

The following is an email Ken Biegen sent out to our Class back on September 15, 2001. Because of the events of 9/11 we had contemplated cancelling our 30th reunion. When Ken heard about that, he sent out this email. When the committee read this email, we decided to continue on with the reunion that year.

From: KBiegen@aol.com
Date: Sat, 15 Sep 2001 00:08:49 EDT
Subject: WTC Nightmare and Thanks

Dear fellow Plainedge alumni,

In the past few days, I have received many calls from friends and relatives, as well as numerous E-Mails from many of my Plainedge classmates that I haven't had contact with for years. From the bottom of my heart and the depths of my soul, I want to thank you all for your thoughtfulness and concern. Your kind words of remembrance and prayers have touched me and my family, and have been a great source of strength and encouragement to me during any unbelievably traumatic period of my life. Thank you all so much. My love and prayers goes out to all of you as well.

Some of you have asked to know more about what happened and how I'm doing, so I've tried to summarize the past few days below. When I have some more free time, I hope to respond individually to each person I've heard from via E-Mail or at the reunion.

In July, I was temporarily transferred from my office at 1251 Avenue of the Americas (50th St. and 6th Avenue) to 1 WTC. As a Senior Vice President of Corporate Finance USA for Mizuho Financial Group, the world's largest banking institution (assets of \$1.6 trillion), my assignment for the next five months was to help integrate the U.S. corporate banking activities of the three Japanese banks (IBJ, DKB and Fuji) that are in the final stages of merging together to form Mizuho. In December, the plan is to consolidate all the client management/business development staff back to Mizuho's offices at 1251 Avenue of the Americas.

On Tuesday, at about 8:45 A.M., I was blown out of my seat, which is about 5 feet from the windows on the 48th floor of 1 WTC ("North Tower"), by the impact of a deafening explosion. The building and floor moved and rocked like a major earthquake. At first, I thought this was the big earthquake that a Discovery Channel documentary I once saw predicted would eventually hit NY City. I looked out the window toward the Statue of Liberty and saw fiery debris falling from the sky.

My colleagues and I didn't know what was going on. There were no alarms or announcements. After all the fire drills we had all heard that started with "This is the fire safety inspector ... etc, now when it was real, there was nothing but silence. We went to the stairwell and when we opened the door, we were greeted with the smell of smoke. I knew we had no choice but to try to go down.

It took about 15 minutes to go 10 floors and I really didn't think we would get out. You could look down and see the stairs packed with people, but very little movement. We really didn't know for sure, whether what was below us was better or worse than what was above us. I

prayed that some how we would get out. For the most part, there was no panic but rather a very eerie calmness as we descended, much too slowly, covering our mouths to minimize the smoke inhalation. For some people they were reliving the nightmare of 1993, in this same building. A woman cried out, "this is the second time for me; I know I will die this time". A few of us kept telling everyone to keep calm, keep moving, we will get out alive.

Every five floors there was a stairwell exit, and some elected to stop and rest or "wait it out". There was smoke on all the floors, so people kept saying "close the doors". At about 9:15, when we got to 30, we were asked to stop and move to the right as several injured people were helped down the stairs. Myself and others pulled out our cell phones again to call our loved ones, as we had several times previously, but no calls could be connected. Shortly thereafter, we heard a fire alarm for the first time, but still no announcements.

When we got to 25, I thought we had a chance, and at 20 (about 9:20 A.M.), the first brigade of fireman told us to move to the right as they ascended on their way to the top. It was then that we were told that a plane had hit the building. Someone asked how big? No answer. Another asked what floor? Up higher. Fortunately, there was no mention of what had already taken place in the South Tower at 9:03, or there may have been mass panic. In the stairwell I was in, we never heard or felt the second hit.

As at least a hundred fireman passed me, I tried to touch as many as I could and told them Thank You... God be with you... God Bless you. Many looked so young. They all looked so brave, so resolute and determined on their mission to get to the top. None of them could have envisioned what they were climbing into. It has been estimated that over 250 of these selfless, brave and heroic men lost their lives trying to save mine and others.

Someone asked if we would get out alive. They assured us, "keep moving and you will". The smoke got thicker between 20 and 15, and many of us were really feeling it. The last floors went more quickly and I kept saying to myself just 14 more... just 12 more... At 9:30 we exited the stairwell and reached the Mezzanine level. As we began to jog inside, outside in the spacious courtyard between the same two towers where Leslie West and Mountain had given one of the many free lunch time concerts several weeks before, I was surprised and shocked by what I saw. There was wreckage and body parts everywhere. Like everything that had preceded this, it seemed so surreal, like being in a 1970s disaster movie. A police officer shouted out, "Don't look back, keep moving, follow the line". What came to mind was the biblical story of Lot's wife - - it echoed in my mind again and again - - "Don't look back, keep moving". We were ushered down a stairway into the Concourse shopping level of the WTC. There was no fire, no smoke, but the sprinklers were on and it was flooded with at least an inch of water. The water felt refreshing and rejuvenating.

We were directed ahead and up a staircase to street level. There was a stream of people who had gotten out and kept running and many onlookers taking pictures and videos. When I got several blocks away, I stopped to catch my breath and looked up for the first time. It was then that I realized that both towers were on fire. A bystander told me what had happened and that he had seen six people jump from the flames. Suddenly, another jumped and I started running again. Remembering again Lot's wife, I never looked back.

Somewhere around Broadway and Murray Street, I hopped in a cab and heard all the catastrophic news on the radio. After numerous attempts to reach Linda on the cell phone, my call finally went thru. She cried out "You're alive!" I felt so blessed to hear her voice again.

Sobbing she told me that her mother had called her shortly before 9 and told her to turn on the TV. While she frantically called my old office to confirm what floor I was on, she saw the second plane hit 2 WTC (South Tower).

When I heard the LIRR and all the bridges and tunnels were shut down, I hopped on the F train and after getting stuck under the River for 20 minutes made it to Queens. I walked for a few miles on Queens Blvd. and tried to flag down a cab with no success. I waited at an Auto Repair Shop in Queens for three hours and watched the TV in the waiting room in disbelief. I couldn't believe I had survived this catastrophe.

Sometime around 1 P.M. CBS News interviews this "expert" on terrorism who suggested that the towers collapsed from secondary bomb explosions planted by terrorists within the towers, and that there was a high probability that biological weapons of mass destruction (i.e. anthrax and botulism) were involved. He warned that those who escaped should not develop a sense of false security and needed to get an antidote, if they developed flu like symptoms within the next 36 hours or face the certainty of a horrific death. His estimated death toll was 50,000. Fortunately, all of this turned out to be false, but it really scared the hell out of me for some time.

Linda and her brother Rich attempted to come pick me up. After being stuck on the LIE for over two hours (it was subsequently closed down and limited to emergency vehicles only) I was able to get a Yellow cab to drive me home. Linda immediately drove me to see an internist who checked my lungs and told me that I was in pretty good shape. He also told me not to worry about the biological b.s. (although I may have been exposed to asbestos) and counseled me about post traumatic stress syndrome.

Unfortunately many of my Mizuho colleagues may not have fared as well as me. The second plane went thru the 81st floor of 2 WTC (South Tower), and Mizuho occupied floors 78 thru 82. About 50 to 60 people remain missing and efforts are ongoing to try and find them. Yesterday's NY Post and Newsday featured two Mizuho employee escape stories.

Since the attacks, I have had no time to really relax or properly mourn. The U.S headquarters for two of the three banks that formed Mizuho (DKB and Fuji Bank) have been obliterated. As an "essential employee", I was required to report to work the next day. We have been operating out of a makeshift office at the backup data services center in Jersey City and at IBJ's U.S. headquarters at 1251 Avenue of the Americas. The last 3 days have been chaotic and depressing. I feel like I'm at a wake and work at the same time. Early this morning, while leaving a stall in the Men's room, I surprised a Japanese man standing in the far corner with his back to me sobbing with his hand's covering his face and leaning against the wall. I washed my hands and was going to leave, not wanting to risk embarrassing him or cause him to "lose face". Instead I went over to him and tried to console him. Aoki san, who I had never met before, told me he had lost several close friends he worked with on the 80th Floor of 2 WTC. We hugged each other and cried our eyes out for about 30 seconds. Then we both washed our faces, put on our "game faces" and went back to work.

Yesterday afternoon, I went back to my old offices at 1251 Avenue of the Americas for a meeting with a few people who work with me. When we arrived, everyone had evacuated the building due to bomb threats. We walked around trying to find a place to eat lunch and soon discovered that Grand Central and Penn Station had been evacuated and most of the city had been sealed off due to numerous bomb threats. We all decided we had enough of this terrorism crap and decided to try finding a way to get to our homes. I was able to get two good

Samaritans from Northport who were stopped at a light to let me ride back with them to Long Island. We shared war stories as we tried to figure away out of NYC, which was sealed off due to numerous bomb threats. I suggested going to the safest place in NY - Harlem - and over the Willis Avenue Bridge to the Bronx. It worked. From there we took the Throgs Neck to LI and they dropped me off at my house in Dix Hills.

Notwithstanding the recent traumatic events, I can feel the peace of God and the power of the prayers of many people. Brian Cairns sent me an E-Mail appropriately entitled 9 lives. He probably remembers me using up a few in High School (e.g. my 5 night stay in Massapequa General Hospital after o/ding on booze at the party at Assistant Coach Claus' house after the mighty Red Devils football team led by Doyle, Barney, Joey D, and Frankie Pro upset undefeated Syosset) and in the summer of 1992, my family miraculously escaped death when the brand new motor home that we had rented in Colorado for a 3 week National Park Tour burst into flames in Yellowstone Park due to a defective propane line and gas leak. I don't know how long this string of "good fortune" will last, but at this point each new day is icing on top of the cake.

I have been richly blessed with a great family that includes my wife, Linda Krajewski (also Plainedge '71) and four healthy, talented and beautiful children, Tivona (21) is a senior at McGill University in Montreal and will be pursuing a joint law degree and Master's in Biomedical ethics next year. Vanessa (17) is a senior at Half Hollow Hills East High School who competed in the Junior Olympics in Salt Lake City with the Long Island Power Club volleyball team and helped lead the Long Island Scholastic Team to the gold medal in the Empire State Games this past July. She is also an exceptional student who is being recruited to play volleyball by numerous colleges. Greg (15) and Ryan (14) are also students at Hills East and actively involved in athletics and other activities.

In July 2000, Linda was diagnosed with breast cancer and went thru five months of Chemo and radiation. She is now in remission (hopefully cured) and gets rechecked every 3 months. She does private duty nursing and volunteers as a support partner to women who have recently been diagnosed with breast cancer. She is a great wife and mom who has shown great courage and bravery in battling her disease.

The last few days have been extremely traumatic for all of us. The world will never be the same. The threat of terrorism on our own turf may be even more frightening to us and our children than the threat of nuclear annihilation that we grew up with. We need to continue to put aside politics (it was great to see Chuck Schumer and President Bush united together in downtown Manhattan today) and stand united and prayerfully support our leaders as Americans to defeat this hideous and hidden enemy that threatens us.

God bless you and your families.

I look forward to seeing those who will be attending the reunion.

Sincerely,

Ken Biegen

P.S. Keep on running and don't look back!