

SEPTEMBER 11, 2001



Emile Wamsteker / Matrix

The following is an account of my experience in the World Trade disaster on Tuesday, September 11, 2001. This day will forever change me.

My day started out as usual. Up a little before 7:00 am, take a shower, get dressed, and off to work. My route to work involved walking to Grand Central station and getting on the 4,5 express subway to Fulton Street. At the Fulton street exit I walked up the street by Krispy Cream, where I tried not to stop on a daily basis, and into 2 World Trade via the plaza. The plaza is the open area between building 1 World Trade and 2 World Trade. During the summer months the plaza entertained hundreds of people with a summer concert series. My favorite day was always Thursday, country music day. Thursday's were always great days during the summer. From inside 2 World Trade I take the express elevator to the 44th floor then take the local elevator to the 58th floor where the DAIS group was located.

Walking into the office on Tuesday morning I remember saying hello to a Cedric, Bob, and Vito, co-workers of mine. This was about 8:15 am so most of the office had not arrived. Fortunately, most of the office did not roll in until around 9:00 am. I proceeded with my morning routine of checking voicemail, e-mail, and setting up my computer for the day.

Sometime around 8:45 everyone in the office heard a very large boom and felt 2 World Trade shake like never before. Worried about what I had just heard and felt I quickly looked to my left out the window, toward the Hudson River, to see paper and debris falling all around. I then ran to the window facing North to get a better view of the situation. As I looked up at 1 World Trade, I could see flames and smoke coming from an enormous hole in 1 World

Trade about 30 floors higher than us. I watched in amazement for just a few seconds then looked at the reactions of everyone around me. Everyone seemed confused, amazed, and scared. I, along with most of everyone else, immediately headed for the stairs. No one really knew what had happened. Some thought a missile had hit the building, others felt it was a bomb, we just could not explain what we had felt and witnessed.

We walked from the 58th floor to the transfer station on the 44th floor. The stairs were crowded going down but the march was organized and people remained calm. Most people were trying to use their cell phones to contact loved ones. Once we arrived at the 44th floor I tried to use my cell phone to call my mother. I was able to get a weak signal to call her. Mom answered the phone but I was barely able to hear her. I told her to turn on the TV and the building hit was not my building. I then lost the signal. During the walk down the stairs from 58 to 44 we did receive an announcement that 2 World Trade was secure and safe, not in danger. This announcement relieved many people walking down the stairs. After hearing this warning I concluded that I could safely return to my desk on the 58th floor, make a phone call to my father and girlfriend, get my bag, and get out of the building.

I jumped on the elevator going back up to the 58th floor with a group of people. When I walked into our office a few people were at the North window watching the spectacle in 1 World Trade. I walked over to ask about the situation. Before I could say a word, one gentleman looking shocked, stated that they had watched three people jump from 1 World Trade. This gentleman then proceeded to point out where the people landed in the plaza. Not wanting to subject myself to this destruction I quickly glanced

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then moved toward my desk. At this point I was concerned but did not really understand the severity of the situation. At my desk, I grabbed my bag and called my father and girlfriend to tell them that the building on fire was not mine and I am on my way home.

Shortly after I hung up the phone our building was hit. I heard a large boom and the building shook, lights went out, and parts of the ceiling started to fall down. Panic had now hit me along with everyone around me. I grabbed my bag and ran for the stairs. As a ran around the corner into the reception area, just short of where the stairs were located, a few people were running to get under the reception desk because of falling debris. However, everyone quickly realized that going for the stairs and getting out of the building was the best idea.

Once in the stairwell we moved in an orderly manner as fast as possible. The stairs were crowded but for the most part the line was moving. The stairwell was extremely hot and some people were having trouble walking down so many flights of stairs. Everyone was worried as we walked down the stairs. However, we were worried because we thought we were running from a fire not a collapsing building. I, along with everyone else, tried the entire way down to make calls on our cell phones. Cell phones just did not work in the stairwell. Once we hit the plaza level we walked out into the lobby with large windows that faced the plaza. The plaza was horrifying. The path that I walked nearly every day had debris six inches deep across the entire plaza. I looked around for a few seconds then followed everyone down the escalator into the mall area. As we entered the mall area there were a number of police and firefighters directing people out of the building into the street. Most likely these firefighters

and police officers did not make it out of the building when it collapsed. They sacrificed their lives to save thousands of people.

In the street more firefighters and police were directing people away from the towers because of falling debris. Across the street, next to the Millennium Hotel, a large crowd of people stood taking pictures, video, and watching the spectacle. This is something I do not understand. So many people were trying to document this horrifying experience. Not sure what was going to happen I quickly moved away from the buildings toward my apartment in midtown. My primary concern was to get to a telephone to let my family and friends know I was alive. I tried to stop at pay phones on my way home but every pay phone had 3, 4, 5, or more people in line to do the same as me. It took me about 45 minutes to get home. By the time I arrived at home and turned on the TV, both buildings had collapsed.

My feelings for the people lost I cannot explain. How blessed am I to have made it out when others did not. The “what if...” question constantly runs through my mind...what if the plane hit lower or what if the building would have not had held up so long. All I can do is be grateful I survived and not think about the “what if...” situation. My heart and prayers go out to those lost in this tragedy, especially the firefighters and police that lost their lives saving so many.

J.D. Ressetar