

# The Remembrance of 9/11 and Lessons Learned

This year marks the 20th Anniversary of a date that we, as Americans, will never forget. It is September 11th, a day on which tragedy struck the Twin Towers in New York, the Pentagon in Virginia (the DC metro area), and a field in Sommerset, Pennsylvania.

That day forever changed our world.

I, having lived in Alexandria, Virginia at the time, might say that I had a close up view of what happened. I used to pass by the Pentagon every day on my way to work. In fact, on September 11, 2001, the day of the tragedy, I must have driven past the Pentagon about 45 minutes before the airplane slammed into it. It was at work that I saw on the television that the Twin Towers and the Pentagon had been hit by airplanes. And it was later on the radio that I heard about the plane going down in Pennsylvania and that possibly its intended target was the White House.

It took me 5 hours to get home that day. The trip home normally took about 45 minutes. But many of the residents of the DC metropolitan area (DC, MD, VA) were subject to the horrendous traffic that resulted from people being released early from work that day.

It was pure chaos. An attack on USA soil. No one knew what was going on or what was going to happen next. I listened to the radio as I was driving to try to get updates. As I finally arrived home, I anxiously waited for my children to arrive home from school. I wondered if they'd heard about the tragedy during the school day. They were school-age, but just a few years before, they had been right there on the Pentagon grounds (not actually in the Pentagon but nearby) in

the daycare center. I wondered silently what emotions and feelings those parents who sent their kids to daycare there were feeling. Sheer panic, no doubt.

My children and I talked about the events of that day. They worried about their dad, who usually worked in the vicinity of the Pentagon, but was thankfully out of town. The fact that he wasn't at work would normally have been totally good news except for the fact that he was now stranded in Chicago since many airplanes were grounded after the 9/11 incident.

September 11th is also a special day for my daughter. It is her birthday, but we didn't do much celebrating on that day. We were still planning to have her party on the weekend, so she would get to celebrate thankfully. But I tried to keep the day of the tragedy as close to normal as possible.

I stayed up that night watching the news, seeing the horrible scenes of the damage that had been done. Nearly 3000 people died that day. I made sure that I let people in my family know that I was safe and okay.. Schools were closed the next day so I stayed home with my daughters.

But when I did return to work, I had forgotten that I would be driving past the Pentagon. I drove past it and saw for myself the horrific damage. It was very troubling to see it for myself versus seeing it on TV.

The attacks were carried out by Osama bin Laden and al-Qaeda. Al-Qaeda is a militant extremist group widely regarded as terrorist. The US went in search of bin Laden and Al-Qaeda, which resulted in us ending up in a war on terrorism with Iraq and Afghanistan, where the terrorist cells were located.

I am sure that if you ask most people, they, like I, can remember exactly what they were doing on September 11, 2001. Even though most people were not residents of New York, the DC metro area, or Pennsylvania, the tragedy impacted them deeply. They would probably tell you how they were glued to the news coverage. Or they might tell you how their travel and other aspects of their lives were impacted. But mostly they would probably tell you of the profound sadness that the day caused. People knew that their lives would never be the same.

Well, Osama bin Laden was tracked down and killed on May 2, 2011, but the war on terrorism continues. No one wants to see another 9/11—not in our lifetime, not in anybody’s lifetime. The war on terrorism is an everyday fact of life. We must keep our country safe from threats of both domestic and international terrorism. That means keeping an eye on extremist groups among other things. We must come together.

We need to be vigilant. We have to protect our way of life. We need to pay more attention to the security and safety of not only our buildings and monuments but ourselves. As the phrase goes, “if you see something, say something.” We must all do our part to fight this ongoing war.

It’s hard to believe that this year’s September 11th, it will be 20 years. Twenty years since all the death and destruction. Twenty years since Osama bin Laden and al Qaeda essentially declared war on this country. Twenty years since our way of life was changed forever.

How will the 20th Anniversary of 9/11 be commemorated? Well, people probably have their own individualized ways of commemorating the date. But at the 9/11 Memorial and Museum, here’s how this memorable milestone will be recognized. The museum will host an in-house reading of the names of those who died in the 9/11 tragedy by family members. Those attending the special ceremony, which is open only to family members, will also observe six moments of silence to acknowledge the times of the World Trade Center towers being struck, the times the towers fell, and the times corresponding to the attack on the Pentagon and the crash of Flight 93, the flight that crashed in Pennsylvania and was reportedly intended to strike the White House. Also, when the sun goes down, the

“Tribute in Light” will illuminate the sky as it does every year on the 9/11 anniversary.

As for me, I will have my own personal remembrance and reflection. And then I will return to normal and wish my daughter the happiest of birthdays. May we all find a personal and prolific way to remember the day. Let us look toward hope for the future and for a better world.

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