

The day the World Trade Center was attacked was the most surreal day I have ever lived through, and the incident was the worst I have ever witnessed in my entire life - and I must say that it has changed me forever.

I was walking out of the subway about 10 minutes after the second tower was hit. As I walked up the stairs from the #4 line, I looked up and saw this thick cloud of smoke - the smell of burning rubber and metal in the air. I remember thinking, "What the hell is going on?" I finally got out of the subway, and noticed that the cloud of smoke was coming from behind Trinity Church, where I knew the Towers were located.

I wanted to see if the fire was behind the church, though I had this feeling that something was happening at the Towers, since the smoke was pretty high up in the air. I then crossed the street, all the while noticing the crowds of people pointing towards the Towers, I turned around and saw the second tower as if it were right next to me (as big as the Tower was, and me being only about 2 blocks away from it diagonally), and saw the worst thing I have ever seen in my life.

The Tower was scarred with a hole that looked like a gigantic slanted slash, and at least three quarters of the width of the south side of the tower around the 80<sup>th</sup> floor was simply gone, along with about 10-15 floors as well. It was a horrific scene of smoke, fire, paper, and steam flying everywhere. I thought to myself, "No fucking way. No FUCKING way. Those bastards, they finally got the Towers!"

People around me just stared in awe at the scene. People were crying, and holding each other, yet there was this weird silence on the Street at the same time as if everyone was holding their breath. The building just kept burning and burning. We could all hear what sounded like every fire truck in the City rushing towards the towers, police sirens, ambulances, police helicopters over head. The smell of fire, and death in the air. The building was on fire - It was like the scenes you saw in the movie Armageddon after the first strike of the meteors hit NY, and they show buildings with holes through them. It was just like that. Unimaginable, and totally unfathomable.

New Yorkers were everywhere, walking around crying and screaming and cursing the fucking terrorists of the world, and all their stupid religious crap. They were cursing everything. Everyone. I remember telling a guy that was standing next to me as I turned to look at the building again - I was actually thinking, like a typical New York Workaholic, of going to my office to make sure that the office was going to close, and I turned to the guy and said, "That building is going to come down. Look at the way it is leaning, and how the corners are under so much stress - look at the bulge in the north corner there. That building is going to collapse, it's only a matter of time before the fire stresses the steel. Watch." His only response was, "No way. No way. No fucking way this is happening."

Ten minutes later. We heard what sounded like a series of explosions, and then a really slow rumble - sort a like the sound of 1000 maverick horses running toward you in a Midwest field - and the longest 2 seconds of my life started at that very moment - I mean the longest 2 seconds. It felt like time just stopped as everyone looked up at the South tower and saw the tower coming down, seemingly towards us. It took like what seemed like hours, and I felt like I could see every piece of the structure falling down.

At 2.01 seconds the thousands of people on Broadway and Wall Street staring up at the South tower one moment just started running for their lives. I ran toward the Stock Exchange one block east, as people stopped and ran in every direction. People were screaming that another bomb, or airplane had crashed into the other side of the Stock Exchange, and then total mayhem erupted as time froze again. A woman running in front of me ran right out of her shoes, literally speaking, and she never even thought of stopping.

I ran for my life, and held onto a book I had in my hand, and a bag lunch that Patrick (he is so caring sometimes) prepared for me that morning. I just kept thinking to myself – survive. Survive for him. Survive for your wife. I kept praying for a way out, and held on to Patrick's bag like it was Patrick himself. I remembered him telling me how he had to give me my lunch that morning before we took him to school, and he went and put a Banana and a box juice in the bag, and handed it to me, he said, "That's your lunch daddy, now you go to work. Eat your lunch OK? Daddy..."

The thought of him handing me that bag, and the amount of pressure I applied on the bag crushed the banana. I still ate the lunch though when I was safe - after about an hour when I ended up at my office building at JPMorganChase's 60 Wall Street tower – though I was not allowed up to my office on the 49<sup>th</sup> floor. Before reaching the building, though, I made it into a store behind the Stock Exchange, and I stayed there for a few minutes before the owner of the store then said people had to get out because he was going to close the store, and people ran to the building next door – a hotel I remember.

After about an hour and a half the world began to walk home over the bridges - it seemed like a scene from some apocalyptic novel, like nostradamus had been right all those years back, and we were all walking away from some scene of death injected by some odd plague. 10's of 1,000's of people crossing into Brooklyn over the Brooklyn, Manhattan, and Williamsburgh bridges. I decided to walk the 2-3 miles to the Williamsburgh to avoid the crowds on the two lower bridges, but that was worthless - the Williamsburgh was just as crowded. 10's of 1'000's of people all walking over the bridges. Police EVERYWHERE. I walked with a couple of friends from work, and we were decidedly keeping on the least traveled side streets, and remember discussing how, if, just if another attack would occur the Brooklyn Bridge could be next because of its significance, so we kept walking North to the Williamsburgh.

The scariest part of walking over the bridge was that every time someone heard an airplane they ducked - 10's of 1'000's of people fearing for their lives. The only solace they had, if any, was that the jets they heard overhead were United States Navy fighter jets protecting the City from further invasion - since the FAA had ordered every airplane in the country to land immediately at the nearest airport after the second plane hit. Air traffic over the US was prohibited in any way shape or form. I had lived in this City for 27 years, and I have never so much as seen a fighter jet, except for the occasional 4th of July Fly Overs, but Jets with actual missiles, and bombs underneath them!?!? Never.

I walked all the way to the Kosciusko Bridge on the border between Brooklyn and Queens - look at a map of the City. Find Wall Street, and trace across the Williamsburgh bridge, and up the BQE - I don't know 8? 9? Miles- that's how far I got, then a good Samaritan gave me a ride across the bridge after waiting for like an hour and being rejected rides several times by NYC Sanitation trucks citing "security" concerns!?! I waited for the hour for a bus that never came, and in that hour I saw

fighter jet after fighter jet flying over the City. Also a few gunships - helicopters with guns, which was another addition to an otherwise scarred City.

I was in shock until about 1:00am that Wednesday morning, September 12<sup>th</sup>, when detailing all of this to my wife I broke down in tears. I wasn't able to really talk for a few days afterwards. The sheer terror that I experienced on that Tuesday is something that I do not ever want to feel again. And to make things worst - I felt so helpless that all those people died and I could not do anything for any of them. When the tower (the first one) was collapsing I saw black dots falling from the windows, and thought - Jesus Christ, those are people falling like rain drops from the building, and I felt so fucking helpless.

Unfathomable. Unconscionable. Totally Reprehensible. The US had been stabbed through the heart, and it's very soul was feeling it that day, and for the days afterwards. That Wednesday morning the radio station I listened to for years Z100 and Z Morning Zoo played "It's So Hard to Say Goodbye" by Boyz II Men, and my tears gave way again - I cried the hardest tears I have ever cried in my life. And as I wrote this they played Lee Greenwood's song, "Proud to be an American" - That song ripped my heart out during the Gulf War, and it ripped my heart out again that day - I cried for like 30 minutes, and cried myself to dry heaves, and then someone else felt completely helpless watching me slowly deteriorate... My wife.

I remember the words of Lee's song... "And I'm glad to be in America were at least I know I'm free, and I'm proud of the men who died to give that right to me. And I proudly standup next to you and defend her still today. God Bless The USA!"

Lee wrote that song to commemorate the men who died during the Gulf War years ago, and then it was only fitting because of all the Americans that died that day in the horror of the attacks. Even though those people were not defending America as a soldier does in the battle field, I felt as though those people were doing one better. They were making sure that Democracy kept doing its thing by keeping America moving forward in business. And then there was silence for those souls.

I was still in shock when I wrote this, and was glad that was able to write this and let it out. Like I said, it will be a very very very long time before I will ever forget what happened just a few days ago.

The world ended then, and my world wasn't, isn't and will never be the same again.

God Bless the United States of America.

Fernando Martinez, 1<sup>st</sup> Version Written on September 13, 2001