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'PATRICK, NOW!'

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Bath Township man heeded voice in his head, scrambled out of World Trade Center hotel

September 11, 2002

BY DAWSON BELL

FREE PRESS STAFF WRITER

Patrick Anderson's memory of Sept. 11 is acute but fragmented.

Some of it is captured in his mind's eye with startling clarity. Some in vividly recollected sound.

Other bits have vanished, as if an internal technician had been recording Anderson's sense of sight and sound and emotion that day but froze the frame or killed the mike at odd moments.

Some of it still seems like a hallucination.

He remembers the noise of the first plane striking the first tower, 80 or so stories above his head.

It was, he said last week, a "lonng crash, not the sound of backing your car into a tree" -- but one that went on and on, as if china cabinets lined up somewhere nearby had been toppled over like dominoes.

It was 8:46 a.m. and Anderson, an economic consultant based in Lansing, was getting dressed in his room at the World Trade Center hotel. The 22-story building linked the twin towers.

In 15 minutes, he was to meet a colleague in the lobby for the last day of an economic conference they were attending.



AL GOLDIS/AP
Patrick Anderson stands in his Lansing office on Monday. He was attending a National Association of Business Economists conference last Sept. 11, and escaped the World Trade Center hotel.

It had been a good trip for Anderson, 43. The meetings had gone well. He had a magnificent dinner the night before, and had gotten a head start on Christmas shopping for his wife and three young children back home in Bath Township. Then the world started coming to an end.

When the china cabinets stopped crashing, Anderson went to his window and looked down to the street. He saw cars wrecked, one with its roof caved in. Debris was still falling. And a burning corpse was near the curb.

People on the street gazed skyward, but Anderson couldn't tell why. He started dressing again -- urgently, but methodically. He recalls inserting the plastic stays in his shirt collar.

A voice came over the hotel intercom. Stay in your rooms, it said. A few moments later, he heard another voice, from someone running down the hallway outside his door. Everybody get out now, it said.

"I had alarm bells going off in my head by then, like an angel perched on my shoulder that said, 'Patrick, *now!*' "

Running for life

Within seconds, he was in a stairwell, trying to descend four stories and get his second shoe on. The scene in the hotel lobby was pandemonium: fire and police rushing in, directing the fleeing guests to the south exit, away from the burning north tower.

At the door, a fireman shouted: "Run! Hands over your head! Don't look up!"

Anderson said he followed directions but couldn't resist the urge to turn and look, to see what had so horrified the people in the street below his room window.

It was about then that he heard the roar of jet engines coming in from the south and saw the second plane. It was also about then he realized the plane thundering over his head was going to smash into the building over his shoulder. And he thought maybe he was going to die.

Anderson doesn't recall the sound of the second crash, though it must have been something like having china cabinets exploding inside his brain.

"I don't remember hearing anything . . . until I started praying, and then I only heard the sound of my own voice." It was coming from beneath the shelter of a 5-ton delivery truck, where he and two other men took shelter from the shower of debris.

Anderson spent the next hours as part of the instantly-created horde of

New York refugees. He was five blocks away when the south tower collapsed and found himself on his knees again in a tiny, pocket park, praying with a sense of complete helplessness, and an "awareness of all these people that were dying."

A guardian angel

As the huge clouds of dust and smoke raced his way, Anderson was beckoned inside a nearby school building, Stuyvesant High, by a policewoman.

The scene inside was surreal. Swarms of kids were on cell phones and lined up at pay phones. Along a wall on the opposite side of the lobby were photographers and technicians, set up to take senior class pictures.

Anderson recalls hearing Stuyvesant's principal come on the public-address system. Students should return to their classrooms, he said, and the lunch hour had been canceled.

Eventually, he made his way up town with a guardian angel from the photo crew. They walked for several miles to a studio. It was full of production workers. None said anything.

By early afternoon, Anderson had reached his family (the only phone call he had been able to make earlier came in his hotel room after the first crash, when he told a nanny at home that something terrible had happened but he was fine). He also found a place to stay and reunited with his economic conference colleague.

Within a few days, his life returned to normal.

Except that he keeps wondering what would have happened if he hadn't gone to the deli after returning late to his hotel room the night before. Because he did, he changed plans and visited the hotel's rooftop gym early in the morning instead of later. He wasn't there when its glass-enclosed workout area, 20 floors closer to the impact area, was showered with glass, metal and concrete. He wonders what would have happened if he had tried, like other hotel guests, to pack instead of sprinting for the stairs with one shoe in his hand.

A powerful reminder

On Dec. 27, Anderson got an e-mail from an inspector in the New York Police Department.

"I don't know if your alive," it read. But if he was, the crews searching through the wreckage had found something that belonged to him.

It was a small, leather-bound planner. It had been inside his briefcase

on the bed in his hotel room. A photo of his son was inside.

Last week, Anderson offered to let a reporter inspect the package he received a short time later from the NYPD. He said he can't look at it himself.

He can barely talk about it.

"When I think of what it would have meant to my family if I hadn't come back . . . it really hurts."

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