom and cousin. My friend talked me into getting on a subway

towards midtown, as it was the only way we could get out of lower Manhattan. I don't like riding the subway on a good day, and that day was no exception. Thank God she forced me. We were on the last train to run, and were underground when my building collapsed. We soon parted company, and my mother, cousin, and I made it to 23<sup>rd</sup> Street before the train shut down. I begged a man in a small food store to use his phone. I had been trying to use my cell phone and public phones on the street to no avail. The only number I was able to reach was our office in Long Island where I reached my boss. He was extremely happy to hear from me, and promised to make phone calls to my family to let them know we were safe. This was about 10:30 a.m.

I don't remember a lot after this, but I do remember being cold on that warm, sunny September day. We made our way to 34<sup>th</sup> Street, home of the famous Macy's. They have a cafeteria where we were able to sit and relax, and try to figure out how we would get back to my house in New Jersey. We did not make it home that day, as there were no trains or buses running, and all tunnels and bridges were closed. I tried phoning a co-worker who lives in Manhattan, and was not able to reach her—I must have left ten messages, the last ones while crying. As we got to Times Square, we saw crowds of people looking up at the large screens showing live coverage. It was then that we learned we had survived a terrorist attack, and that the world-famous Twin Towers of the World Trade Center no longer existed.

We walked for six hours that day. Our final stop was the Waldorf-Astoria on 49<sup>th</sup> Street, who had three rooms available (for a price, of course). We got home via the subway and train to New Jersey from Penn Station on Wednesday morning. I was still cold.

All of my co-workers are safe and alive. There are so many people that died. One of my daughter's classmates' mothers was a victim. She has a younger sister who is four years old.

I will be okay, and so will my mother and cousin. I am dealing with some post-traumatic stress issues. I have nightmares, not as often now as I did initially. I dream of fireballs and of the man lying in the street. I have woken my husband in the middle of the night by crawling on the floor looking for things I've

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lost. I have feelings of guilt for being a survivor, and for not suffering as much physical pain as others on that day. My daughter cannot go to sleep at night unless I am home. Our young pastor has been a rock for both of us. I thank God for her as well.

I have thanked God continually throughout this ordeal. I believe, and my mother and cousin believe, that they were with me on that day for a reason. I have worked in or around the World Trade Center in New York City for 15 years, and my family had never been in to visit. My cousin tried two other times to get vacation, and that week was the only time she could come. My family believes that if she and my mom had not been with me, I would have gone back to my office to get important papers or to help someone, and they are probably right. I had to focus on getting them out, which prevented me from going back. We also believe that we had a guardian angel at work that day with God; my grandmother, my mother's mother who has been gone now for 23 years. She always seems to be around when we need her. We were guided out of the building. I have never felt God's presence any stronger than I did during our escape, and in the days that followed.

Tragic events such as these bring people closer together and change lives forever. My co-workers are closer now than we ever were before. You must tell those that you care about that you love them every day. Do not leave special words unsaid, do not forget to show the people you care about how special they are to you.

Be a proud American and stand tall for your country. Do what you can to help anyone who needs assistance. Hug your children, your spouse, family, friends and even co-workers. Life, love, and freedom are such precious gifts.