

As I entered my office in McLean, Virginia that beautiful morning I looked over my shoulder at the flat screen television through the glass door at the McLean Group. The station was tuned to CNBC, and the image showed a burning Tower I. With only my quick glance I thought that this was merely a prop plane that was flown too close and had accidentally rammed the side of the building. Perhaps this was just my hubris thinking that the large building symbolizing America's financial might was impervious to all inconceivable incidents.

The reason for my over confidence in the building's structure derived from my having worked there between 1996 and 2000. I was located on the 62nd floor as a NASDAQ/OTC trader for Morgan Stanley Dean Witter. Like yesterday, I can remember the view to the Brooklyn Bridge spanning the East River or how Jerry Mullin's conference room perched over Wall Street and Trinity Church. The building had been bombed before and not only had it survived but instead it thrived. At the turn of the century, the World Trade Center never looked better and nor had lower Manhattan. The real estate build out was phenomenal, and Mayor Guiliani had the city in top shape.

I was sent back to the World Trade Center for corporate training in July 2001. Here I was given an opportunity to really say good-bye to many of my friends from having left the trading floor a year earlier. The only difference I noticed in July 2001 from when I left the city in September 2000 was that it seemed tired. We had surged through tremendous highs on the stock market, impeached a President, grieved for another Kennedy, and survived the tiresome worry of Y2K. Now, another George Bush was our President promising tax cuts, people were killing each other in Israel everyday, and yet Rep. Gary Condit was the headline dominating our news for the summer. It seemed as though everyone in Manhattan that summer raced out to the Hamptons or the Jersey Shore. The once overcrowded bars off the World Financial Center were practically lifeless.

"That was no accident!" yelled my co-worker. I raced to the TV on my computer and watch the replay as the reporters shuttered. "Tyler! Arturo!" I yelled at my screen choking back tears. My mind raced as I watched the reply again. "Think. Think. Think." I was trying to grasp the unthinkable and regroup, "What is the current state?" It hit me "We, the United States, are under attack." I placed my finger to the screen: "Okay, the plane hit came through this high, and I know that my floor was about here" as I measured the building with my hands. My floor was below impact, but not by much. The plane's fuel and explosion could very well have killed my good friends Tyler Olsen and Arturo Domingo. Then I thought of my other friends and acquaintances whom I had worked with over the years. What about Tom Swift on 73, Devish Karindikar on 73, Larry Darrow on 73, Ramez Nashid on 73, and John Olson on 68? What about there co-workers? What about the corporate trainers on 61? The brokers in the branch on 72? The security guards? The janitorial staff?

"Look over there." A co-worker said as he rolled up the blinds. "Would you say that the Pentagon is in that direction?" Over the hill on the horizon was a gigantic cloud of smoke rising to the blue sky. The Dow Jones news ticker was clicking by with headlines saying that bombs had been going off in DC. A report stated that the Old Executive Building had been bombed, but that proved false. But, then the news report confirmed that the Pentagon had indeed been hit. The ex-military in my building in McLean were now hit twice as hard. Then the news of the plane downed over Pennsylvania was reported, and the great fear set in, how many other planes are in the air?

I left my office and went home. Workers in Crystal City were ordered to evacuate and many took to the streets as Metro was out of service. I picked a few up and drove them to their destination in Alexandria. Fighter planes flew overhead escorting passenger planes to Reagan. My wife met me at Joe Theismann's and all sat in silence watching the news on America's tragic day. Estimates of 50,000 dead in New York were lowered to 35,000 and later to 25,000. I sat thinking of what I would have done had I been there, and kept saying to myself "They can't be gone. They can't."

Working at the World Trade Center was the highlight of my career. I loved getting up and going there in the morning. On days I would take the ferry from New Jersey, I would enjoy the walk outside across the mall and the huge fountain. The statue was ugly, but the buildings were spectacular as they gleamed in the morning sun. My co-workers were a family and we were trading in a day before pure automation and decimalization. Those days are gone, and now that special place where so many emotions during the trading day once thrived was now just air again.

I lost some friends and my friends lost friends. Tom Swift, who had sat behind me in Jersey City, was gone. He and his wife had just had a baby. Tony Mazella from the Dean Witter floor had moved to Cantor Fitzgerald and is gone. John Resta and his pregnant wife were stolen from us. My friend Doreen Yednak lost her brother-in-law, and I had seen pictures of his kids over the years. Those children won't know their father. It was all so senseless.

On the bright side, a great many of my friends, including Tyler and Arturo, were fine. That evening I was told that our corporate hotline had only 22 missing from the 3,500 employees in the complex. Most importantly, a hero to the human race emerged in Rick Rescorla, Morgan Stanley's Chief of Security. Thousands owe their lives to him as he can personally be credited with saving 99.9% of our employees. He had the instinct to race people to safety when others simply froze in fear. I believe Mr. Rescorla was destined to be present and act at this moment. His life prepared him for this day. He was in Tower II, and he directed the employees out of the building once Tower I was struck, which was against the WTC building security's request that employees return to their offices. After directing employees out of the building, Mr. Rescorla went from floor to floor demanding that employees leave the building. At the fateful moment, Mr. Rescorla did not have time to exit the building himself. I will always remember seeing Mr. Rescorla leaning his arm on the security desk on the 44th floor. We'd just smile and say hello in the mornings. I recall his seemingly thousands of fire drills that we on the trading floor never participated because we just simply could not leave the orders or the market. No matter, Mr. Rescorla prepared and prepared for the day he was meant to lead. Of the 5 billion people on the planet, on that day we at Morgan Stanley had the most suitable man on earth for the job.

I have given a lot of thought to September 11th. I don't pay the killers that much attention because I believe that justice in the next life has already come. The tragic stories are heartbreaking which demonstrates the insignificance of our everyday worries. But what affected me most was the loss of arrogance and hubris. I compare my days at the World Trade Center to those who walked with confidence aboard the Titanic. We as Americans had become brazen in our self-confidence to dominate militarily, financially, and culturally that we didn't think a pack of radical crazies would inflict such damage. Thanks to the stories of the brave firefighters, police officers, and corporate security (especially Rick Rescorla) I have faith in mankind and that good will ultimately triumph over evil.

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