

My Account: 9 September 2001

My name is Michael Graves, and I was in the World Trade Center complex when American Airlines Flight #11 hit the North Tower on Tuesday morning, 11 September. This document contains my account of my path out of the disaster and the events and situations I witnessed along the way.

[21 Sep: Initial Draft: no maps, illustrations. Commentary at end to be added later]

I flew into Newark International Airport late on Monday 10 September, landing shortly after 11pm local and took a taxi from the airport under the Holland tunnel to the Financial District in lower Manhattan. I'd asked the taxi driver to take me to the "downtown Marriott", and was dropped off at the Marriott Financial Center, which is located at 85 West St. -- two blocks east of the Marriott World Trade Center. Unsure of which of the two Marriotts my reservation was for, I paid the driver and went into lobby of the Marriott Financial Center. The lady at the registration desk couldn't find a reservation in my name, confirming in my mind that my reservation was at the Marriott World Trade Center. "We have rooms available, so if you'd rather stay here, you're entirely welcome" said the lady at desk. The lobby of the hotel was a mess of scaffolding and remodeling equipment, so I thanked her and indicated I was going to head down the street to the Marriott World Trade Center. Here I found my reservation and checked into my room, room 2012. As the lady at the reception desk had it it was actually the 24th floor, as the guest floors began several floors above street level. My room faced south, along West Street, and was approximately midway between the two towers of the World Trade Center. While I had plenty of email and other work to do on my computer, I went to bed around 1 am after an abortive attempt to finish the book I was reading - *D-Day* by Stephen E. Ambrose. I set up a wake-up call for 8:45 am as I was due to be on the phone at 9:00am.

I was in New York to meet with Dun & Bradstreet at their offices in the World Trade Center at 10 am on Tuesday 11 September. Brian Matthews, my fellow team member on the Business Development team for VeriSign, Inc. was to meet me at the World Trade Center. When the wake up call rang my phone at 8:45 the next morning, I was already awake, and was looking for my cell phone to call Brian. I hadn't reached him the night before to coordinate where and when we were going to hook up before the meeting. Typically, we will have breakfast of coffee together to debrief before going to our first meeting in the morning. I couldn't find my cell phone right away, so I gave up and went to take a shower. I had stripped down to just my polo shirt and was reaching for the faucet handle when I heard a thud, and felt the earth shake like an earthquake.

I had been in a shopping mall in San Jose, California on 17 October 1989 when the big "Loma Prieta" earthquake had hit, as well as a dozen or so smaller quakes before and after, so the rolling sensation of the impact left me thinking that New York was experiencing a moderate earthquake. This of course did not take into account the dull thud I'd heard just prior to the shaking, but as with much of this morning, my critical thinking skills were not at full capacity.

I took several steps out of the bathroom and was suprised to see sizable objects falling outside my window. One was distinctly on fire, and one to the very right of my field of view through the window was very large. Within a second of this I heard the screeching of tires from cars below on the street, then the sounds of many cars colliding, and glass shattering. Just as car horns started to honk below, something crashed through the windows of my room, sending shards of glass across the floor almost to where I was standing and a jolt of adrenaline through my system. Whatever it was that broke my

windows hadn't come into my room, but had glanced hard enough against them to break them, and had continued to West Street, some 24 stories below.

At this point my curiosity morphed into concern, and I grabbed my jeans on the bed, and made a couple gingerly steps to the desk where my shoes were, and grabbed them. The windows of the hotel are very effective at keeping sound out, and now that they were gone, I could hear loud crashes on the street below, car horns, and most disconcertingly, hundreds of panicked screams. As I was bending over to pick my shoes from the floor, a piece of glass in the window that hadn't yet fallen to the ground came down in my room with a crash. That was enough to get me out the door of my hotel room as fast as I could go, wearing nothing but my polo shirt, jeans and running shoes in hand. I quickly pulled on my jeans in the hallway, and made my way to the emergency stairway, just a couple doors down. By the time I had descended several stories, the hotel alarm went off, and the stairwell got increasingly more crowded with each floor descended. At or near the 10th floor, the lights in the stairway went out, and the small emergency backup lights came on.

At the bottom of the stairs, movement slowed considerably, as the lobby of the hotel had by this time become quite crowded. While the emergency lights had lit the way for us down the last dozen floors or so after the building's power went out, it was quite dark at the bottom of the stairwell. At least a couple people began to panic, frustrated by the inability to move into the lobby due to the crowd of people and the dark. Screams could be heard through the lobby, which only heightened our anxiety.

Within a minute we were out into the lobby, and could see West Street. I'd been in a hurry out of the building since the windows in my room came shattering in, but the view through the lobby doors gave me pause; more than a dozen cars sat abandoned at every imaginable angle. Many had been seriously damaged by falling debris, and one – a white Dodge Intrepid – was in flames. Broken glass covered the street. Large pieces of metal that looked like the bumper from a car were strewn about. To the right of our field of view through the lobby doors, we could see the body of a man laying in the street. His feet were toward us, so it was hard to see how he'd been hurt, but a very large pool of blood had accumulated to the left of where he lay. Across the street two firefighters and a police officer were looking up warily, trying to time an attempt to run to the injured man and pull him to safety.

All the while, debris was falling. On West Street, there was enough debris falling that the Marriott Security staff and a police officer were preventing anyone from exiting the hotel through the main lobby entrance. Instead, we were directed out to the southeast entrance, on Liberty Street. At this entrance, Marriott staff were assisted by an FBI staffer in a navy blue jacket with "FBI" in yellow on the back. He was prodding the crowd inside to cross the street. The falling debris was much more sporadic here, but there was enough debris (some still aflame) still falling on Liberty Street that the crowd was hesitant to cross. Waiting in line to get out of the building through the Liberty Street entrance, I looked at my watch: 7:55am – 8:55am adjusted for the Eastern Time.

Looking at 3D drawings (like the one above), it's not at all clear how so much debris could be falling on Liberty Street, especially where we were exiting the Marriott. The winds that day were from the northwest, which would tend to carry debris south and east from 1 WTC. But 2 WTC ostensibly protects Liberty Street in this case. However it happened, when it came my turn to cross, with about four other individuals, a large, chunk of steel and glass hit the street to our right, just short of the intersection of Liberty Street and West Street. At the same time, dozens of smaller pieces of debris hit all around the area. Everyone nearby, including the FBI officer, reflexively took several steps inside the building to avoid the debris. I was surprised that the big chunk hadn't bounced as I'd expected. Instead, it had sunk right into the street, as if the hard pavement were made of soft clay.

As soon as the crashing debris started, it stopped. For the moment all that was falling from sky were office papers, a much less violent but equally ominous clue as to what was happening. The FBI guy seized the opportunity to send more people out across Liberty Street to safety. Everyone wanted to take a moment to look up for falling debris as they

prepared to cross, but the FBI guy was growing increasingly assertive in getting people out. He wasn't pushing people out the door, but was shouting at the top of his lungs and motioning wildly with his arms. "Get out! Everybody out NOW!!" I looked up as I stepped onto the sidewalk, and began to trot across the street. I hadn't seen anything as I looked up, but had gotten no more than six or seven steps when I heard a loud crash behind me to my left. Reflexively, an adrenaline rush converted my trot into a full sprint to the sidewalk across the street. I ran all the way to a recessed doorway in the Bankers' Trust Building before I turned to see what had happened. Another large chunk, shaped like a beam had crashed to the street as I was crossing, and had struck down a lady that had left at the same time I had from the door of the Marriott.

She hadn't even screamed. While the man lying on West Street was clearly at least seriously hurt, he may have survived his injury. One horrifying look at the site in the middle of the street made it clear that this lady was killed instantly. She had been struck on the upper back near her left shoulder, and had been nearly cleaved in two diagonally across her midriff. A number of onlookers shrieked in horror, and several fell into a complete panic, dropping to their knees or sitting down on the sidewalk, sobbing uncontrollably, oblivious to the danger they might be in.

There were approximately 20 of us in the recessed doorway area of the Bankers' Trust building. Several people were trying to get out of the Bankers' Trust building via this door, but the crowd covering from the debris prevented their exit. Why no one attempted to go into the Bankers' Trust building through this door and out on the opposite side I do not know. Those of us in the doorway sat reeling from the horror of the last few moments, and the debris let up again. Several firefighters came running down the sidewalk from West Street, clearly hoping to get to the lady who'd been struck down on Liberty Street.

As they walked past our alcove, we heard the sound of aircraft engine. It was suddenly very loud, even above the din of screams, and sirens, and car horns stuck on from collisions. Across the street at the Marriott door where I'd just come from a tall black man pointed up and behind me and shouted, "Look! A plane." From where I stood I could see huge clouds of black smoke billowing out from 1 WTC. My first thoughts in reaction to the sound and sighting of a plane were: *They're going to do the 'Forest Fire' thing – dropping tons of fire retardant on the top of 2 WTC.* I looked up and back to the southeast, expecting to see a C-131 or some similar aircraft on approach for the drop.

Instead, I saw what looked to be a 737 as it came into view from behind the Bankers' Trust building. It was banking to the left and was just screaming, making a sound that reminded me of when the Blue Angels traced overhead at low altitude, before the sound of the afterburners hit you. In an instant, it slammed into 2 WTC, nearly immediately above us. I was astonished at the visual impression it left. It hadn't crashed *into* 2 WTC, it had crashed *through* it. Between the two towers, we could make out the unmistakable shape of a piece of the nose-cone/cockpit section of the plane arcing toward the ground, several blocks away from 2 WTC.

For an instant, there was a neat, clean hole in the side of 2WTC, about 2/3 of the way up near the northeast corner: long narrow holes at approximately 45 degrees where the wings had hit, and a large circular hole in the center where the fuselage and gone in. A second later, that section of the building exploded in a cloud of flame, smoke and flying metal and glass. We could clearly see the shapes of two people who'd been blown out the building and we're falling toward us.

We had watched the airplane plow into the building in stunned silence. Now as the building above erupted in flame, the crowd around me erupted into complete panic. Clearly, the falling debris situation of the past ten minutes was nothing compared to what was coming down now. Everyone nearby ran headlong from the area, trying to evacuate before the flaming carnage above made it to the street. The sheer height of the building provided a window of safety for me and others nearby; I made it to the corner of Liberty Street and West Street, and perhaps 20 yards southeast on West Street before I heard the thundering crash on the street around the corner. Two more people lay in the street near the intersection of West and Liberty. Across the street, a police officer was being treated for wounds to his head. The front of his blue shirt was covered in blood.

They're trying to kill us. I was incredulous. *I'm living in a Tom Clancy novel.* Feeling out of imminent danger for the moment, my mind began to process what I'd just seen. "What the hell was that?" asked a man walking nearby. "It was an airplane. It looked like a Continental 737," I said. As it turns out I was wrong on both counts – it was a United 757. The plane had definitely looked familiar, however, just in the couple seconds I saw it before it hit the tower.

I continued south on West Street to the end of the block, where I crossed to the west on Albany Street. At this point, large numbers of emergency and law enforcement vehicles were coming down West Street from both directions, stopping right about where I crossed so as not to be in the way of falling debris. There were tens of thousands, if not hundreds of thousands of people out on the street, and the block I was on was as crowded as a shopping mall during the height of Christmas shopping season. Ambulances had to crawl down West Street because of the number of pedestrians.

As I crossed West Street and had made it a half block down Albany Street, the crowd on the street was electrified again by the sound of approaching aircraft. As everyone dashed for whatever cover they could find, a pair of F-16 fighter jets roared directly overhead on full afterburner, at approximately 1500 feet (they seemed just high enough to easily clear the twin towers). As they passed the towers to the east, they eased off the throttle, and banked hard to the left, starting a semi-circle around the burning buildings. A collective sigh of relief went up from the crowd, along with shouts of "Go get 'em!!" and the like. While many in the crowd were comforted to see that the Air Force had arrived, the Fire Department and Police Department on the ground weren't taking any chances. The massive crowd was being directed to the south and east, towards Battery Park City and Battery Park. I didn't understand this at the time, but the authorities were concerned about the other tall buildings in the area being targets for more attacks, and were herding us into an area where the buildings were lower. Battery Park City is a fairly new set of

residential buildings, and while these buildings are high-rises in the conventional sense of the word, they were tiny compared to others nearby.

This area also affords a magnificent view of the WTC towers. Both were now engulfed in flame at the top, and a massive cloud of dense black smoke rose into the clear blue sky. I found a place to lean against the wall on the southeast corner of Albany Street and South End Ave. A large crowd gathered here, dense enough that cars could not navigate the streets. Until now, it hadn't occurred to me to get on the phone and get the word out that I was okay. Brian Matthews was en route to our meeting, and would be wondering about my whereabouts. As it was only 8am back home in Minnesota, I doubted that they were even aware of what was transpiring here in Manhattan. I tried at least a dozen times on my cell phone to get through to home. I repeatedly tried Brian's cell phone number. All the while watching the spectacle above me. At this point, the first of many "jumpers" flung himself from west face of 1 WTC. Screams erupted from the onlooking crowd, and we quickly degraded from a small sense of relief at our safe egress from the area to the abject horror of watching a man fall more than a thousand feet to his death. No sooner had the first jumper hit the ground than another one jumped. Then another one, not ten seconds later. A woman jumped hand in hand with what looked like a grade-school age child. Her red dress blew up around her head as they fell feet first, hands clasped to the end. That was too much to bear. The horrible scene was impossible to *not* look at; at this point, though I walked diagonally across the street corner, to where I could not even see the towers. As the crowd reacted in horror and wails to yet another jumper, tears welled up in my eyes.

There was a pay phone at the corner with at least two dozen people waiting frantically in line to try and reach loved ones. It's the rare pay phone in Manhattan that works when there's *not* a disaster in progress, so no one was surprised to see that the pay phone wouldn't even offer a dial tone, much less a connection. I saw an Asian man waving to us just down the sidewalk a bit. I and several others wandered over to investigate. Another pair of fighter jets roared over head, causing momentary jitters in the crowd nearby. This was a pair of F/A-18s, navy birds, and they came in at high speed from the north over the east river, banking hard near the Statue of Liberty and turning west, toward the Hudson. Someone yelled in the crowd that the fighters were chasing another airplane. We could clearly see the F/A-18s but couldn't see any other aircraft. Of course there was no third hijacked aircraft in the area, but the idea quickly electrified the crowd, and people scampered for shelter, or alternately for a place where they could supposedly see over the water to watch the fighters bring down the commercial airplane. I didn't run anywhere, but rather just watched the crowd around me. I did believe there were likely to be more aircraft slamming into skyscrapers nearby, but didn't much care to watch.

As the fighters roared off up the Hudson River, people returned their attention to watching the towers burn and the jumpers jump to their deaths. I was now right outside the doorway of the dry cleaning store where the Asian man had been beckoning us a few moments before. He was offering us the use of his phone. Three people had jumped at the chance ahead of me, but within a minute, word had spread and a line at least fifty people long strung down the sidewalk. The first person failed to reach anyone, and

slammed the phone down in disgust, leading me to think the line for this phone was dead. The second person, a lady with a British accent connected with someone, chatted briefly and hung up. The third person, directly ahead of me was a young lady with a strong Brooklyn accent. She connected, talked frantically through her sobs for a minute, then hung up and dialed another number. As she began talking on the second call, several people behind me in line began to harass her. "Hey lady, one call!" "We got a hundred people waitin' here. Move it!" etc. She talked for a few seconds more, and as the harassment got louder and more severe, hung up the phone, turned to flip the finger to her harassers, and stomped off, crying.

Needless to say, when my mother-in-law Mary Hageman answered, I was brief:

Mary: Hello?

Mike: Hi, Mary, just calling to say I'm OK

Mary: OK? What do you mean?

Mike: Well, you should turn on the news. Tell Jennifer I'm out and OK.

Mary: What news?

Mike: Any news. Gotta go. Bye.

I was probably connected for less than 15 seconds. As soon as I hung up, I realized that I should have taken time to instruct Mary that Jennifer should get the word out that I was OK to friends and colleagues who knew I was in the area. I made my way toward the water to the west and south on Albany Street, arriving at the Esplanade, which I mistook for Battery Park. Again here at the Esplanade, I found myself standing there with an excellent view of the burning towers, slave to my morbid fascination with the scene, and the inevitable jumpers. Here over the course of fifteen minutes or so, I watched at least 25 people fall or jump to their deaths. A couple of those who fell fell head first, which seemed so unnatural that I assume these people were unconscious at the time, and had fallen or been blown out the building. Nearly all jumped from 1 WTC, despite the fact that 2 WTC was now burning much more fiercely than 1 WTC. At one point we watched from below as two windows were broken from the inside on the west face of 1 WTC, way up high, several stories above the impact point, at or around the 100th story. As soon as the windows were broken, smoke started billowing out, and we could see one person climb halfway out each of the windows, obviously forced there by the heat and smoke.

At this point a helicopter (commercial type, looked like a news chopper) approached from the west, dangling a long line with a rescuer in orange clothes at the end. As the helicopter neared the building, it became clear that the rescuer hanging from the helicopter was going to try to rescue the two who'd just kicked out their windows and were standing on the ledge, clinging tenuously to the tower. The crowd around began to sizzle with excitement and cheers, rooting on the rescue effort. The stranded individuals were near enough to the top of the building that the helicopter was above the roof of 1 WTC, which may explain why no previous attempts were made to rescue the dozens of individuals clinging to the edge of the tower some twenty floors lower.

As the rescuer got within approximately 50 feet of the tower, an explosion that could be heard down where we were blew a huge tongue of flame and smoke out of the tower

where the two stranded people were, breaking several other windows nearby. The fireball was big enough that the rescuer may have been burned. What became of him I do not know. The helicopter immediately veered off to the north and west, swinging the rescuer in a wild arc below him. At this point both of the stranded people were pried from their perches by the flames, one just a moment before the other. In a moment, the excitement of a daring rescue a thousand feet in the air had turned to tragedy, and women and men just burst into tears, as the flaming bodies of the two people fell to the earth below. Again, I'd been caught up in the spectacle: it was too gruesome to watch, but impossible to look away from. The failed helicopter rescue snapped me out of it, though. I turned south along the water's edge toward Battery Park. The time was 9:22 am.

Approximately 15 minutes later, I stopped to sit down and rest and take stock of the situation. For the first time this morning, my cell phone indicated that it had a signal, and I tried repeatedly to reach home, Brian Matthews, and Mark McLaughlin, my boss. People were wandering around crying, dazed, mumbling. A heavy-set, shorter man wandered by ranting about the attack. "They did it again!! They hate those buildings! That's TWICE!! They really hate those buildings!!" He gestured wildly as he walked by, his face flushed, veins popping from his bald head and neck. While there's nothing funny about the situation, the scene was comical. He very much reminded me of George Costanza on *Seinfeld*. A Japanese lady just a few feet down the bench from me was sobbing, "My father was in there!" Another man nearby and I went over to console her and to see if there was anything we could do to help, but she refused our offer, preferring to be left alone in her grief.

I looked up and saw that I was standing in front of the Jewish Holocaust Museum, which is located on 1st Place at the north end of Battery Park. I'm not one normally given to paranoia, but given what I'd just seen, I felt decidedly uncomfortably standing on the steps of the Holocaust Museum. I wasn't sure that we were done with the kamikaze airliners, and I half expected buildings and monuments in the area to start suffering bomb blasts at any moment.

I started walking east on 1st Place, hoping to find someplace quiet to wait things out. The fires were getting worse by the minute, but I presumed that after several hours wait, the fires would eventually be extinguished, and I'd be allowed back into my hotel room to at least retrieve my belongings. Between the Holocaust Museum and Little West Street, I miraculously connected with Jennifer on my cell phone. We talked for a few minutes, and I believe she was the first to inform me that the Pentagon had been hit as well. I explained that I was all right, and very shortly thereafter the call dropped. Little West Street runs parallel to massive concrete onramps that I thought were the foot of the Brooklyn Bridge, and here I had to choose to either head south back to the waterfront, along Battery Park, or north toward the burning towers.

I asked a policeman at the corner of 1st Place and Little West St. if I could make it uptown by going out to Battery Park and under the Brooklyn Bridge. He indicated that the Brooklyn Bridge had been closed due to terrorist threat and that they were directing

people around it, and not letting people under it or near it. He instructed me to head north on Little West, and turn back east past on Rector Street when I got to West Thames Street. A large crowd was going that way, and it definitely looked as though the area to the east under the on ramps had been evacuated, so I headed north on Little West Street. I was confused, here, nearly fatally so. The onramps that were not the entrance to the Brooklyn Bridge, but rather the FDR expressway, which runs up the east side of Manhattan Island. I most certainly could have made my way successfully east towards Front Street and north along the East River there.

I arrived at the corner of Little West Street and West Thames Street at approximately 9:45. As I headed east on West Thames Street towards West Street – the street that runs along the west edge of the World Trade Center – I came upon a knotted crowd listening to the radio. The White House was being evacuated, and unconfirmed reports of another hijacking over Pennsylvania were just reaching the news desk of the station. I moved up past the knot of listeners near the southwest corner of West Street and West Thames. I sat down on the curb to listen to the radio from the car, which was plenty loud enough to hear from where I was. To my right was a set of three fire engines, lights flashing, and I could also hear their dispatch radio from one of the engines. My attention was caught by a woman who sounded slightly hysterical. It was a black woman in a dark purple business suit, completely drenched, with no shoes and a large tear in one sleeve. She was explaining – in shrieks – to the leader of a fire company that was standing nearby that she had just come down from the 84th floor of 2[??] WTC. She worked for MetLife and had narrowly made it down the stairway alive. She'd had to change stairways at the 44th floor, and the stair she took down from there was completely dark, filled with smoke, and had water cascading down the shaft in such great quantities that she and the others descending with her more fell down the 44 floors of stairs than walked. Above 44 she said, it was an inferno, and no one could survive it.

It became clear from the lead fireman's response and his directions to his team that they were suiting up to go up into the tower. "Ma'am, we've got a job to do. Please let us do it." At this point the lady began to beg the men not to go. I've no doubt that the story the lady was telling the men was unnerving, but as they finished strapping their tools and gear on, and collecting their helmets, a large explosion blew out windows in 2 WTC and several nearby towers in sympathy. At this point, the group of firemen (maybe a dozen) had moved to the curb just beside me, and were headed toward the tower just three or four blocks down. The lady was following them, sobbing uncontrollably, pleading with these men to abort their plans. Whether it was the woman, the explosion or just the awesome spectacle of the conflagration they were walking into I don't know, but several of the men were crossing themselves, one I could hear mumbling parts of Psalm 23, and a shorter red-headed firefighter was saying 'Hail Mary' over and over:

*Hail Mary, full of grace.
The Lord is with thee.*

*Blessed art thou among women,
And blessed is the fruit of thy womb, Jesus
Mary, Mother of God, pray for us sinners
Now and at the hour of our death.*

I don't know if this is the 'official' version of the Hail Mary, but this is how the man repeated it, over and over. I don't know how many times I heard it, but it was enough that I memorized it. I haven't been able to get it out my head since.

The leader finally pushed the woman aside, and moved across the street with his team, up West Street towards the towers. The Hail Mary and crosses affected me, but I'll never forget the looks on the faces of those firefighters. It was a powerful mixture of cold fear and raw courage, and I believe, a deep sense of their prospects for coming back alive. The night before in my hotel room, I'd been reading about the landings of American Infantry at Omaha Beach in Steven Ambrose's *D-Day*, marveling at the unalloyed courage of these young soldiers. More than fifty years had passed, and I was seeing firsthand the same faces, the same courage in these firemen.

From my vantage point sitting on the curb at West Street and West Thames, I could see down the street just a few blocks to where I'd come out of the Marriott just an hour ago. Another jumper had just jumped, and the crowd watching screamed in horror as, according to them, the jumper had landed on someone standing on the street. I did not see this happen, but have since heard several reports that a similar incident did take place. Apparently the crowd nearby was witness to this awful scene. At this point I had the distinct feeling that this day was trying to outdo itself with successively more extreme scenes of horror and agony. I decided it was time to make speed out of the area.

I got up and attempted to cross West Street, intending to head east then north to midtown, hopefully to Brian Matthews office at 37th Street and 6th Ave. West Street at this point was blocked off by police officers who were sealing off the entrance ramp to the Brooklyn Bridge. Also, on the north side of West Street, the police had cordoned off a large area of sidewalk and street to be used as a marshalling area for emergency vehicles and staff. A taped line had been quickly strung up and law enforcement officers were posted along the line to keep the area clear of civilians. An enormous number of vehicles and people were at work in this area. Injured citizens were being loaded into ambulances. Fire teams were huddling around maps, listening to the leaders bark directions. I needed to walk toward the towers just a short block, to where I could get up a side street to the west.

The fire was clearly worse than ever in both towers, but at this point I had no idea that that the building might actually come down. Any hopes I'd had earlier of returning to the hotel later in the day to retrieve my stuff had by now been dashed. I was just three blocks or so from the towers, but very little debris was falling now, and a large crowd was converging on Rector Street. It was the funnel between the onramp to the bridge and the burning towers. I headed toward it. The time was just after 10:00 am.

Before I could reach Rector Street I noticed smoke billowing out of one of the towers very low, near street level. Thick black smoke was pouring out onto West Street, and as I looked some more, I could make out flames as well. I'm no architect, but this got me completely disturbed, as the thought that the whole building was going to come down dawned on me for the first time. I hadn't seen any smoke or flame below the midpoint of either tower. Now it was clear that fire had reached the base of the tower. I now became intent on getting as far from the towers as possible, and was castigating myself for letting my path take me back so close to the towers. There was a thick crowd at the entrance to Rector Street, and the dull thud of an explosion in the tower unnerved me to the point where I turned away from the entrance to Rector Street, and headed back down West Street, whence I'd just come. The crowd entering Rector Street was large, but not panicked. Either they weren't aware of the fire at the base of the tower, or hadn't jumped to the same conclusions about it that I had. The crowd was moving at a slow orderly pace from West Street onto Rector Street.

I had not even made it back to West Thames when I heard a loud 'pop'. It was an odd sound, more like a snap than an explosion. I turned around, and my blood instantly went cold. The nearest tower -- 2 WTC -- was about to come down. The top of the building was shaking, and the entire tower swayed. Before the first floors collapsed, the whole of lower Manhattan realized what was about to happen, and panicked accordingly. Everyone who could see the top of the building instantly knew what was to happen next.

People ran in all directions, screaming, crying, in complete panic. I wanted to run, and probably should have, but didn't. As the floors where the fires burned gave way, it was clear that there was no outrunning this. I was too close. As best I can measure from maps, I was just less than 1000 feet from the southwest corner of 2 WTC. Others were running headlong down the street. Looking back, I should have tried to run into a nearby building. What I did was to scoot under a large dump truck. Its suspension was high enough that I had enough room to lay underneath it, and still had enough room to raise my head and look around. As I got under the truck, I looked up and could see large chunks of debris heading in all directions, particularly in my general direction. It seemed like the tower had been transformed into a volcano and was spitting out automobile-sized chunks of glass and steel for miles around. I could see the first few stories collapse in sequence near the top, then I was under the truck, hoping it would provide protection from the debris that would arrive in just a second or two.

I'd been in mortal danger crossing Liberty Street, but hadn't known it at the time. I was in much worse trouble this time, and I knew it. I made it under the dump truck, and had time for an eternity of thoughts to race through my mind before the debris started falling all around me. I don't remember praying, but I do remember thinking I probably had a lot to confess if I want to end things with a clear conscience. The ground was shaking violently now, even as the debris started to hit, from the weight of the collapsing tower. I felt much safer under the truck than I would have out in the open, and indeed, there were hundreds of small chunks that could have killed me that would have bounced harmless off the truck, but two huge chunks landed right nearby that made it clear that if a big chunk was headed my way, a puny dump truck wouldn't protect me at all. The first crash

was toward the tower on West Street. A long beam with smaller beams attached hit the pavement, and sunk in – deep. Smaller chunks sent pieces skittering in all directions along the pavement, causing me to cover my eyes with my arm when a second, bigger hit happened to my right, on the other side of the street. A yellow and white ambulance had been smashed like an egg, and I could see mangled parts of what looked like a police officer sticking out of the mess nearest me.

Oh geez. I'm finished. I felt calm, and relaxed for an instant. At that moment, I felt as if I were being slid out from under the truck. Actually, the truck was pulling away – fast – even as I hid under it. I don't remember hearing the engine start or rev, but before I knew it, just as I was starting to yield to my fears, I felt strangely silly. I was exposed now, and the truck sped off into the mess of people scattering about and the deadly hail of steel and glass. The image of the plane slamming into 2 WTC was definitely a surreal experience, but this far surpassed that in its dream-like quality. By the time I stood up, I could see no more giant chunks hurtling down our way, but was now faced with a descending cloud of ash and dust coming down upon the whole area. I know on the video it looked a light gray, but coming down, the cloud looked black as night. There were many injured people in the street nearby, but everyone just reflexively began to run south on West Street, in a futile attempt to escape the enveloping cloud.

Before the cloud reached us, it became abundantly clear that there was no hope of outrunning the cloud. Given what I'd just seen, I was sure that the cloud was made up of so many millions of chunks. This was the point of the most extreme horror for me, and I remember slowing up, realizing I had no hope of escaping the cloud. Once again, I felt resigned to my fate. I remember just feeling that I was going to die because I was stupid. Stupid to be where I was at that time. I crouched beside a navy blue Volkswagen Passat, and the cloud rolled over me. It felt very much like having a large section of snow give way from your roof and fall on you as your standing underneath. It nearly knocked me over, but it felt remarkably soft and gentle. Little gritty pieces stung my arms and neck, but nothing hit me that even caused a small wound.

The sky went dark in an instant. Several video clips I've seen bear this out; it was like I'd been blinded. Before I could worry about seeing though, I started to choke and gasp. The leading edge of the dust cloud had passed, but in its wake, so much particulate lingered in the area that I then began to worry about suffocation. I thought I might be able to find breathable air inside the Passat I was crouching next to, but the passenger window on the opposite side had been broken, and it looked for what little I could see that the air inside the car was as bad if not worse than that outside. The car was also locked, as was the car immediately behind it.

A thick film of dust and particulate had accumulated on the lenses of my glasses, so I quickly stuffed them in my pocket, and pulled the collar of my shirt over my mouth, attempting to use it as an air filter. To my amazement, this worked remarkably well, and quickly my immediate fears about suffocation were allayed. For as dark as it was, my glasses wouldn't have helped much at that point anyway. I was turned around, and unsure which direction was away from the towers, so I just stumbled along in the direction

everyone else seemed to be going. I was literally covered with this dust. My eyes stung from it, and my throat felt sore just from the few breaths I'd taken before deploying my makeshift air filter.

I walked several blocks before I could notice any brightening in the sky above me. I walked right through what had been the emergency services marshalling area further down West Street. There were now at least two inches of dust and ash on the ground, and it felt very much like walking through a freshly fallen snow. When kicked up, the dust just seemed to hang in the air, settling back down on the street ever so slowly. Those near enough to see looked like sandblasted zombies. Each was covered with dust and ash. Each had streaks down the cheeks from tears caused by irritation in the eyes, torture of the soul, or some combination of both. No one said anything as we trudged up West Street, and under a giant overpass which led to the Brooklyn Bridge.

Eventually I reached Trinity Place, and from the looks of it, it headed away from the towers, so I followed it. I could begin to see light and blue sky far down Trinity Place. By the time I reached the intersection of Trinity and Rector Street – my original destination – the dust cloud had subsided enough that I only had to pull my shirt over my mouth to breathe every few breaths. I could now see blue sky clearly down Trinity Street, and could also see that the cloud was blowing to the east and slightly to the south.

I followed Rector Street for some blocks, in a daze. When I came to Broad Street I turned north, mistakenly thinking that Broad Street turned into Broadway. Near this intersection a black man on a bicycle with a passenger crashed right in front of me. The black man pedaling the bicycle was okay, and got up frantically to check on his rider. The rider, a white guy in his forties, howled in pain. He could not stand up, as his left foot was apparently injured. I still did not have my glasses on, but even without them, I could see clearly enough to make out his left foot, which had been nearly severed from his leg above the ankle. It took me a moment to figure out that he hadn't severed his foot when the bike had fallen over with him on the back. Rather, he'd been catching a ride towards help – somewhere – when he and the black man and crashed. I don't know how much worse the fall had made it, but it was a grisly sight. Several people, including me, and the black man with bicycle went to try and assist the man. The black man, who was trying to be a Good Samaritan and speed the man with the injured foot towards help, was beside himself, and was apologizing profusely.

Nearby, two guys had opened up the back of their linen truck, and were tearing open plastic bags stuffed full of large white athletic socks, and distributing them to the crowd nearby as "masks" for filtering the air. Another man who had seen what I'd seen alertly went over and grabbed four or five socks, and returned. He used one as a tourniquet around the injured man's calf. The others he began trying to put on the nearly severed foot. The injured man howled in pain, took the socks, and in sheer agony, pulled one sock then another over the injured foot and up onto his calf. The last sock was tied lower on his leg, partly as tourniquet, partly to hold the socks that were holding the man's foot. The man indicated that he wanted to wait there and asked us to go get help for him. Two men took off on the run to find help, but another passerby stepped in to tell us that two or

three blocks up, a team of emergency staff had just setup a makeshift first aid station. Another man and I helped up the injured man, and as I was the biggest guy there, the injured man threw his left arm over my shoulder, and I put my right arm around his waist, supporting him like a human crutch. By the time he had stood up, the socks on his injured foot had already become soaked in blood. The other man who had helped the injured man up with me came under the injured man's right arm, and together, the three of us started hobbling up Broad Street in search of medical help.

Not even two blocks up, we found at least a dozen firemen and paramedics who were treating all sorts of problems. One man lay on the pavement, apparently uninjured, receiving CPR from a female paramedic. My thought at the time was that he was suffering a heart attack. When a paramedic got our injured man onto a litter, the injured man promptly passed out. The paramedic thanked us, and told us an ambulance would be taking him to New York Downtown Hospital if we wanted to find him later. Quickly several paramedics converged on him. I never even learned his name. I hope he's OK.

From here I do not know what route I took. I was approaching New York Downtown Hospital when I felt the ground shake. The second tower was collapsing. It took quite some time this time for the cloud of dust to reach me, and I was safely on side streets such that the cloud billowed down the street ahead of me and behind me, and then only slowly settled on me and those walking nearby. While it wasn't dark, it was thick enough again even here to force me back into my shirt to breathe. In just a couple minutes, the dust subsided enough to breathe with out the aid of my shirt.

I continued north on Broad Street, and somehow ended up at the Bowery Mission, located at 227 Bowery. The people at the mission were great. They were handing out water, fresh dinner rolls, and a chicken soup that had been seriously thinned out to make it stretch farther among the crowd. I thanked a worker who had handed me a Styrofoam cup of soup, and said "Thanks a lot. You guys sure got this rolling fast." He smiled a smile of terrible teeth at me and replied "Brother, this is all we do. All day. Every day." I felt like a complete idiot. I asked what the longer line across the street was for. "People giving blood" he answered. "If you want to help, go around the corner to your left, there's no line.

So I did. I sat on the curb around the corner from the Bowery Mission in line to give blood and a group of people over at the mission began singing *Amazing Grace* at the top of their lungs. Within a few seconds, several hundred people were singing along. I started to sing along, too, and stopped, as I began to weep uncontrollably. I think they sang the song through at least twice, and I was still sobbing when they finished. A nice young lady behind me in the line asked repeatedly if there was anything she could do to help me. No, I replied, adding that I should really be one of the ones trying to help, rather than sitting there crying my eyes out.

I was a red-eyed sniffling mess when I finally got inside the building – a small gym – for my turn to give blood. I was still a dust-covered mess, and a kindly old black nurse washed my arms thoroughly as she ran through her screening questionnaire. "Do you

really want to do this?” She asked as she prepared the syringe. I indicated that I did, and she hooked me up and left me for a few minutes while the blood was drawn. By the time she came back to finish with me, I was feeling much better, having let out a great amount of pent-up emotion, and bolstered by the idea that at least I had been able to do one small thing to help the situation. “Normally, I’d have a glass of orange juice and a Rice Krispie bar for you, but we’re running a little short today” she said with a wink. Her soft, calm, soothing manner changed my whole attitude.

The sky was clear now, and while the area where the Trade Center Towers stood was a smoking smoldering mess, a strong sense of relief came over me. I felt I was out of danger at last. *It’s good to be alive.* I kept repeating this over and over as I walked north toward midtown Manhattan. I should have been concerned about my circumstances: no wallet, no money, no ID, no way to contact my wife and let her know that I was *still* OK. But I was feeling good, if a little light headed after giving blood.

6th Ave was more crowded than I’d ever seen. Nearly everyone was walking north, away from the WTC, and there was almost no traffic on the street. Several delivery vans were crawling north, barely able to move faster than the pedestrian traffic, filled with riders headed north. Taxis were buzzing around, but it was impossible to get a free one. *Everybody* was trying to get somewhere else at that time.

By 11:30 am or so I arrived at 1001 6th Ave. – Brian Matthews’ office on 37th St. The situation here was oddly normal. As I went up the elevator in Brian’s building, several women were coming out of the elevator, discussing their choices for lunch. Brian had left his office an hour earlier, but his next-door office mate, Sari, was there. I popped my head in to ask about Brian, and ended up with a crisp twenty-dollar bill in my hand, and a chance to send an email via here Internet connection, as I was still unable to connect by phone to Minnesota. Sari was very gracious, especially so given the dust I was bring into here office. While she had very little cash on her, she very generously gave me what she could, and wrote down her home address and telephone number in Manhattan for me in case I failed to make to Brian’s house in New Jersey. Had I needed it, I know she would have given me a place to stay for the night, even though we’d never met before.

By 12:30 pm I headed out onto the streets again, this time headed west toward the Port Authority ferries near the intersection of 11th Ave. and 34th St. It was just a few block walk, and from several blocks away I could see that the line already stretched up 11th Ave for many blocks. By this time the National Guard had deployed in force in the area, and had secured a large section of the waterfront between 27th and 33rd Streets. I stopped to talk briefly to a young national guardsman near the corner of 11th Ave and 36th St. He mentioned that a new set of ferries had just got going some ten blocks south, and that from what he heard, the line for the 34th St. ferry was 2-3 hours, and extended beyond 42nd St.

I thanked the young man, and headed south. There were enough people headed where I was that I could see where to go, but when I arrived at the dock, I was relieved to see two short lines forming to board the boats. I was actually not at a ferry dock, but at the docks

for *Spirit Lines*, a local cruise operator. Spirit had gotten all four of its large dinner cruise boats ready and had just started up an ad-hoc ferry service to Weehawken, New Jersey, just north of Hoboken across the Hudson River. Each of these beautiful boats could hold 600 people, and sported fine china and white linen tablecloths, to boot. I had to wait no more than 20 minutes before I board the *Spirit of the Hudson*, climbing to the top deck where I could see.

Three men who had been with me in line all came up to the same area of the top deck and by the time we were underway, it was clear to me that my story, while plenty scary to me, paled in comparison to the harrowing stories of these guys. Two of their stories were just plain miraculous. Shortly after we got underway, one of the *Spirit* crew unfurled a huge American flag over the port side of the ship. Other passengers on another nearby *Spirit Line* ship erupted in applause, which was shortly joined by many at the docks. At the opposite end of the top deck from where I stood, a small group began singing *America, The Beautiful*. A few seconds later, people all over the ship were singing it. Where the spontaneous singing of *Amazing Grace* back at the Bowery Mission had unleashed a torrent of emotions about just living through the disaster, *America* brought forth an overwhelming sense of pride and patriotism.

Stock traders in blood-stained white dress shirts sat next to construction workers in tank tops, hard hats still on, sing at the top of their lungs. Next to them three black women in business suits sang along as well. It was a moving outpouring of patriotism and New York spirit. I tried to sing along, but all I could manage was a weak mumble – I was on the verge of breaking down again. My three fellow passengers and I talked the rest of the way to Weehawken, pausing every few moments to stare at smoking financial district, and shake our heads in dismay and shock.

Half an hour after landing at Weehawken, I walked to Brian's house in Hoboken, and he greeted me with a big hug at the door. We sat in his kitchen watching CNN, while I devoured a plateful of leftovers from Brian's kitchen. I had made it "home" finally, and spent a wonderful afternoon and evening with Brian and his two beautiful children.

It's good to be alive.