



Eight
Blocks
Away

Memoirs of
September 11, 2001

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Professor

That morning I was at home getting some writing done when I heard that thud. Thinking it was yet another auto accident at the corner of Broome and West Broadway, I looked out the window onto West Broadway. The workmen on the roof of the building next door were not looking down at the intersection, but all ten of them were rather staring fixedly downtown. I walked to the big windows facing downtown through which I have had a view of the twin towers for twenty-seven years. I could see on the face of one of the towers a dark spot tinged in red. I thought immediately of how the Empire State Building is specially lit for special occasions such as the red and green for Christmas. This seeming hole in One World Trade Center must, I thought, be some special promotional stunt, but how the hell did they do it? Then I remembered the thud and turned on the television and heard the news.

There I sat on sofa watching the first tower burn on television and out my window, side by side. I could not believe what I was seeing until, all of a sudden, that huge ball of fire suddenly erupted out of the side of Two World Trade Center. I couldn't sit still any longer. But, where to go? People were already streaming up West Broadway to get away from the towers. It would be nuts to run downtown. So I went to the roof of our building. Here at least there was no glass between me and the incredible, awful events. Then an even more shocking surprise. Two World Trade Center collapsed. I knew immediately that most of those fire fighters I had heard roaring by were dead. A huge cloud rolled up West Broadway chasing the crowd before it.

By the time One World Trade Center collapsed, I was prepared to believe that anything could happen. So when I could see nothing south of Chamber Street but a cloud of dust, I wondered whether everything down there had gone down. I cringed to think of my many friends who work or live in the buildings around the Trade Center. As the cloud settled slowly, first one building and then several began to emerge. I almost leapt for joy. At least something, someone, was left. For twenty-seven years now, my days have ended sitting in a sofa looking out

Gerald Simpkins

Class of 2002, evening division

I arrived at my office at I World Trade Center at about 6:30. I took the elevator up to the 69th floor and read the newspaper and then finished up some things that I had been working on. It was a bright, sunny day. At about 8:50, the building shook violently and I thought that it was going to topple over. It must have moved about 5 feet. Looking out the window, papers, desk and people began falling out of the sky. For the first time in my life, I thought that I was going to die. Most of the people in my office arrive before 9 so they were already there. I ran to a friend's desk to see if she was in and thank God she wasn't.

People were told to leave the floor immediately by our boss. They did. Ten of us assembled in the hall and came up with a plan for evacuating a co-worker that was wheelchair bound. After the bombing of 1993, we had gotten a special chair to use to evacuate him. Two of us went looking for the chair and making sure that everyone had left the floor. We found the chair and went back to the group. One side of the floor was filling with smoke and fuel was beginning to soak the floor near where we were. We took our friend to the stairs and strapped him into the evacuation chair. He weighed between 250 and 300 pounds. I took his wheelchair out of the staircase and tried to put it someplace safe. That was when I heard people trapped on the elevator. I couldn't open the doors and I didn't know where they were exactly but I knew that someone would be there to get them out soon. I just knew it.