

September 11th Oral Histories



ABOUT THE READING Immediately after the devastating terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001, people in New York and around the country rallied to help in any way they could. Putting their own lives in danger, firefighters and medical personnel rushed in to help the injured. The following excerpts are taken from interview transcripts of the World Trade Center Task Force following the attacks.

VOCABULARY

EMT Emergency Medical Technician



As you read, notice how the speakers convey the emotion and fear they felt on September 11, 2001. How do you think you would have felt being a witness to the attacks on the World Trade Center?

Faisal Abed, EMT, October 12, 2001

“... We are driving down 34 Street and we get to 23 Street and you see tower one. It’s like ... oh, god. Look at this. The first thing that comes to your mind is oh, ... it’s an act of god, it’s a terrible tragedy. I mean you think you know—you look at it and say—it’s not the first time a plane hit a building. You had the Empire State Building. My parents told me back in 1945 when a big bomber hit the building, so it’s an accident, god, it’s a tragic accident. But then we are driving and ... we are about a half mile out, halfway from the World Trade Center and we see this shiny object coming and me and my partner are going ... what’s wrong with that plane ... There is something not right with that plane. And ... the

On July 28, 1945, a B-25 bomber accidentally hit the Empire State Building. The crash, blamed on poor visibility due to fog, killed the pilot, two crewmembers, and 11 people working in the building. Several others were injured.

Just before 9:00 a.m., a passenger jet crashed into the north tower. Minutes later, a second passenger jet hit the south tower.

Source: From interviews with Faisal Abed, October 12, 2001, transcribed by Elizabeth F. Nason, and Adrienne Walsh, December 17, 2001, transcribed by Maureen McCormick from “Oral Histories from September 11 Compiled by the New York Fire Department” from *New York Times* web site, available at http://nytimes.com/packages/html/nyregion/20050812_WTC_GRAPHIC/met_WTC_histories_full_01.html, October 14, 2005. Copyright © 2004 by **The New York Times Company**. Reproduced by permission of the publisher.

tower blew. So my partner said . . . ‘The building’s going to fall. The building’s going to fall on us.’ It was coming—the force—you see like . . . the whole top of the building go off and just the junk that was coming out of there and the explosion was—I thought it was Hollywood. I thought this was an act. I said this can’t be happening. In New York. It’s not happening . . . I think right after the first building collapsed, people were just walking around. They didn’t know what to do . . . I was walking around like I lost my little puppy. I was definitely just totally shaken . . . If you ask me, can we ever prepare ourselves for something like this, not this magnitude. Not this magnitude, no. This was something else way beyond our comprehension and something that we, you know, can never handle again. It’s impossible. It really is. As much training as we get . . . I never want to see this again. I really don’t.”

The collapsing buildings killed about 2,500 people, including hundreds of firefighters and emergency rescue workers.

**Adrienne Walsh, Firefighter, F.D.N.Y.
- December 17, 2001**

“ . . . As I got to the back of the rig, I don’t know why, but I looked to my right, and I saw a black cloud the size of the biggest skyscraper I’ve ever seen actually coming, hurdling at us like a tornado, and I just yelled, ‘Run,’ and I took off . . . We ran down the block toward the east side, and I thought to myself the building—I knew it was the second tower going, and I thought if the building was going to collapse down, that if I beat the cloud, I would beat the building, and I saw the size of the cloud, and I knew I wasn’t going to beat the cloud, but I gave it my best shot. So I ran down the block, and . . . there was a door open. Some maintenance workers left the door open to the basement of . . . another office building. It was about the only light you saw. I ran into there.”

At around 10:00 a.m. the south tower collapsed, causing huge clouds of dust, smoke, and debris to engulf several city blocks on the island of Manhattan. The smoke clouds were visible for miles.

WHAT DID YOU LEARN?

1. What event did Faisel Abed think of when the first plane hit the World Trade Center?

2. What might Adrienne Walsh have been thinking as she ran from the “black cloud”?
