

Your stories...your words

Farmington area residents share their experiences, reactions to the terrorist attacks in New York, D.C.



9-11

I woke up Tuesday morning and turned on channel five. Two towers were in the air - two capsules hit the side. I didn't know what happened, but I knew something was wrong. Two smokestacks on the skyline two hours after dawn. I saw it in slow motion like a Hollywood cartoon. But any doubt I might've had just vanished all too soon. Then one after another with an unforgettable sound. Twin soldiers disappeared - twin soldiers hit the ground.



Greg Poulos

You can't break my back and you can't keep me down. Cause I believe that freedom will keep me standing tall. Despite the weight upon my shoulders and confusion on my mind I will rise up even stronger and heal over time.

Another eagle turned around and headed toward a star. It went down much too early without getting very far. Nobody saw it coming - nobody had a clue. I watched the walls collapsing on channel sixty-two. A last farewell from heaven - from a rider in the sky. Who took a vote to take control or at the very least to try. The odds were stacked against them, but they were still alive. And they put the eagle in a field so that others could survive.

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Hills man's tale of terror

September 11, 2001, was the last day of a three-day conference of the National Association of Business Economists that started on Sunday. I woke up at 6:30 a.m. in Room 826 on the eighth floor of the Marriott Hotel located in World Trade Center 3, which was converted to WTC 1.

The flight home was 5:45 p.m. I packed my belongings, put the cell phone on a charger, dressed up, pocketed my wallet and hotel room card, and headed down to the breakfast meeting on the ground floor. I was in a great mood and totally unaware that an airplane was flying toward WTC 1, and what I left behind in the room will be lost forever.

There were about 200 economists in the Grand Ball Room of the hotel on the ground floor. We chatted and ate breakfast. I didn't see David Teolis, the keynote speaker, the president of a major bank, has been delivering a speech for five minutes about the fast pace of financial innovation and its impact on the global economy. Suddenly, the lighting on the ceiling started to shake. We looked up, but nobody moved. Then a few seconds later, two rumble shook everything.

"Let's get out"

My first reaction was earthquake! Somebody said, in a normal voice, "Let's get out." And a stampede began. Out of the conference room, I saw a woman fall to the ground, two men then pulled her toward the door. One thought that calmed my mind was: It's not under your control, die peacefully, two boys are secure financially with your life insurance.

We initially headed toward the revolving door, then changed direction and exited the building at a regular door. It was already chaos, but not complete chaos on the street: a car accident, police vehicles rushing past, people flooding out of buildings everywhere, women crying, men with stunned expressions.

Since I was at the foot of the World Trade Center complex, I was unable to see the huge tall towers. I followed the crowd, and then I saw a dead body on the ground, huge chunks of steel in the middle of the road, pieces of thick glass, and I heard voices shouting.

I walked across a big street, turned my head and looked up, and saw a large ugly black horizontal gap had opened high up in the body of the light-green WTC Tower 1 with visible small red flames inside. Huge smoke

spit out of the gap and rose into the beautiful blue sky. Just then, I saw David dressed in a blue sport coat standing nearby, and I immediately joined him.

2nd plane hits

We stood there watching the fire. Then the second plane hit Tower 2 with a thud. We saw black smoke coming out and debris falling out from the sky. "Oh my God!" was the most common utterance I heard from the crowd. At that point, everybody realized that this was no accident.

Then I saw a small object quickly dropping off the tower, and realized that it was a human body. Then another one. I turned away. "Let's get a little further away," I said to David, and we inched toward the water front. Then we started walking along the landscaped area and toward the uptown direction. This proved to be a good move, as all lower Manhattan would be engulfed with debris and choking smoke.

However, once in a small park and about five blocks from the towers, we relaxed, took a little break sitting on the park bench. Since I joined him, David had been trying to make cell phone calls with no luck. I eagerly gathered bits of information about the nature of the attack. We learned that terrorists flew the airplanes into the towers.

The fire and smoke continued, but from the outside, there was absolutely no sign of further trouble. We were still thinking once the firefighters put out the fire, we might be able to go back in and get our belongings. How naive we were!

Narrow escape

David was getting anxious, so we walked further uptown and finally found a high school with fixed-line phones inside. There were at least one hundred people, mostly students jammed inside. Suddenly there was a small shake, and the lights went on and off.

"Calmed down. This is normal event during a big fire," the speaker announced, so nobody moved. It was the collapse of WTC 2, and everybody should have left the building right away.

David connected to his wife's co-worker and talked briefly, wiping his tears. Then he connected to Joann, our secretary, and Paul, our boss. He told both parties to contact my wife, Amy. There were a lot of people wait-

ing for the phone, so we got out of the high school building. A policeman told us to go to the main street. Next to him, I saw a team of firefighters. A leader was shouting instructions.

After walking for about 100 yards, we heard "Oh my God!" and turned around, just in time to witness Tower 1 crumbling down, just like what you see on TV, except for the deep noise and the huge smoke coming out at us like an upside-down mushroom cloud.

We ran for a few minutes, slowed down when we realized that the cloud would not be able to catch us. Then I stood there in horror: The high school building was no longer visible. If the lines at the telephone were longer, we would have been trapped inside and have to be rescued.

Long journey home

In retrospect, that was the end of physical danger and the start of a long journey home. We continued to walk toward midtown. Volunteers were handing out cups of ice water as if we were marathon runners. We were advised to board a big ship.

On the ship we finally heard on a small radio that Washington was also attacked, and another plane had crashed. I was in a good mood, commenting on how beautiful the New York skyline was. However, I jumped nervously at any loud, sharp noise the ship was making. I could not control myself and realized that unconsciously I was a damaged person.

Still, my mind was very clear, and I told David the far-sighted prediction that the only way home is to get a car at a GM dealership. A man on the ship told us that on Route 440 there are many dealerships.

At about noon, we landed at New Jersey. No (hotel) rooms, taxis, or rental cars were available. We called Total Travel Management, connected with our wives, but found nobody at GM (the office tower RentCar was empty). One hour of walking got us nothing, and David said we ought to hunker down at a place instead of wandering aimlessly.

We eventually returned to the hotel. With dress shoes, our feet were hurting badly and we were tired and starving. We grabbed a bagel and boarded a bus to Newark Penn Station. We took a final look at the smoke in the distance and I fell asleep. The Penn Station was full of

anxious people, and no Amtrak train was heading west. TIM had reserved a car for us at Newark Airport but we were told it was closed.

I called Amy and eventually she connected us to Ting Lee and her husband PT Chiang. Lee was Amy's boss more than seven years ago in Washington. They advised us to take a train toward Trenton direction and stop at the New Brunswick station where they live.

Finally, a way out

Mr. Chiang picked us up in his Volvo and Ms. Lee directed us to rental car places over the cell phone. No luck. We started searching for a hotel. Luckily, at the third stop, Holiday Inn had a couple of rooms. We thanked Mr. Chiang and had dinner in the sports bar where four TV channels were showing. There we saw what everybody saw on TV.

The next day David started calling TTM, rental companies and finally had Sharon Shernat, a director in Paul's group on line. She connected us to Andy at GM's Northeast regional office. One hour later, we had a car. People understood our situation and were extremely helpful.

We took turns driving, made minimum stops and were home 12 hours later. David and I were lucky that we escaped a very close one unscratched. We were lucky that we found each other soon and provided comfort and encouragement, and combined our wits as we made countless decisions with great risk and uncertainty.

A long list of people, people we know and people we don't know in the street, helped us escape and make our quick journey home under the most difficult circumstances. We are most appreciative of the help.

It has not fully sunk in yet. I am still a little shaky. This morning as I enter the company garage, I dropped the car after I swiped it. This has never happened, and I don't understand why I could not hold onto it. A once-in-a-lifetime historical moment and a near death experience is worth sharing. That's why I am writing this down. In the last 12 years, I have been to countries in five continents on various business trips.

Who would have guessed that the most dangerous trip is in the home country, the almighty America?

Ted Chu

September 13, 2001

Song captures WTC tragedy

BY JONI HUBRED
STAFF WRITER
jhubred@homecomm.net

Songwriter Greg Poulos has put many words to music, but none so tragic as those he wrote on Sept. 13.

Two days earlier, Poulos stayed glued to the couch in his Farmington Hills home all day, trying to absorb the news of hijacked airplanes, burning buildings and terrorist attacks.

"I'd just woken up and turned on the TV," he said of that Tuesday morning. "I sat on the couch. I didn't move all day."

I didn't know what happened, but I knew something was wrong. Two smokestacks on the skyline two hours after dawn...

For the past 10 years, Poulos has been writing his own music. Having played guitar with a number of local bands, he'd launched a solo career and got tired of performing everyone else's music, he said.

"I like to write songs about things I witness and things that happen to me," he said. "I wrote this song to help other people heal. I wanted to convey that sort of message."

It took him about 10 minutes to find the words for "9-11."

Despite the weight upon my shoulders and confusion on my mind I will rise up even stronger and heal over time.

Poulos then recorded the song and uploaded it to his website (www.psilo.com) and e-mailed it to friends and national news outlets. He has also posted it on memorial sites - anywhere he could find.

On the first day, his website recorded 425 hits. The second day, 325 more people listened. Some have sent him e-mails expressing their appreciation.

A former Northville resident, Poulos has lived in Farmington Hills for the past few years, just down the street from his brother. The 30-year-old musician is making stock trading his career, but the "Trade Center tragedy" has put that on hold.

He and a friend had planned to launch their Internet trading company on Monday, Sept. 10. "We decided to wait a day or two to start, to see how the market did," he said. "Hopefully, this will bring a quick bottom and it will recover sooner than later."

Poulos' song, "9-11" can be downloaded from his website. Anyone who wants a CD can click on the e-mail link there.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

A grateful heart

With a grateful heart I share some of my thoughts over the past week. My son, Gary, has lived in NYC since he graduated from Harrison High, U. of Michigan and Wayne State Law School. He works for Merrill Lynch in the World Financial Center - immediately west of the World Trade Center Complex.

His windows rattled and from his office he saw the damaged tower and people dropping from the 90th floor. After leaving the building, he witnessed the second plane hit. His two children attend school just three blocks north of the WTC. Fortunately his wife was still with the children as she had an appointment with the principal. She had been very close to the 1993 bombing and immediately signed out my grandchildren and left the area, eventually walking over the Brooklyn Bridge on the way to their home (over five miles).

From the bridge they watched the first tower collapse. Since all subway stations were closed and cabs were unavailable, Gary ended up walking home via the Manhattan Bridge. All phone lines were jammed from Michigan, and fortunately I have a niece in Anchorage who was able to contact them around 1 p.m. and found all were finally home and physically OK.

My prayers go out to all who were not as fortunate. I will never take our freedom and democracy for granted again.

Jan C. Dolan
Farmington

Reason, not faith

I believe in reason, not faith. Faith is the acceptance of something as true, without reasons. Faith is the belief in the irrational. It was faith that allowed terrorist pilots to fly planes into the buildings. When I see the world engulfed in prayer, I am encouraged by one thought: man has created so much good on this earth.

We cannot fathom what he will accomplish once he frees himself from the irrational: once he understands that freedom and reason, not faith and the initiation of force but freedom and reason are the basic requirements for human life, because human consciousness is volitional and rational. How many of us have the courage for independent thought?

Bonnie Bertrand
Farmington Hills

Muslims condemn terrorism

The Muslims of Farmington/Farmington Hills unequivocally and strongly condemn any and all terrorist action against innocent civilians here in America, and abroad.

These coordinated and concerted attacks are a tragedy for the entire nation. We extend our most heartfelt condolences to the victims of the nightmarish terror of Sept. 11, and to their families. American Muslims remembering the events immediately following the 1995 attack on the Alfred P. Murrah federal building in Oklahoma City, are naturally concerned for their safety as well. The American Muslim community was under attack, as the perpetrators were originally thought to be Middle Eastern terrorists.

We sincerely hope that violent attacks of revenge against American Muslim schoolchildren, women clothed in Islamic attire, Muslim-owned businesses, mosques and Islamic centers - which did occur in the days after the Oklahoma City bombing - will not be repeated.

It is important for the nation to remain calm in the face of tragedy. All citizens must unite to condemn this terrorist action and extend their condolences to the victims and to those who lost loved ones in this tragedy.

Adim Khan
Muslim Community of
Farmington/Farmington Hills

Hart Schaffner & Marx collection show

Wednesday, September 26
4 to 8 pm
In Men's
Rochester

Thursday, September 27
4 to 8 pm
In Men's
Livonia

Join us for a look at this unique collection of suits, sport coats and trousers. Let representative Ralph McElroy help you build your wardrobe from our in-stock selections, or have garments made to your personal measure.



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