

September 16th 2005

Trading Cities

By Paul Gibson



Pure Evil

It's a wonderful, beautiful day. The sun is shining and it really seems like summer again. Traffic is noisy as hell and I'm running late for work. We're going to have to grab a taxi, otherwise the boss is going to be all over me today.

"Good morning, Sir. Where are you off to?" "I'm running late, off to Morgan Stanley, next to the Sears Tower. Wow, it's really just beautiful out there today." "It sure is!" Ten minutes pass in the heavy Chicago traffic.

Looks like we're almost at the door. "Did you hear that?" "What?" "Looks like some plane just hit the trade center in New York." (Thinking of the small planes—the only ones allowed to fly that low) "I hope the pilot is okay! Have a nice day!"

I was running into the office at 222 W. Monroe Street in Chicago, just west of 175 W. Monroe, known as the Sears Tower (110 stories building). I just got into the elevator and we made our way into the office to punch in. I first ran into my friend Dean, wondering what was wrong with him... looking at the floor..wondering if he was okay. He says to me... "Did you see what just

happened in New York?" ... I told him I heard that a plane hit the tower but nothing more... (He knew it was a commercial jetliner but didn't bother to tell me). I went on to rush to my desk and grab some coffee before the busy day...

Just then I was stunned by the sight of a plane hitting one of the trade towers...via television... while I was filling up my mug, the second plane hit and I, like most of us, were trying to figure out how they had got such close-up pictures of something that they didn't know was going to happen...the second plane had hit. The reporters were stunned as well...some thought it was a tape of the first... It was bad. It was really bad.

I rushed to my phone to call my friend in New York...she worked in Trade Tower 7. She answered the phone and says that she has been hearing fire trucks all around her building...they tell her they need to get out as a precaution, so she has to hang up.

Within minutes, I receive a phone call from our offices in Minneapolis, Minnesota. "Paul, is that you?" "Yeah, it's me, who's this?" It's me, Deborah. What's going on... I just saw two planes crash into our offices in New York and they say there are three more planes that are floating around that were hijacked. They think it's heading for Chicago. You better get out now!"

I can't remember exactly what I first thought, I guess the immediate reaction was to look through the window at the Sears Tower, leaning next door and up at the sky to see what was going to happen next. The president had ordered all aircraft to be grounded immediately...and within 10 minutes there were only 4 planes left. Amy began crying and asking whether we could evacuate. She was scared the plane was going to knock the Sears Tower right on top of us. Like her, some began to panick.

Mike Donahue, office manager, tells us all that he hasn't received word yet from New York on anything. (Mike always follows the chain of command.) If you want to leave, I will understand. I tried to console Amy and our other two friends, telling them that nothing was going to happen...that it was absurd to try to get close to Chicago with the Air Force base so close.

While I was going on and on to Amy about how she had nothing to worry about, Mike comes back to speak to the now 25 or 30 of us there. "I have a friend of mine who works in the Federal Building here in Chicago (two blocks away from us) who says they have found four bombs in the basement. I want you to leave quietly. But please get out of downtown and stay home." There was a lot going through my head. It was only 9.30 AM and I had just got to work. I waited with my friend Jake. We decided to stay back to give Mike a hand with everything so if he wanted to leave early he could. Jake and I finished up and started down the elevator. We arrived at the lobby and that was a scene I will never forget. The lobby was jammed, every office had evacuated. The streets were full of people walking and Jake and I, both having lived abroad and fearing the worst, decided to avoid all public means of transportation just in case. We decided to walk downtown to where we attended business school and that's when our nightmare just began...

We were walking along the bridge on Clark street when we saw it....two F-16 jetfighters flying in between the highrise buildings in downtown Chicago. We thought for sure that this was going to be war... but we didn't know who was attacking us...and this was in Chicago, not New York.

It was now close to 10.15 AM and right when we got to the university we see a television set up in the lobby and suddenly we see an airplane has drilled the pentagon. We saw the plane go right into the building, then moments later, the "less fortunate" flight in Pennsylvania drilled into the ground. Jake's relatives from California were calling him and then, Dan, my friend from business school calls me to tell me he can't find his sister. She used to rent an apartment directly in front of the towers in New York and now all and I mean all the cell phone communication etc. was completely out - not only in New York, but also where we were in Chicago.

I visited Dan and his wife Monika - they were both crying...not knowing where Dan's sister was... just watching the images over and over again, people crying, distraught...

After leaving Dan, Jake and I both walked home... an hour and a half walk - normally a 15-minute train ride. Then it all came back again, this time even worse.

Just before going home alone, I stopped in to see Amy Stein, one of my neighbors... she answered the intercom and simply stated, "Paul,

thanks for stopping by, I am okay... I have lost 4 of my closest colleagues, each one on a different airplane of the four that crashed that day... but I'll be okay... I can't talk to you right now."

When I got home Tower 2 was just beginning to fall... I started to think about all of my colleagues I speak with every day in New York...you see, I was working from Chicago for Morgan Stanley in New York...and the newspeople repeated that they were the hardest hit by the attack ... 52 floors of the trade centers were theirs. I feared the worst for my colleagues... Then it was as if the world stopped, and the images just did not do it justice... Tower 1 fell to the ground and it seemed as if the entire downtown Manhattan area had gone up in smoke.

That night, all of us slept one or two hours as the warnings of bombs, terrorists and arrests poured in... and the silence in every city of the country was so deadening... there were absolutely no airplanes in the sky and it was as if we had all gone back to our childhood.

The following days were spent watching television, learning of friends and friends of relatives that had died... the first victim, a Catholic priest, was the spiritual director of my older brother John... That night, seeing President Bush stating that we had been attacked... and that we would bring the fight to them, funerals...at least 12 televised everyday, memorials, masses, and the fight against time...and discovering that there was just nobody alive... and the death toll was going up...

At work we took over all of the New York area offices, and everyday it was speaking with a family who had lost a loved one, sometimes a brother or sister... all of them crying on the phone, ...they had just called to try to get on with life and couldn't. I think I had it worst, I had offices from the Pentagon, New York, Massachusetts and Pennsylvania... all four crash sites with almost 3.000 victims. People crying on the phone while you had to talk to them about the money of their relatives... the most heartwrenching experience.

Terrorism? More like pure evil that should and will be stopped with your help or without it, with your permission or not...thank you very much.