



## A Reflection on 9/11

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**R**ecently the United States woke to the news we as a nation have been waiting for since September 11, 2001: Osama Bin Laden is dead. Strangely, I did not feel the ecstatic elation I wanted to feel. Instead, I simply felt a dull sense of relief. Long awaited justice was served, but it could not erase the painful memories I carry every day. Many of us can recall where we were or what we were doing on 9/11. Everyone has a 9/11 story. I am a FBI Special Agent from New York City and this is my story.

On 9/11 at approximately 0830, as I was waiting to have my vehicle inspected at a security check point on Broadway, outside of 26 Federal Plaza, I felt my vehicle vibrate, and then a few seconds later heard a loud explosion. I jumped out of my car and saw people all around me looking up and pointing. I looked up and saw a large hole in the World Trade Center (WTC) North Tower: A trickle of black smoke was coming out of the lower left hand corner of the damaged section of the building, and a shower of torn paper was gliding through the sky as though it was snowing. Bystanders were screaming that a large airplane had hit the North Tower. I initially believed it must have been an accident. I raced up to my squad area on the 22<sup>nd</sup> floor of the federal building and ran to the windows directly facing the WTC. I watched as the North Tower began to burn more intensely and then I saw it: A large passenger airplane

banked around the WTC, disappeared for an instant and appeared again as a fire ball ripping through the South Tower.

I realized we were under attack, but I couldn't believe what I was seeing. I quickly decided I must respond and help with the rescue of victims. In the chaos and confusion, I grabbed my FBI raid jacket, notified the first supervisor I could find that I was going to the WTC, jumped in my car, hit my lights and siren, and was on the corner of Church and Vescey Streets at the foot of the North Tower in minutes. I joined a few police officers who had also responded to the scene. The roadway and the sidewalks were covered in jagged pieces of airplane fuselage, and there was a slow stream of victims exiting the North Tower through WTC 5. I initially cleared access to the WTC 5 entrance by pushing ambulances with tires shredded from debris on the street so other ambulances could get through to help the victims.

A NYPD police officer told me a third plane was on its way to strike the WTC again and that the North Tower was still full of people who were not evacuating quickly enough. I decided to enter the North Tower through WTC 5 to speed up the evacuation and stationed myself two floors below ground on the plaza area that connected the North and South Towers. I was joined by another FBI Agent, and in an effort to increase the pace of evacuation, I positioned him outside of the North Tower on the surface while I stayed below ground and directed people to the surface and away from the PATH trains. I encouraged everyone to move quickly but calmly up the escalators and directed a Port Authority Police Department (PAPD) officer, together with a panicked mother, to evacuate the day care center on the second floor. Luckily, it had already been safely evacuated.

Working with other police officers, we were able to create an orderly and fast paced evacuation route out of the North Tower, with hundreds of people getting to the surface. Suddenly, I heard a muffled explosion and felt the ground shift. I wrongly thought this was caused by the impact of the third airplane striking the WTC: It was the collapse of the South Tower. I felt the right side of my face beginning to burn and getting pelted by sharp objects. I heard a roar and saw a large black and grey tidal wave of debris and smoke turning corners and moving through the plaza towards me and the people I had lined up to go to the surface. For an instant, the wave looked like it was alive. As the debris wave created by the collapse of the South Tower engulfed us, I locked eyes with a woman in a dark business suit. She was trying to get to the surface. She just looked at me, she did not scream, and the wave took her.

A large cement column protected me from getting buried. But a lack of oxygen made it very difficult to breath, and there was a complete absence of light; I became disoriented. All around me, I could hear the screams of the victims who were injured and buried. I think my training kicked in because I realized I needed to move if I were going to survive; I kept thinking about my daughter and my wife. I did not want to die this way—I was not going to let whomever did this kill me. No flight, I was going to fight. I started to crawl along the wall in the general direction of where I thought there might be an exit. Miraculously, one emergency ceiling light came on and I crawled in its direction. Realizing I was not injured and could stand up, I located two PAPD officers and organized a search for trapped and injured victims.

I found a young injured woman with trauma to her head who was going into shock. I kept her conscious and focused on surviving. Eventually, firefighters located us and led us to the surface. I exited on to Vescey Street and quickly went back and reentered WTC 5 to look for the Agent I stationed at that entrance earlier: He was gone. I found him later at an aid station; he had sustained a head injury. As I

walked away from the North Tower, I ran into other FBI Agents who advised me to report to our command post at St. Andrew's Church. As I walked towards it, I heard screams and a loud groan and saw the North Tower collapse. I don't know what happened to the men who rescued me, but I believe they all perished performing their duty. They made it possible for me to make it home that night to my family. I hope in some small way I was able to help others make it home that day as well.