

YESTERDAY



& TODAY

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My Experience on September 11, 2001

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Until September 11, 2001, I had never known New York City without the World Trade Center. For the last twelve years it has been where I worked, shopped and ate. I started work there on September 23, 1989 on the 58th floor of One World Trade Center at Brown & Wood, a law firm. By September 11, 2001 I had a different job, as an in-house attorney with Morgan Stanley, finding myself in an office on the 59th floor of Two World Trade Center.

I remember feeling exhaustion when my alarm rang at 6:30 a.m. on Tuesday, September 11. I had just returned from Atlanta on Monday night and had encountered a four-hour delay due to thunderstorms in the Northeast. In fact, the preceding seven days had sent me traveling from Palm Springs to New York; New York to Coeur d'Alene, Idaho and then to Atlanta with a side trip to Birmingham and home from Atlanta on Monday night. I suppose that explains some of my exhaustion.

I had a conference call that morning, scheduled for 7:30 a.m., which I decided to miss. Hitting the snooze button a few more times than I should have, I leapt out of bed, showered, dressed and decided to grab a cab to work to save time, rather than take the subway. The day was absolutely breathtaking. It was crisp and clear with a temperature that felt like fall. I recall how pleased I was with the cab ride. There was very little traffic down the West Side Highway and I arrived at One World Trade Center within 10 minutes of leaving my apartment. I remember thinking to myself what a relief it was that all of the construction of the West Side Highway near the World Trade Center was finally complete.

As I got out of the cab at the World Trade Center, I recalled the conversation that I had had with a colleague and friend from work the night before as we flew over Manhattan before landing on our much delayed flight from Atlanta. We had discussed how odd it is to look out at the World Trade Center from the plane and imagine that your office, desk and personal effects are all inside, even though the building (from that vantage point) looks like a toy. I smiled to myself as I went through the revolving door and through the lobby of One World Trade Center on my way to Two World Trade Center recalling that conversation. Once inside the concourse that runs between the two buildings on ground level, I passed a secretary who works at Brown & Wood, my former law firm occupying floors 54 through 59 in One World Trade Center. I remember seeing her because I was surprised that she was coming in so early (Brown & Wood opens at 9:30) and because she has difficulties walking due to a medical condition.

I arrived at my office on the 59th floor of Two World Trade Center at 8:25 a.m. I started to organize my desk and schedule for the day. I recall that I replied to two or three emails and then organized my voice mail messages that I had received while traveling for three of the four working days of the week before. A colleague from work, stopped in to say hello and see how my meeting in Atlanta had gone. We spoke for a moment and then agreed to catch up later in the morning.

Shortly after that, while sitting at my desk, I heard a disturbing boom-like noise. It sounded like thunder. I could also feel the building shake. Having worked in the World Trade Center for 12 years, I was used to feeling the building sway. During storms and other weather conditions with high winds, the building (we were always told) was designed to sway. At these times, one could hear the building slowly creak back and forth, with a sound that is very close to a slow-moving rocking chair on a wooden floor. This time, however, there was no sway. Instead, there was a very distinctive shake as if the building were settling. I immediately looked out of my window (I had a southern view of New York Harbor and the Statue of Liberty) and saw the beautiful crisp day. I thought to myself that the noise I had heard was clearly not thunder. In the next seconds, I saw what looked like a ticker tape parade outside the window. There were thousands of pieces of paper flying through the air. Suddenly, I saw other objects besides paper sailing by, many of which were on fire. At that point, I jumped out of my chair and ran from my office on to the open area of the 59th floor.

My colleagues were also out of their offices and we decided that it made sense to leave the floor. We rounded everyone up and directed people to the stairwells at the center of the building. No alarm or anything else had sounded to make us feel that we should definitely evacuate or that we were in any kind of jeopardy. My feeling was one of concern, but not panic. I remember as we passed the bathrooms telling someone to shout in each bathroom that the floor was evacuating through the stairwells. Some people on the floor were already feeling panic by the look on their faces, others were crying. As we opened the door to the stairs, there were already hundreds of people walking down the stairs from higher floors. At each floor, doors were propped open and more people were joining the evacuation. The journey down the stairs was for the most part quite orderly. We still had no idea what had happened. Nor did I feel that this was the last time I would ever be in the World Trade Center. Instead, I spoke with someone about a meeting I had at 9:00 (it was now 8:55 a.m.) on the 69th floor and that I guessed I would not make it.

By the time we had made it down to the 49th floor, I ran into a woman whose desk is immediately outside of my office on the 59th floor. She has a respiratory condition and I noticed her having difficulty getting down the stairs and also being able to breathe. It was not yet a case of smoke, but rather just the physical exertion of walking down the stairs. I stopped to see how she was doing and for the next 14 floors we walked down together. I attempted to talk to her about things that had nothing to do with the building or the reality of the moment. I smiled a great deal and tried to think of things that would make her smile and relax. Every two or three floors, we would stand to the side and rest so she could try and regain her breath. Another friend from work joined us, and the three of us continued down the stairs. At one of our rest breaks, someone had a cell phone and had been told that an airplane had struck One World Trade Center. I remember thinking that the airplane story sounded like one of those urban myths or, if it were true, that the plane in question was probably a small, single engine propeller plane. Although I had seen all of those papers and flaming objects

outside of my window, I was not able to process the thought that we were in any kind of serious danger.

By the time we reached the 36th floor, my feelings were confirmed. The public address system of the World Trade Center, with the same voice I had heard through twelve years of fire drills, announced the following: "An airplane has stuck One World Trade. Two World Trade Center is secure. Repeat Two World Trade is secure. Tenants should return to their offices."

I felt as if we should continue down the stairs. I remember that over the course of 12 years working in the building, including the 1993 bombing, that this was often the rote instruction of the Emergency Response Team in the building. So we, as well as most everyone else, continued down the stairs. Some two floors later, we saw many people exiting the stairwell in an attempt to use the elevator. With Joan still having difficulty breathing, we decided to use the elevator as well. Approximately 11 or so of the 66 people on my floor were also exiting the stairwell. We got out of the stairwell and to the elevator bank rather quickly. Knowing what I know now, this decision seems ludicrous. But then again, how were we to know that a 767 jet aircraft had hit One World Trade and that another was on its way? We got on an elevator from the 34th floor to the lobby. As the elevator door opened, I, and those with me, realized, at least in part, the danger that we were exposed to. The once bright, marble and steel lobby was dark and smoke was beginning to fill it. An arc of security guards and policemen directed us through the revolving doors and into the concourse, rather than the outside doors. The mood was one of quiet panic. People were either running or walking fast. I began to feel a sense of a need to keep those of us from the 59th floor together. We hurriedly entered the concourse and kept moving. Someone suggested we exit the World Trade Center on the Church Street side and we followed hundreds of people doing the same. There were two flights of steps up to the Church Street exit in between up and down escalators. I was on the landing between the two sets of stairs when I heard another loud noise. It sounded very similar to the first, except it was much louder. My position on the steps allowed me to see outside and within seconds of that noise I saw huge amounts of steel debris and flames outside. Suddenly, those people exiting ahead of me came running back into the building, screaming and crying. The wave of people coming back in spread complete panic in the building. I did not know what had happened but suddenly felt terrified at what I had seen and the panic of all of the people running and screaming toward me. It was as if I could die either by the terror unfolding above me or by the trampling of hundreds of people who had been caught outside at the time of that second explosion.

We all began to run. I am not able to recall if I screamed or not. I know that I swallowed hard and joined in the people running. At this point, I began to see streams of fire fighters arriving into the concourse. They were, of course, heading into the towers, unlike the rest of us who had begun to run out. As we crossed the concourse, I looked in the direction of the entrance to One World Trade. It was filled with billowing smoke. In that short glance, I could see what looked like hundreds of firefighters running into the smoke. Security guards were still standing there keeping people away from this area. Total panic had spread.

The most direct exit at this point was across the concourse, past the PATH train entrance and out the doors on Vesey Street. Intuitively, if not incredibly, I knew this was wrong. These doors are at the edge of the north side of One World Trade. I suspect now that what I saw on the steps just seconds before made me know that falling debris was a possibility if we used those doors. As several people that I know headed for those doors, I screamed

for them to turn right and head for the northeastern corner of the building where a subway station is located. Everyone followed suit and we ran into the subway station. The gates to the train platforms were open and we, along with hundreds of other people, hurried all the way down the platform to the northernmost exit of that station which is some 3 blocks north of the World Trade Center. As we passed through the entrance to the subway, there on the steps leading out of the station, I saw rescue workers huddled around someone on the floor who was bleeding profusely.

At this point, the woman with the respiratory condition got on the train as we heard its doors about to close and safely exited the area on that train. I, along with Tom Nelli and Mark Zima, continued to walk the length of the subway platform and then left the station by the West Broadway exit. The feeling of walking up the steps and seeing the outside for the first time is almost impossible to describe. It was the moment when, for the first time, we realized that both towers were on fire. The first glance at the two towers where I had worked for 12 years was filled with disbelief. I knew what I was seeing, but could not believe it. Those images have been replayed on television repeatedly since the attack, but to see it live at the moment just a few blocks away will stay ingrained in my mind for a long time.

Around us people were stunned. Some were running away and others were staring at the World Trade Center. We simply could not take our eyes off of it. Suddenly, I realized that my family and friends may already know about this and immediately began using my cell phone to call them. Unfortunately, my cell phone would not work. We began to walk north away from the burning World Trade Center. Sirens were wailing and there was mass confusion. One amazing moment occurred shortly after we exited the subway station. We were walking and looked at a large, cylindrical piece of machinery, just a few feet away, which was smoldering. We stared at it rather quizzically and realized that it was a jet engine. At that moment, the airplane story came back to me and I began to wonder if it were true.

The feelings that I had at this point are hard to describe. There was still no way for any of us who had been in the building to know for sure what had happened. We assumed that there had been a bomb or bombs. We had no idea if there were more bombs to come. As we walked north, we noticed long lines of people waiting to use pay phones. At one of the phones, a friend from work yelled out my name. She was crying and started telling me her story. She had been on the street at the time of the first explosion about to enter the building to go to work. She saw the plane crash into One World Trade Center. Frightened, she started running north and then saw the second airplane crash into our building. She was crying because she had no idea where the airplane had hit and I was the first person she had seen from our office. We hugged and talked for about ten minutes. I debated whether I should wait at the telephone since the cell phones were not working. It dawned on me that we could walk to my apartment where my regular line telephone could be used to call family and friends. Both of my colleagues were also deeply concerned about reaching their families.

The walk to my apartment in the West Village seems surreal. Under normal circumstances, you would have thought that all of the employees of the World Trade Center were on a field trip to midtown Manhattan. Except this field trip was punctuated with almost constant sirens from passing fire trucks and ambulances. We arrived at my apartment where there was spotty telephone service, even locally. With the television on, we slowly began to learn what had happened. Perhaps the most telling indicator of the level of shock that we were in was that as we watched our building collapse, not one of us could even believe it. Instead, we initially believed we were watching some computer simulation of what might happen if the fires

in the building continued. In the meantime, we continued to pass my telephone around in the hopes of reaching family and friends. Long distance remained almost impossible. The lucky attempts at achieving an actual ring at the number dialed then ended with the announcements that all circuits are busy.

Interestingly, none of us were able to sit. Instead, we stood and paced around my apartment. We continued to watch television and the collapse of our building was shown again. Almost simultaneously, it dawned upon us that our building had actually collapsed. We all hugged with the realization that the people we had left in the building, from the security guards and rescue workers to people that we work with, were probably dead.

My story of September 11, 2001 both begins and ends there. It ends there because I had safely escaped the devastation of two 110-story buildings collapsing into rubble. It begins there because it marks the commencement of what was to be an ongoing journey of dealing with the loss of life and innocence.

New York was now without the southern anchor of its proud skyline. For the next days, all vehicular traffic was stopped at 14th Street. The surrounding area of my apartment in the West Village was filled with smoke and the streets were empty, except for the unsettling sounds of sirens from ambulances and fire trucks rushing by. With no deliveries of any sort, grocery store shelves began to empty and no one received mail. Within 24 hours, the thousands of pictures of people that were missing began to appear on bus stops, subway walls and most notably, on the walls of St. Vincent's Hospital. St. Vincent's, located close to my apartment, was to be the key hospital for the rescue effort.

It is now several weeks after the terrorist attack on the World Trade Center and much of life in New York has returned to normal. I now have an office in midtown Manhattan and grocery store shelves are full again and vehicles of all types freely pass in the streets. But the smoke is still here in New York. Sometimes it is the smoke from the World Trade Center that even now continues to smolder. At other times, it is the smoke from the hundreds of candles that quietly burn in front of fire stations all over the City mourning the loss of hundreds of firefighters.

And then sometimes, it is a just the emotional smoke that hovers like a shadow over all of New York and, I think, over the rest of the country too.

*Stephen Thomas Paine is a 1982 graduate of Valdosta High School.
He is the son of Clarence M. and Joyce B. Paine of Valdosta.*

MEMORIALS

Becky Shelton Allen

by

Mr. & Mrs. George Hart
Mrs. Eleanor M. Howard
Mr. & Mrs. James H. Matthews, Jr.
Mr. John Peebles
Mr. & Mrs. Albert S. Pendleton

Evelyn Saunders Austin

by

Mrs. Eleanor M. Howard

Rosella Brantley McCall

by

Mr. John Peebles
Mrs. Gloria Sorenson & Mrs. Dorothy Dalton Paine

Edward Harrison "Harry" Mixon, MD

by

Mr. & Mrs. Albert S. Pendleton

Ferrell Dalton Hart

by

Mrs. Gloria Sorenson & Mrs. Dorothy Dalton Paine

HONORING

Emily Dalton Hermann

by

Mrs. Gloria Sorenson & Mrs. Dorothy Dalton Paine

Virginia Dalton Puckett

by

Mrs. Gloria Sorenson & Mrs. Dorothy Dalton Paine

MUSEUM NEWS

This past month, Renate Milner, Museum Director, taught a class in Local History for V.S.U.'s Learning in Retirement. This class is culminating with a visit and tour of her students to the Museum.

Dr. John Crowley met his Local History class at the museum on September 17th, to show them what kinds of records and resources are available at the museum for use in their research.

Leadership Lowndes began their tour of Valdosta with breakfast at the Museum on Thursday, September 20. They raved about what they found here. That evening was our Quarterly meeting featuring Dr. John Lancaster's historical overview—**The Langdale Company: The First Sixty Years**. Later that evening, during the reception raffle tickets were sold for the Honeybee quilt, which was displayed.

Julie Smith, as part of the Museum's Partnership in Education, installed an exhibit at S. L. Mason School. The exhibit touches on the history of the school and describes the recent archaeology project. This permanent installation is a focal point in the school's lobby. The archeology project is winding up and students will work with Julie and Marvin Smith on the final report. The students are also learning to do interviews so they can talk to local people who remember S. L. Mason's early years and before.

Another group of Boy Scouts visited the Museum. Tony Williams with his Tiger Cubs, Pack 406, from W.G. Nunn School, enjoyed our Scavenger hunt on October 1st.

A selection of Albert's way Back When Articles are now available on our Web page <http://www.valdostamuseum.org>
Angela Purser started working on a kid's page, which will be our next addition to the web.



George Haire working on top of our bookcases.

George Haire, from ACE Electric, finished work at the museum this week. He installed outlets and cables to network our computers, and an outlet for our recently donated microfilm/fiche reader. It was fun having him here, as he always smiles and has a great sense of humor. He grew up in Valdosta, but moved to Nashville with his family three years ago. He knows a lot about local history, and loves old brick buildings, or as he put it: "I wish I had enough money to buy all the old buildings." George does outstanding work and we appreciate his knowledge and expertise.

MUSEUM CALENDAR OF EVENTS

October 29	(Monday, 7:00 p.m.)	Sons of Confederate Veterans
November 26	(Monday, 7:00 p.m.)	Sons of Confederate Veterans
December 1	(Saturday, 12:00–5:00 p. m.) (Downtown Open House)	Holiday Open House
December 8	(Saturday, 2:00– 4:00 p. m.)	WWII Exhibit Reception
January 13	(Sunday 3:00 p. m.)	Quarterly Meeting

Paragraph Lost

Because of a computer glitch the last paragraph of *The Story of Tiby Corbin* from "Albert's Desk" in last months newsletter was dropped. Here it is:

There is no end to the stories from friends and family of the Class of '26. "With all the e-mails and letters, every little page of this story unfolds into another saga," said LeHardy. "Part of the reasons for us doing this – we feel so strongly about this class that we want to keep the tradition going." "My hope is not just the 75th reunion – the next hope is for the 100th, hopefully our children will do it. All of this is a continuation of beating the drum for those who served our country."

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