

Every American over the age of 10 years remembers that awful day. People living or visiting the New York City or Washington, DC areas truly have memories that will never fade away. Our very existence seemed to have been threatened. For me, it was the longest day and I can remember as each minute ticked away. The following is how it went for me.

I jumped into a taxi and headed up to the Senate Russell Building. Every two weeks Senator Kay Bailey Hutchinson (R-TX) would host a meeting with national association executives to discuss current policy and upcoming legislation. She would gather our input and report it to applicable members. The meetings would start promptly at 8:00AM. The speaker on this day was Senator Bill Frist (R-TN) who I was eager to hear. Senator Frist's son played football with my twin boys at St. Albans School and Kay and I would sit next to him and his wife at all of the home games. We had also been guests in their home.

The meeting started and was going along smoothly until a staffer of Senator Hutchinson quickly entered the conference room and whispered into her ear. Within minutes they brought a television into the room and put it on a cable news channel. She announced that a plane had just crashed into one of the twin trade towers in lower Manhattan. "Let's proceed and monitor the developments at the same time". Our necks were going back and forth as Senator Frist began speaking. A few minutes later, a second plane crashed into the remaining tower and silence went over the room. Then the news station announced Breaking News: "The Pentagon has just been bombed". That bomb turned out to be another jet crashing into a major building.

Senator Hutchinson jumped up and said to Senator Frist, "We have to get with Trent (Senate Majority Leader Trent Lott)". They left the room walking very fast. The rest of us got up and hurried to the stairs and exited the building without saying a word to each other. As I came out of the building I looked across to the Capitol building. People were running out at lightning speed. I then turned to my right and looked across the Washington Mall and saw billowing black smoke coming from across the Potomac River – it was the Pentagon.

I went to my cell phone and it was completely dead. F-18 fighter jets could be heard overhead scrambling with a vengeance. Taxis were coming by but they all had passengers. I stepped into the street and in front of a taxi. I opened the door and jumped in and yelled "Take me to 1350 Connecticut now"! The passenger who was already in the taxi said "But I have to go to Dulles Airport". The taxi driver assured her that my destination was on the way (not really). She told me that she was going to take the first plane out of Dulles no matter where it was going. Little did she know that every airport in the nation was already on lockdown for the next few days.

DC was a mess. Every place was immediately closing – federal buildings, stores, subway, schools, everything! The rumors coming out of the taxi's radio didn't help the panic. "The FBI headquarters has been bombed". "There are terrorists inside the State Department building". The twenty minute drive to my office took about one and a half hours. Everyone there was in mild shock. I then laid out our survival plan – military style.

I got the car and took one employee to where his car was parked (by his son's school). From there he would head home with his son. The others were to flag down taxis and get in them four at a time and have the driver hit all destinations. Our twin boys were picked up by Mrs. Simpson at their school and driven to her home (fortunately, phone land lines were working so she could let us know). Her son played lacrosse with my boys and were good friends. We appreciated her move and I was now heading towards her home in Maryland. When I picked up the boys she asked, "Harry are we going to get them for this". I exclaimed, "Oh yes! They will have hell to pay".

My drive should have taken 45 minutes. It took three and a half hours as traffic was going at a snail's pace. The 2 million commuters that come into DC each day were all leaving out at the same time. Finally, we were all home. Kay was just sitting at the kitchen table not saying a word. I turned on the TV and watched as tanks, humvees and troops were crossing the Key Bridge and marching into our nation's Capital. I cried like a baby. The rest is history. God bless America!

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