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Law Bulletin and legal community reflect on their 9/11 experiences

Chicago Daily Law Bulletin asked our readers to reflect on where they were when they learned about the Sept. 11 attacks. Here are their responses as well as responses from our staff:

Sept. 11, 2001 was just another Tuesday. I had business meetings in Minneapolis on Monday and I was on a 7 a.m. flight back to Midway Airport.

The check-in at Minneapolis-St. Paul International Airport was normal. I showed up at the airport as usual, about 45 minutes before departure and checked in at the gate. Again, nothing unusual.

The flight departed on time from Minneapolis. It's about an hour flight to Chicago, but because of Chicago air traffic at rush hour it can be a bit slower.

We landed at Midway at about 8:20 a.m. and taxied to the gate (both World Trade Center towers had been hit by 8:05 a.m. central time). We deplaned and I began walking through Midway on my way to the CTA Orange Line train to Chicago. Again, nothing unusual.

As the train approached the south Loop stops at about 9 a.m., I noticed an unusual number of people standing on the platforms, some holding computers, not laptops, but CPUs. This was unusual. I thought maybe there was a bomb scare at Sears Tower (now Willis Tower).

I exited the train at State and Lake and began to walk to our office at State and Hubbard, north of the Chicago River. There were lots of business people on the streets, very unusual for this time of day. I stopped one and asked if there was a local incident. He asked me where I had been with an exclamation mark, not a question mark. I said I was in an airplane and hadn't seen the local news. He told me about the attack on the World Trade Center in New York and said he feared Chicago may be under attack.

No announcement of the attack was made on the airplane. I assume it was because we were already in Chicago air space when all planes were ordered to land everywhere in the United States. No announcement was made at Midway



Heather Eidson

Attorney G. A. Finch (left), of Hoogendoorn & Talbot LLP, prayed during the invocation at the 9/11 prayer breakfast on Wednesday, which was hosted by The Chicago Bar Association.

Airport. Nothing until I stopped a stranger on the State Street bridge.

I later learned that a terrorist had been arrested in Minneapolis for taking lessons to fly a jet airplane and he didn't want to know how to land. Now that's odd. I've always wondered if my airplane, scheduled to be over Chicago airspace at exactly the right time, was the vehicle for that terrorist to slam it into the Sears Tower. I will probably never know, but it certainly was a possibility.

Like the assassination of President Kennedy, we will all remember where we were on the morning of Sept. 11, 2001. I've been to ground zero many times, most recently in May 2011. I've talked to firemen at FDNY Ladder Company No. 10 on Liberty Street across from ground zero. I told one firefighter who had returned from an alarm that I am from Chicago, but wanted him to know how proud we are of his company and sorry for their loss.

There is nothing that is usual anymore.

Sept. 11, 2001 changed all that for Americans.

Mike Kramer

Publisher of Chicago Daily Law Bulletin

On Sept. 11, 2001, I was working as a reporter at a midsize Indiana newspaper. I was scheduled to work the evening shift because I needed to cover a meeting for one of my colleagues. While getting ready to workout I put the "Today" show on and quickly learned about the disaster.

I called the newspaper to ask how my editor needed me. He dispatched me to the local American Red Cross because we heard about a long line of people forming to donate blood. Most didn't know what to do to help those hurt by the travesty so they thought giving blood would be the best way. While waiting their turns, people watched several television screens that relayed news concerning the situation.

People cried and talked about what the

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situation meant for our country. It was a deeply moving experience for me because on one hand people sacrificed their day to give blood, and on the other hand you realized how truly helpless we all are. But it gave me great hope to see so many people rally together to support their fellow Americans. Each story I heard from those donating blood was unique and poignant. And I couldn't imagine being anywhere else during such a sad time. I felt lucky to be alive and lucky to be a journalist who gets to tell these people's stories.

Olivia Clarke

General assignment reporter for the Fort Wayne Journal Gazette in 2001

Now editor of the Law Bulletin and Chicago Lawyer

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While walking from a downtown train station to work at the Daley Center on Sept. 11, 2001, I noticed a TV screen in the window of a financial services company on LaSalle Street. The live television video showed that a plane had flown into a World Trade Center building in New York City.

I then headed to my post in the Daley Center's press room, on the building's 7th floor.

An editor informed me that terrorist attacks occurred in New York and in Washington, D.C.

I began making phone calls and learned that court officials sent employees home at 9:45 a.m. and that an evacuation of the Daley Center was underway.

Because I was gathering information about the impact of the attacks on the Cook County court system and about an upcoming chief judge's election, I locked the door to the press room, turned out the lights and kept working.

I wrote an article stating that the chief judge election was set to take place the next day and it did.

After deadline, I left what was then a nearly empty Daley Center.

My late father, who worked as a newspaper reporter, was proud of my remaining at my post and filing the article. But my wife, and the mother of our children who were young at the time, was not pleased that I did not leave the Daley Center following the evacuation order.

John Flynn Rooney

Daley Center beat reporter in 2001

Law Bulletin staff writer today

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It's amazing how many people know exactly where they were and what they



Heather Eidson

Attorney Rosemary Simota Thompson, of the U.S. Department of Justice, Antitrust Division, sang along to "God Bless America" during Wednesday's prayer breakfast.



Heather Eidson

Attorney Kareem M. Irfan (center), chairman of the Council of Religious Leaders of Metropolitan Chicago, gave the benediction at the 9/11 prayer breakfast on Wednesday.

were doing on 9/11; much like Neil Armstrong stepping on to the moon 32 years earlier. However, the emotions these two memories evoke couldn't be more different. I was barely out of diapers when Apollo 11 landed on the moon, and yet I do remember the excitement, joy and pride my parents exhibited with their friends upon hearing the news. Early in the morning on 9/11 I had just gotten a cup of coffee and was joining a conference call with a couple of lawyers, one of whom was located in the Sears Tower (I still can't bring myself to refer to it as the Willis Tower). No sooner had we begun our discussion when there was an eerie

coincidence. In the background of each of our offices there was suddenly a lot of chatter that was loud and animated. I couldn't make out the background voices on the phone, but as I stood up to catch the attention of those in my office, all I saw was frantic, scared and sad faces. Just then one of the other lawyers on the call announced the reason – American Airlines Flight 11 had just crashed into the north tower in New York. In shock, we all tried to get more news online, not believing this news could be true.

As we each found confirmation, you could hear our exclamations full of

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emotion over the line. I remember hearing my colleagues react caused me to be even more emotional. “@#\$, my sister works near the twin towers.” I excused myself from the call and texted my sister and my parents in DC to be sure everyone was alright. While I heard from everyone that they were fine, the first videos and live news coverage was becoming available. I will forever remember the image of Flight 11 slamming into the north tower, and the anxiety and building sinking feeling I felt in my stomach. The the images of the towers collapsing became available, and shortly thereafter I got a text from my colleague, “evacuating” the Sears Tower. Shock, fear, anxiety and sadness – emotions tied to my memories. Even as I type this, my fingers shake a bit. I would later learn that a childhood friend died into the north tower. I have participated in a number of 9/11 events and am amazed and somewhat comforted by the shared memories and emotions we all have of that day.

*Peter Mierzwa
General Manager, Sullivan’s Law
Directory, Jury Verdict Reporter, Law
Bulletin Seminars and Index Publishing
Corp.*

I was in Indianapolis at a conference sponsored by the Indiana Human Rights Commission. I was preparing to make a presentation to real estate professionals, builders, developers, managers and bankers on fair housing and fair lending. While I was in the lobby waiting for the speaker ahead of me to complete his remarks I was watching a TV monitor and saw the second plane fly into the second tower. I was advised there would be a short recess before the conference would continue with my presentation.

I called the airport and found out all planes were grounded. I asked the hotel desk if I could stay in the hotel that night and the desk said because I had checked out they could not give me a room because they were full. I checked a couple of other hotels and they were full as well.

I called rental car companies and they said they had no cars. Then the Hertz clerk told me about a local rental car company. I rented a car and after many requests from people standing in the car rental office I agreed to take three young students with me who shared the cost. The seminar then continued. I finished my speech. I had fewer questions than usual. We then headed for Chicago. As we drove we learned that the attack on the towers was attributed to “radical Islamists.”



Heather Eidson

Gov. Patrick J. Quinn gave the keynote address during the 9/11 prayer breakfast.

I didn’t know what that term was supposed to mean. The young man in the front seat with me fell asleep and I began to talk to his two female companions in the back seat. They advised me they were Muslim students from Iraq who were attending college in Chicago and they had been attending a meeting in Indianapolis for foreign students from the Middle East. The trip was uneventful. When we arrived at the drop off point I said goodbye to my passengers, accepted their part of the car rental cost and took a limo home.

*Clinical Professor F. Willis Caruso
The John Marshall Law School*

I drove into the Loop to teach a 9 a.m. property class. I heard the reports on the radio about the planes hitting the World Trade Center. I was upset but not alarmed, given all the air traffic in the NYC area. My daughter was with me. She was planning to take the Orange Line to Midway Airport to return to the West Coast where she and her husband were living.

When I came into the classroom, I found many students watching the planes in real time on their laptops. I had a scheduled quiz that day, so I asked them to close their laptops, give full attention to the test and that later they could get back to the news story.

Just as the test was completed a staff person came into the room and told us to all leave the Loop immediately. I went back to my office to make sure my center staff was leaving. One student from the

property class followed me to ask questions. I realized he was terrified. I told him we could take up his questions later, and urged him to leave the central business district immediately. By then I was worried.

Just as I was about to leave, my daughter called to say Midway had been shut down and she was coming back on the Orange Line into the Loop for a return trip home. She did finally meet up with her husband several days later, but only after a long drive by car because flights were grounded.

*Professor Celeste M. Hammond
Director, Center for Real Estate Law
The John Marshall Law School*

I was in my vehicle parked outside of the Lake County Courthouse in Waukegan, listening to the radio and preparing for a 9 a.m. hearing. I sat there in disbelief overwhelmed by the horror of it all. I quickly realized that this had changed everything. I was anxious to get home so I could hold on tightly to my only child at the time.

*Matthew L. Willens
Willens Law Offices
Chicago*

I was driving out to Rockford to cover Illinois workers’ compensation hearings before Arbitrator Holland in the state of Illinois building there on Wyman Street (E.J. “Zeke” Giorgi Center) and I listened

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to Howard Stern the whole way out. At the time he was on a local FM radio station whose signal went out to around Belvidere at which point I lost the show. I arrived at the hearing site around 9 a.m. I don't remember who told me but one of the attorneys told me what was happening. Most everyone was in the auditorium where they had set up a TV. I sat there watching the two towers burning. No one expected they would fall. I will never forget one of my clients came in to the auditorium. He asked me about his case. I remember looking up at him and thinking how could he not know what was going on and how on earth could he expect me to answer his question. I remember there was a scare that the Sears Tower could be a target as well. I called the office where I worked and everyone was still there even though it was in the shadow of the Sears Tower. I felt relatively safe being out in Rockford. A passenger jet landed at the Rockford airport as part of the call to clear the skies.

I did call the station manager of the radio station to ask why he didn't break into the show with the news. He was new to the job and advised me he was listening to the show also and simply didn't know what was going on in the world that day either.

*Robert J. Smoler
Smoler Law Office
Chicago*

It was about my third week of my first year of law school at Chicago-Kent. I was in the shower that morning at my apartment in Chicago's Lakeview neighborhood when my roommate knocked on the door and told me that my mother was on the phone and that it was important. I knew that my grandfather, 74 years old at the time, had back surgery in a Manhattan hospital on Sept. 10 and I immediately thought that there had been some complication arising from that. It proved not to be the case, but one sinking feeling turned into another when she told me to turn on the television. I turned it on and saw both towers of the World Trade Center burning. The second plane had hit the south tower only minutes before. My sinking feeling now turned to my uncle Kevin, my father's younger brother, and my godfather. Uncle Kevin was a highly decorated, 20-plus-year veteran in the FDNY — a lieutenant with Ladder Company 3 in Manhattan. His fire house was on 13th Street and 4th Avenue in Manhattan, a mere minutes from the

World Trade Center. I had no idea if he had been on duty, but there was a part of me that nevertheless knew that he was there.

My family and I went all day without hearing from Kevin. We learned that he had worked the night shift immediately before the attack and that he had not made it to the hospital to visit my grandfather as he had planned. Kevin had gone off duty early that morning, before the attack began, but instinctively responded to the World Trade Center anyway. Late into the evening of Sept. 11, 2001, we learned that Lt. Kevin W. Donnelly was officially listed as "missing," along with 11 other brave men from his firehouse. Despite all of the optimism that I could muster, knowing that there were likely voids in the debris pile and that Kevin had responded to the 1993 World Trade Center attack and knew the ins and outs of the entire complex very well, reality was telling me that he had made the supreme sacrifice and gave his life helping others to safety. Hours turned into days, and days into weeks as we waited for any news whatsoever. A memorial service was on Oct. 6 in Wantagh, N.Y.

We had no body to bury — only memories to celebrate. I was 22 years old at the time and gave one of the three eulogies that day in front of thousands of family, friends, well-wishers and firefighters all dressed in their Class A uniforms. Uncle Kevin was given full fire department honors. It was the most moving and emotionally difficult day of my life. Uncle Kevin's body was eventually recovered on March 16, 2002, the day before St. Patrick's Day — his favorite holiday. He was laid to rest shortly thereafter in a small, private ceremony at the Cemetery of the Holy Rood in Westbury, N.Y.

I, along with my wife, parents, grandparents and other members of my immediate and extended family will return to New York this year to mark the 10th anniversary of that tragic day. There will be more memorials and dedications and we will have the opportunity to visit the Ladder 3 firehouse and share memories with the other members of Ladder Company 3. It is sure to be another emotional day, but one emotion will stand out in my mind — PRIDE. Pride for what my Uncle Kevin and his brother firefighters accomplished that day — the largest rescue of civilian life in American history.

*Craig E. Donnelly
Roberts, McGivney, Zagotta LLC
Chicago*

On Sept. 11, 2001, I was on a detail assignment in Washington, on the sixth floor of the former headquarters of the Office of Thrift Supervision, approximately one block from the White House. It was a bright sunny morning and Washington was abuzz because Michael Jordan had just signed a two-year contract to play for the Washington Wizards of the NBA. It was at approximately 9:50 a.m. Washington time when I learned of the attack. My initial thought was it was some crackpots in private airplanes, it would not be until later that I learned of the true severity. While listening to the radio, we saw a flood of employees leaving the Old Executive Office Building, which was just east of our office. It was not long until security personnel ordered us to evacuate; and advised us not to enter the subway.

I walked to my hotel, about a mile north. The streets were full of people heading away from downtown and vehicular traffic was at a standstill. There was no panic, more or less an orderly withdrawal. Military jets could be heard overhead and the sirens of emergency vehicles moving through the streets. Upon arrival at my hotel, I went to the roof and saw the smoke from the Pentagon. It was only upon returning to my room and turning on the TV, hearing Peter Jennings say "what used to be the World Trade Center," that it hit me. As the day wore on, security in D.C. got much tighter and movement was somewhat restricted.

*Neal J. O'Brien
Trust Examiner, then Office of Thrift
Supervision, Bartlett, Ill. in 2001
And today, a bank examiner for the
Department of the Treasury, Office of the
Comptroller of the Currency*

I was in San Diego to attend a multi-day industry tradeshow that began on Sept. 11. Like millions of others drawn in by the stunning live broadcast, I witnessed the fall of the twin towers that morning on the television in my hotel room. The tradeshow came to a screeching halt on its opening day as every large-screen display in the venue was tuned to live coverage of that morning's events; nothing else mattered.

I found myself walking at the harbor's edge, watching one big naval vessel after another head out from Naval Base San Diego for blue water. As if the news coverage weren't gut-wrenching enough, watching the Navy take that obvious step toward a war footing provided a vivid and

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sobering emotional footnote to the horror and the confusion of those early hours. Knowing that commercial flights were now grounded and were likely to remain grounded for some time, I managed to reserve a seat on Amtrak's Southwest Chief back to Chicago. And I do mean "seat" — the sleeper accommodations were all long gone for that multi-day journey. Everyone on that packed train used cellphones to remain connected with loved ones and keep up on further developments, and there was no shortage of extemporaneous discussions about the what, who, when, where and why of 9/11. I arrived home exhausted in more ways than one, knowing that my discomforts of

the past few days were trivial in light of the big picture.

*Steven G. Parmelee
Fitch, Even, Tabin & Flannery
Chicago*

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On 9/11 I was on my way to my 8 a.m. class. Nothing seemed amiss, however when I got out of class I noticed that an odd number of people were frantically running, talking to each other and on their cellphones. At that time, cellphone use was not as rampant as it was today so that peeked my interest.

As I walked to my dorm room one of my very good friends ran up to me and

told me a plane had hit the World Trade Center. I was stunned speechless. As I walked into my dorm room, I turned on the television and saw the second plane hit. I screamed almost at the time of the impact. I felt horribly powerless. I could not believe it. I stared at that television for what had to be hours. I eventually began to call my family and friends. None of them were in New York but I just felt the need to talk to those who I loved and let them know I loved them back.

As long as I live I'll never forget that day. And I hope I never do.

*Andrea M. Harvey
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Chicago*