

A Reflection on the 15th Anniversary of 9/11

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A personal note about the 9/11 tragedies written by a young Italian-American woman, who was only seven years old on the day of the attacks.

On the eve of my seventh birthday, 15 years ago, I sat in a classroom surrounded by about 20 other second graders, dressed in our uniforms of plaid jumpers or white polo shirts with green pants. We saluted the flag as we recited the Pledge of Allegiance, struggling to match the pace of the mighty eighth grader on the loudspeaker, and alas the school day officially began, as it always did. But the events that unfolded next were different.

Teachers huddled outside, leaving heaps of students unsupervised. Uncontained whispers mixed with sounds of fear replaced the typical silence of the hallways during class time. We sat quietly with our feet dangling from our desks, too preoccupied with our own curiosity to discuss with one another the endless possibilities of this unusual occurrence.



Then we heard the cries of Mrs. Hogan, the other second grade teacher, echo down the corridor—adorned with gray lockers taller than the majority of the children who occupied the school's first floor. All I could do was wonder if Serena, my twin sister in homeroom 2H, had a clue of what was going on. I knew I would find out sooner or later after a collaborative, persuasive pry to our mom, who was (and still is) a teacher in the school; however, I didn't know just how soon. The words "early dismissal" are typically ones anyone would welcome, yet even six and seven-year-olds found the suddenness to be too perplexing to revel in wonder.

When the last of my mom's students were picked up, we drove a quick five minutes to our house, nestled at the end of a cul-de-sac in suburban New Jersey. I was surprised to see my dad, who worked at Spear, Leeds & Kellogg, already home and on the lounge chair in our family room closely watching the news. I still remember the exact footage of the flaming Twin Towers that was playing at that moment; the back of my dad's head became more vivid than ever.

My father's office was directly across the Hudson River from the World Trade Center, and earlier that day he was called into the conference room to witness the horrifying aftermath of what he thought was a small plane crash. In amazement, he and his colleagues watched a second plane strike the South Tower, the buildings no longer beaming beacons of the normally picturesque skyline. It was then when they realized that our city and our nation were under attack. They rushed to evacuate and after fighting through the traffic, he picked up my brothers from their respective high schools and arrived safely at home.

Mrs. Hogan had been crying because her husband worked in one of the Towers. Amidst this national catastrophe, her fear and emotions clouded the fact that he happened to be away on a business trip in Philadelphia on that specific day in history—September 11, 2001.

My best friend's mother also worked at the World Trade Center. She was dressed and all ready at the station, but the trains were running late. After a few minutes of waiting, she decided to work from home that morning instead—a minor track delay and her impulsive decision to thank for her safety.

Years later I came to find out that my boyfriend's mom had a meeting in one of the Towers that was actually canceled. But since her office was in the World Trade Center complex, she commuted downtown via the PATH as she normally did. The moment her train arrived, American Airlines Flight 175 struck the North Tower. Covered in debris she managed to escape the rubble and walked over the Brooklyn Bridge side by side with crowds of New Yorkers, all of them in a desperate retreat from the dust and smoke that quickly filled their lungs. Unable to contact her husband and family, they nervously awaited a phone call or any hopeful sign of survival. Thankfully, they reunited that evening.

My uncle worked at the American Stock Exchange and literally pulled his panicking boss from beneath a desk and together they fled the scene, saving both of their lives before more damage was done. They boarded one of the many boats rushed to lower Manhattan that provided a getaway for thousands.

And the narrowest escape that I am personally aware of was that of a classmate's grandmother, who safely climbed her way down from the 89th floor before the building collapsed.

I live 30 or so miles from Manhattan, less than an hour away by public transit, and I hear stories like this annually when September rolls around. There are multitudes of tales of survival and coincidences that prevented the fortunate few from being present to such devastation. But sadly, there are also the stories of the nearly 3,000 people who lost their lives in New York, Washington D. C., and in the fields of Pennsylvania as a result of the coordinated terrorist attacks, and so too of the 343 New York City Firefighters who ran in and climbed to their death performing the duty they loved.

A decade and a half removed from 9/11, my memory is slight, yet eternally palpable. It remains the greatest tragedy of my generation's lifetime—the moment we will never forget. Regardless of the details that I recall, when reflecting on 9/11 I will eternally feel sorrow and pain for my country. I hope to always commemorate the fallen; may they continue to rest in peace.



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