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September 17, 2001
Anonymous, Manhattan

I was jogging down the path just above the World Financial center when I heard a plane flying very low, and very fast, directly above. I looked up 2 seconds before the first plane hit.

Hundreds of us stood there, crying for all the people on that plane and at work in the WTC, while we speculated on what could have happened. We saw that it was an American Airlines plane, and wondered if there had been technical difficulties, or if the pilot had taken ill. Staring at the flames bursting forth from the tower, we noticed people waving shirts out the windows, screaming for help. I stepped forward to point one such person out to a police officer when the second plane hit. We felt the heat of the blast on our faces.

That's when we knew it wasn't an accident. That's when we all realized our city was under attack. The first word that came to mind was "terrorism", and that's when everyone began to run. Thousands of people began to run up the west side path, sirens were screaming, we stopped to look and saw people by the dozens falling out windows. Everyone was crying. We continued our march uptown, wanting to get out of the way, thousands on a path barely wide enough for a car to drive down. Thousands heading north, away from the destruction.

There were people headed south, running south, riding bikes, pushing strollers. What could these people want downtown? "My baby is in that daycare center!" one of them screamed, with tears choking her voice. There were dozens of people running south, against our flow, to go get their children.

By the time we hit 14th street, the first building began to fall, and with that, many of us fell on the street. We fell to our knees, crying and screaming, not knowing what was going on. Without the benefit of TV or radio, we had no idea the Pentagon had been hit, no idea what was going on, we just knew we were witnessing the most devastating destruction New York had ever seen.

September 17, 2001
Matt Cornelius, Cranford, NJ.

Unlike all the mornings, a train arrived about ten minutes earlier than my normal train. I found this to be very unusual, however, as it turns out, NJ Transit had heavy delays that morning and had sent the express train (already 1/2 hour late) to stop at my stop (which it never does). I got on that train, which got me to the WTC almost 15 minutes earlier than I usually arrive.

I hardly remember getting up to my office that morning. It seemed like any other morning and my mind was focused on a presentation I was to make at 1:00 p.m. that day. I went to my desk, on the 65th Floor of 1 WTC (North Tower), and started to unpack my bag. My desk was located 10 feet from the windows on the North side of the building. I faced the direction from which the first aircraft was coming.

I took my lunch to our refrigerator, located towards the center of the floor. I returned to my desk and was about to say hello to my cubicle neighbor, when we heard an unforgettable crashing sound simultaneously occurring with a backward thrust of the building and then a forward thrust. This was followed with violent wavelike shaking, with glass, steel and debris falling past our windows on the 65th Floor. Needless to say, people were yelling, someone said, "An airplane hit the building." Everyone immediately started running, yelling to move to the interior and away from the windows. I ran with four other people to the interior hallway, which was filled with plaster dust. People were yelling, "What should we do?" We immediately started down the stairwell. Progress was quick down to around the 37th floor. This is where everyone stopped. People started shouting, "Keep it moving, let's go, etc." There was nowhere to go, however, with people lining the stairways. We would move a floor every 2 to 3 minutes, with the smoke getting thicker each floor down.

As we approached the 30th floor, police officers began coming up the stairs, as well as firefighters. We made it down to the 22nd floor, where we stopped again for maybe 10 minutes. A Port Authority electrician was behind me, and he had a WTC two-way radio. It was at this point when someone said on his radio, "Both towers are structurally unsound." Up until this point, I had no idea of the severity of this situation. The smoke was thick around the 30th floor, and I became slightly more concerned there, but as we continued down, the smoke was light. This was the first point when a real sense of immediate urgency set in. I told the PA guy that he should turn down the radio before he started a panic. The only thing I thought to do was to rush out of the building and to try and forget what I had heard on that radio while I was still in there. Luckily we began moving again, and by the time we got to the tenth floor, there was no delay in getting down.

As I exited the stairwell on the second floor, I could not believe my eyes. The lobby area was destroyed. Broken glass, water, and steel were scattered everywhere. I ran to the escalator down to the first floor, where people were saying, "Don't look out. Don't look

out." The plaza area of the towers looked like a war zone, littered with glass, steel, debris, and bodies. I will never forget that scene. Once on the lower level, I moved as quickly as possible to the East end of the complex. For about 100 yards, there was three or four inches of water, making me walk quickly, but not run. I made my way to where the escalator up to the exit was. I walked up those and to the exit where people started to collapse.

Police officers and EMT people were lined up at the exit yelling, "Go to Broadway, DON'T LOOK BACK, don't use your phones!" I got to Church St. and looked back to see the second tower burning. I was shocked. We had no idea that the other building was even affected, we had no idea what had happened. In the stairwells, people said that there were two suicide bombers, others said that an airplane hit the building. But all I knew was to get as far away as possible. All in all, it took me fifty minutes to exit the building. I was out by 9:40am, fifty minutes before my tower collapsed. I began receiving voice mails when I first entered the stairwell. But no cell phones were working, no land lines were working. There was no possibility of communication anywhere in Manhattan. I was dazed and was on a mission to find my girlfriend, Jess, who was also near the area. I walked for almost two hours, searching for her. Everyone was out in the streets, staring at the WTC burning. Police cars, Ambulances, FBI, ATF, FDNY all were constantly screaming down to the WTC. People were crying everywhere, shocked and horrified. Finally around 11:15, I finally found Jess at her apartment, she had been looking for me and had decided to go back to her apartment.

We started to search for a phone that worked. We ended up walking to her work, CNN, almost 35 blocks, where we figured phones would be working. I immediately got on the phone there to talk to my parents. That's when they asked me to go onto TV. I figured this was the easiest way to let everyone know that I was ok.

Since then, there is not a moment that goes by that I don't think of the things that I saw. I will never forget those sights and those sounds. I have been in contact with my boss, who indicated that everyone from my floor has been accounted for. But, as we all know, there are still thousands missing, including 154 Port Authority employees like me. I can't imagine the horror and terror that many of those people experienced. I know that I will continue to pray and hope for the best for everyone involved.