

September 11, 2001



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On Sunday, September 11, 2011, America observed the tenth anniversary of the attacks of September 11. Here are some of Cromwell's reflections and remembrances. This is part of an ongoing project to collect the personal reflections of Cromwell's residents. [Please feel welcome to send us your story.](#)

Reflections on September 11, 2001.

I remember, of course, what everyone remembers, but with the perspective of having been a little boy during World War II, when we were all trained early on to run outside whenever we heard a plane and to look up to see what the insignia was on the bottom of the wings. We were to look for

a star and to make noise fast if we saw a swastika. (To this day, I find myself going out of my way to look up and find a plane, any plane, that happens to fly over.)

The swastika-bearing plane never appeared, and by the time I was seven or eight, there was no questions as to who would win the war; there was only the question of when, and at what cost. And now, in September of 2001, the defenses had been breached. The first thought was that the unthinkable had not only been thought; it had happened. I suppose it is the closest a man can come to what any woman goes through after having been raped.

And yet there was no fear. Again, the World War II mentality. They might hit us, but they could not conquer us. We are too big, too powerful, and, by the gods of war and in the face of all our relentless self-criticism, we are right. In our foolish, faltering, inconsistent way we try to for the right thing, we Americans. In private life, those who make it a code to do the right thing always, simply because it is right, although they falter and are mused up pretty badly very often, do prevail. President George W. Bush put it neatly and concisely in the best six words he ever spoke. He simply said, "We're not going to allow it."

And we didn't. Tremendous errors caught us by our clay feet, and what was thought to be a short punitive action turned into an entirely new way of life, but we are better for it. Less arrogant, more humble, ever watchful and still endlessly self-critical, we struggle along. In World War II I was proud to be called an American. I still am.

Richard Wm. Donohue



My memories of September 11 2001 may be a little unusual. At that time I was working for a non-profit organization in Washington DC and commuting weekly to my office. Normally I would fly down early Tuesday morning and return either Thursday or Friday. So, as 9/11 fell on a Tuesday I would have flown over New York about an hour before the first plane hit. That week however, for some reason I had decided to fly down on Wednesday so I was in Connecticut.

There were a number of people who had a similar schedule with whom I flew down regularly who did fly down that day. They told me that it was a particularly clear day and that they had an especially clear view of New York as they flew over. Of course they then found themselves stuck in Washington because it was impossible to get through New York for some time after.

Because I had stayed home I had driven my son down to school in New Haven. It was a nice day and I drove home with the windows open and the radio off thinking through ideas for a presentation that I was scheduled to give the next week. So, I heard nothing about the crash until my mother called just as I arrived home to say “I just wanted you to know that Cathy is fine.” At the time, my sister was working for a law firm whose offices were a block or so from the Trade Center. She had also taken a day off to care for her son who was sick and had remained at home in Brooklyn. It was only then that I turned on the television and began to watch as events unfolded.

It was then two or three weeks before I was able to return to my office. I ended up taking one of the first flights out of Bradley to the Baltimore Washington Airport. I think there were only seven or eight of us on the flight, and I can tell you it was an especially nervous hour until we landed and a very quiet and subdued city to work in for several months after.

John M. Flanders



On the morning of 9/11/2001, my mother, Rosemary Matus, boarded a plane from Bradley and was flying to Arizona on a business trip. I was teaching at Hand High School in Madison and one of my students came running into my room to tell me that a plane had flown into one of the twin towers. When I watched the second plane hit the 2nd tower and realized that these were acts of terrorism, I immediately tried to get in contact with my father to find out if my mother may have been on one of those planes. I was in a panic, but I had to remain calm for my students.

We were still waiting to hear from my mother when Flight 93 crashed in Pennsylvania. At the time, my father believed she might have been on that flight. When my mother was finally able to contact us later in the day, we learned that her flight had been grounded in Rochester, NY and she was safe. I remember crying many times while watching the news for the next several days and trying to make it through the school day without falling apart. It was scary not knowing whether something else might happen. Seeing all the American flags lining the streets brought some comfort and made me proud to be an American.

Tracie Matus Randazzo



We were in China....Anna, Adam, Bob and myself. We had just gotten Allison the day before, and realized that we were not to be coming home any time soon because all international flights into the

US were immediately cancelled. (We learned later that Ben and Brie thought WE were on those planes that they saw on the news over and over crashing into the Twin Towers, but they were afraid to ask.)

The people in China were especially kind. Since our stay needed to be extended we decided to conserve our cash by taking long walks around the city during the day and eating with the locals instead of with the tourists. People constantly asked us if our families were okay. Some showed us maps and were very upset when we showed them where we were from esp since CT looks so close to NYC on most of the maps that people showed us! Shop owners had areas of the store for donations of diapers, clothes and formula which they collected from families who were leaving China, and as families were finally able to fly home most decided to travel lightly and left their supplies for the rest of us. This was a huge help. We stayed for an extra week.

When we landed at JFK we had to sign in at Immigration. The security guard said "Welcome to the US, or what's left of it". As soon as we stepped out of the airport we could smell burning in the air.

Joanne Swift



On September 11, 2001, I was spending the day at my company's Boston office in a conference room with views of Logan International Airport. (American Airlines Flight 11 and United Airlines Flight 175 both departed from Logan that morning before slamming into the North and South Tower, respectively, of the World Trade Center.) I was attending a training program for new employees and no one notified us of the day's events until after 10 a.m. At the point, our 46 story building was being evacuated and we headed down the stairs. People were still unsure of what was happening and almost everyone was frightened - worried that Boston would soon be a target. People were heading down the stairs calling loved ones and sharing teary "I love yous" and "goodbyes" as if our building was going to be struck at any moment. At that moment in time, it struck me as slightly overdramatic, but I feel quickly realized and felt the same fear and feelings of loss and confusion.

Once I reached the ground floor, I quickly headed across the street from our office to South Station where my car was parked. It was a chaotic scene and they told me I couldn't leave as they were not

allowing any vehicles to leave South Station. I begged them to let me leave as I had to drive back to Connecticut and was anxious to get back home to my wife and almost 8 month old daughter. Somehow (likely because no one knew exactly how to handle this situation and everyone was winging it), my pleas were answered and they let me leave. Within minutes, I was on the Mass Pike heading home. The Mass Pike is always a busy ride and I was expecting a long traffic clogged ride home. Instead, although it didn't feel like it during the trip, my ride from Boston to Cromwell has never been shorter than it was on that Tuesday. The Mass Pike was a quiet and very lonely ride. At times, I couldn't see another car - a sight I had never experienced on the Mass Pike. It was eerie and silent. I couldn't make a call on my cell phone because "all circuits are busy" and my radio was barely operating.

During the one and a half hour drive home, I had little idea of what was happening in the world. I drove home afraid and anxious and feeling very alone. When I finally arrived home, I hugged my wife and daughter tight and quickly turned to the T.V. My Main Street home never felt so good and welcoming as it did then. As I began to understand what had happened, I wondered what kind of world our daughter would grow up in. Despite the awful and brutal losses of that sad and tragic September day, in the days and weeks that followed that painful day, I realized that our world was still a pretty good world and that my children would be blessed to grow up in little Cromwell, Connecticut in the proud and strong United States of America.

Mike Camilleri, Cromwell, CT



September 11, 2001 began like almost every other day, breakfast with my wife and youngest daughter and then each of us going to our separate destinations. Looking back, I was sitting at my desk working on a funeral service for the next day. To prepare for a funeral service is not an easy task. Questions like: What scriptures are most meaningful? What words can I share that will bring

comfort and hope to the family? How can I make this a service of healing to help the family and loved ones move forward into a future that is overshadowed by death and despair?

It was while in the midst of these thoughts that the church secretary rushed into my office saying that she had just heard on the radio that a plane had crashed into one of the twin towers. My first reaction was disbelief, that's crazy. I remember turning on the radio and listening to live reports from different people of what had happened and then reporters trying to fill in the gaps, trying to make sense of the unfolding chaos confronting them. Suddenly, one of the reporters shouted, 'Oh my God, a plane just crashed into the second tower'. At that moment, I became one with millions of other Americans, glued to the radio at my desk listening to story after story of what was transpiring in New York City. Disbelief – denial – shock. In the midst of these emotions came more shocking news, one of the towers had collapsed, followed shortly with the collapse of the second tower. It felt like the world was crashing down and for many it had. Time was lost, suspended in space, as I continued to listen in total disbelief of what I was hearing.

Hours later, stunned and numb from listening to the reports on the radio, I forced myself back to reality, the reality of having to prepare a service for a family that was grieving the loss of a loved one. How ironic. While I was preparing to walk one family through the grieving process, there would be thousands, possibly tens of thousands of families being faced with the same tragedy, the loss of a loved one. Who would have thought that what began as just another day would in a moment change the lives of individuals, families, communities, a city, a nation and the world forever. At that moment, the future of many was unknown shrouded in darkness, even as the city was being cloaked in a covering of dust and debris from the towers.

As I began to reflect on both the immediate need of words to say to the family, intermingled with what was happening in NYC, the following thoughts came to mind. (1)Death is no respecter of persons, the young and the old, the rich and the poor, male and female, black/white. We will all die, we just don't know when. (2)Life is short – live each day to its fullest. Don't put off for tomorrow what you can do today. (3)There are no guarantees – live and love as if it's the last day of your life. (4) Life is about relationships, not possession. I made two phone calls that day. One to my wife and one to my mom and dad, I just wanted them to know that I loved them. (5) The best laid plans of man are of naught unless appointed by God. If there was ever a time when we needed God, it was now.

The reality of what had happened didn't really sink in until I went home that evening and turned on the television. My wife and I watched in horror, overwhelmed by so many emotions that it was difficult to even say anything. Our hearts went out to the families who over the next few days received the news that their loved ones were either missing or dead.

Over time, life has returned to normal for most of America. People have returned to their jobs and regular routines and soon found themselves in the fast lane of life with all of its demands. For those who lost loved ones whether in the plane crashes, the collapsing towers or casualties of war, they too have gone on living. I don't know what it is like to lose a loved one in such a tragic way and won't even pretend to say I do, however I continue to stand in awe at the strength, resilience and determination of individuals and families to move forward without bitterness, but in faith, hope and love.

We have been wounded, but not killed. We have scars but life remained in us. We hurt, but our resilient spirits moved us forward. In the words of Howard Lutner, CEO Cantor Fitzgerald, "9/11 is

a part of me. It's a part of all of us. People say, 'Are you going to move on?' and the answer is, we move forward, but it stays with us."

Today we remember, honor and celebrate the individuals who lost their lives. We also remember and pray for the individuals and families of the people who died, that God would continue to be with them, giving them grace and strength to go forward, knowing that a nation is behind them and a loving God is watching over them.

Rev. Douglas Van Veldhuisen  
Pastor of First Congregational Church



For me, 09/11 began much like any other beautiful, early fall Sept day. As principal of Windsor Locks High School, I had just completed my morning rounds throughout the building when I returned to the Adm. office area. There I found everyone's eyes locked on the TV monitor that was anchored to the back office wall. The time was approximately 8:50 and the first jet had just struck the first tower. As I began to get caught up with this startling news the second jet came into view on the TV screen very soon after and struck the second tower.

Everyone immediately knew this was not an accident. Because of the school's proximity to Bradley Airport, we were immediately placed in a lock down position. Rumors were rampant that there were many other hijacked aircraft aloft and we were all preparing for the worst.

As the phones rang incessantly in our offices, primarily from family members checking on their child's status, the most amazing thing occurred on the outside: silence. For the first time in anyone's memory, all aircraft across the nation had been ordered grounded and for a small town like Windsor Locks, the continuous, daily sound of air travel and trade that was its heartbeat had been turned off. That incredibly eerie silence would continue for days after.

Matt A. Bisceglia, Ed. D. , Superintendent of Schools

One of my friends lost her son, James Thomas Waters, Jr. in the World Trade Tower. Her loss is overwhelming and finally some joy has come into her life by the birth of a new grandson, named James. American history is now personalized for me.

Ann Patricia Kelly

