

## 9/11 Recollections and Reflections

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In 2001 I was associate chair of the Humanities & Social Sciences department [at our Daytona Beach campus], a position I had held since 1991. Before I left home for the office, I heard while listening to NPR the morning of September 11 that a plane had struck one of the Twin Towers in New York City. Of course, that seemed especially strange; I imagined a small, wayward aircraft making some sort of navigational blunder. Certainly newsworthy, but primarily as a freak incident. Obviously this was not only strange, but also sad for the small handful I imagined on board that small, disoriented plane. It didn't occur to me that anything other than relatively minor damage would have occurred to such a mammoth structure. I certainly didn't brush it off, but I don't recall much more of a response than a puzzled sort of "What the...?" furrowed brow reaction.

By the time I had located a parking spot at Embry-Riddle, I knew from listening to the radio along the way that it was no small plane, that BOTH towers had been hit by planes, and that the skyscrapers were spewing flames and plumes of thick, black smoke from their upper stories. Neither had been hit by small aircraft, but by jetliners, apparently filled with passengers. There was reporting of the Pentagon being hit, as well, and another plane down in Pennsylvania, but these cases seemed somehow marginalized by the insistent focus on the Twin Towers.

Once I arrived on the second floor of the old A Building (in the academic complex formerly known as Alphabet Soup), I found that I was unable to access the main door to the central Humanities/Social Sciences office because a crowd of perhaps thirty or so faculty members and some students had gathered around a small television placed by a colleague on a table in the hallway. Everyone was completely silent and staring at the TV, grim-faced. I edged up near the TV as a fellow professor leaned over and quietly informed me that the tower was about "to go down." Almost immediately, sure enough...down it went. An unforgettable image that has been replayed innumerable times, especially in the days following 9/11. It wasn't just shocking; it was incomprehensible. Not long after (I forget just how long...maybe a half hour), the second tower – also struck in what was now being declared as an obvious act of terrorism – similarly collapsed ... straight down, imploding, piling into and on top of itself, just like its twin, in a massive billowing cloud of dust and debris. No one knew just then how many people were inside. It was hard to digest at the time, just as it is now...but more so, seeing it happen in real time.

Some of the faculty had peeled away from the gathering to go into their classrooms to begin teaching. How would that even be possible? By this time everyone knew what had happened, what was happening, not necessarily directed by whom...or why...and teaching under the circumstances was impossible. Instead, most faculty I knew quietly met to talk with students, listen to their questions, their confusion, their outrage. In this very immediate aftermath that morning, faculty typically stayed with their students until there seemed nothing more to say since so little was known, and let them go.

I don't remember the rest of the day. Classes no doubt resumed sporadically. Everyone was thirsty for more information. The general feeling, shared by most if not all, was a quiet dread: what next?

President Bush had informed us that “America was under attack.” My own prediction at the time was that there would certainly be more assaults in the coming days---where and when, of course, was entirely unclear. It was quiet. No air traffic, of course, and an atmosphere that can best be described as “funereal.”

Beyond this, I recall the following days or weeks on campus marked by trailers (many of them!) parked across Clyde Morris, satellite dishes everywhere----CNN and other major networks----because it had been reported that one (or more) of the terrorists had received flight training at ERAU. This was eventually disproven, but it certainly created a media storm. The Office of Records and Registration became essentially occupied for days by FBI agents combing through student files. Also, we had a very considerable population of students from the Middle East at that time (Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Yemen, Kuwait, Oman...), and the Embry-Riddle Language Institute’s (ERLI) students were almost exclusively Arab at the time. An immediate result of this was the rapid depletion of ERLI – so much so that it took some years to recover – and the number of students from the Middle East went to about zero, as well, which seriously impacted our overall enrollment in the short term, and certainly had a noticeable impact on our campus’ cultural diversity for the next few years. The atmosphere on campus for months afterwards was somber as students monitored the news and contemplated the future. Young officers-in-training in our ROTC units, no doubt, shifted mentally into “prepare” mindset. It was a quiet time of feeling wounded (and indignant), but also one of bonding.