

- HOME
- JOB MARKET
- REAL ESTATE
- AUTOS
- NEWS
 - International
 - National
 - Politics
 - Business
 - Technology
 - Science
 - Health
 - Sports
 - New York Region
 - Metro
 - Campaigns
 - The City
 - Columns
 - Education
 - Weather
 - Obituaries
 - NYT Front Page
 - Corrections
- OPINION
 - Editorials/Op-Ed
 - Readers' Opinions
- FEATURES
 - Arts
 - Books
 - Movies
 - Travel
 - Dining & Wine
 - Home & Garden
 - Fashion & Style
 - New York Today
 - Crossword/Games
 - Cartoons
 - Magazine
 - Week in Review
 - Photos
 - College
 - Learning Network
- SERVICES
 - Archive
 - Classifieds
 - Theater Tickets
 - Premium Products
 - NYT Store
 - NYT Mobile
 - E-Cards & More
 - About NYTDigital
 - Jobs at NYTDigital
 - Online Media Kit
 - Our Advertisers
- MEMBER CENTER
 - Your Profile
 - E-Mail
 - Preferences
 - News Tracker
 - Premium Account
 - Site Help
 - Privacy Policy
- NEWSPAPER

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TRANSCRIPT

Accounts From the South Tower

Following are accounts from survivors of the attack on the World Trade Center's South Tower and the friends and relatives of the victims. Accounts from the North Tower can be found [here](#).

105TH FLOOR

Michael Egan, victim

AON Corporation

[Portraits of Grief: Siblings and Close Friends](#)

His sister also worked at AON. His wife, Anna, spoke with him briefly. This is her account:

Michael initially started evacuating, pushing his people into the elevators. My understanding is that they managed to get down to the 78th floor and then he was sent back up, along with 15 other people. At that point, Michael decided to go to the floor above in hopes that it was a bit more comfortable. He called at that point, and told me they were stuck on the 105th floor. There were 15 people lying on the floor, they couldn't breathe, it was unbearable. I asked him about his sister, Christine, and he said he had sent her out a while ago, but he didn't know if Christine made it out. They couldn't breath where he was. I was about to ask him who are the people with you, that's when we both saw it. We both said, "Oh no, I love you darling." The line dropped and the building fell.

Interview by Jim Dwyer

105TH FLOOR

Roko Camaj, victim

ABM Window Washing

[Portraits of Grief: Working Atop the World](#)

He made one phone call out at 9:14 a.m. from the 105th floor, according to Vinny Camaj, his son. Roko called his wife, Katrina. This is an account of that conversation:

He said, "I'm on the 105th floor. There's at least 200 people here." He was waiting for the okay to go up or down. Before the second plane hit, they told him to stay where he was -- he had a walkie-talkie.

He had full access to the roof. Most likely, he was on the roof when the first plane hit because he was operating the rig (window-washing) that day. He probably heard the plane coming.

He said, "I'm using a friend's phone." A cop's phone, or a Port Authority police officer's phone. He said it took over a half hour to get through because the cell phones weren't working, and then the line at home was busy with people calling to ask about my father.

My mom was very panicked, but he told her, "Don't upset my kids, we're all in God's hands."

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- Printer-Friendly Format
- Most E-Mailed Articles
- Reprints



South Tower Accounts

- [105 Floor](#)
- [98](#)
- [97](#)
- [93](#)
- [91](#)
- [90](#)
- [89](#)
- [88](#)
- [84](#)
- [81](#)
- [80](#)

[78](#)

102 MINUTES

INSIDE THE TWIN TOWERS

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- Inside the Towers
- Chronology

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- North Tower
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He couldn't hear my mom anymore, but my mom heard him yelling, "Close the door, close the door, don't let the smoke in."

She was very happy to hear his voice. I called her right after they hung up. She said, "I just spoke to Daddy, everything's okay."

Interview by Jim Dwyer

98TH FLOOR

Eric Eisenberg and Gary Herold, victims

AON Corporation

[Portraits of Grief: The Troubleshooter](#)

[Portraits of Grief: Reserved but Loving](#)

Marissa Panigrosso and Sarah Dechalus, both AON employees, worked with Eric Eisenberg and Gary Herold on the 98th floor of Tower 2. Their encounters with these men make clear the men lost their lives trying to assist others to safety, as Mr. Eisenberg rounded up other employees from the 98th floor and Mr. Herold apparently stood by the stairwell, both urging people to leave after a plane had hit the neighboring north tower. Ms. Panigrosso and Ms. Dechalus both lived, Mr. Eisenberg and Mr. Herold did not.

Marissa Panigrosso: The plane hits north tower. You heard a loud pop and then it kind of got you up from your desk. My desk was second from the window. It was very odd like the Fourth of July. There were papers that were singed. I would not go near the window. But you could feel the heat. It was just so so hot, I turned to look at the window and I felt the heat on my face. Like an oven door. That was instantaneous. We all stood up, people started to scream. That is when Eric came over.

He said, "Get away from the window. Everybody get away from the window." He said stay calm and go to the stairs. We will go down the stairs to the 78th. A lot of us did want to call family. Most people wanted to talk to someone they love. People got calls, too.

Eric was very take charge, like let's get moving here. He was the wake up voice. You were stunned. You either froze, or you were running around because you didn't know what was going on. I was not going to wait around. We were so high, you had to leave. We followed Eric. He went to the stairway. He started the train and then went back for other people. I started out walking with Sarah. I met up with Mary Jo Arrowsmith, she was hysterical, she was crying. We went out to 78th floor [where the express elevator is] and into elevator. They were all standing in the skylobby. They were talking. That is when they made the announcement. It said the building is secure, don't evacuate.

I didn't hear Gary Herold say anything. [while she was on the 98th floor] He was very, very concerned. He was standing at the door way at the stairwell. He had this lost look, like he knew something bad was going on.

Sarah Dechalus: Saw an explosion ball. It felt like something was coming at us. Someone yelled fire. It felt really hot coming toward us. I sat close to window that faced west. It was, for a moment, it was like it was trying to reach toward building two, but it did not quite make it. I ran toward the elevator. Then I thought, should I try to run back to my desk to get my bag? Some people said, "I am going to get my bag." Some said, "Don't go down the stairwell. This is kind of high." For some reason, I had a thought of Wesley Snipes in a hijacking. He was on a airplane, in that movie, "Hijack." Why am I having this thought? I wondered. Eric passed me. "Start going down the stairs," he said. He was going around. It was a huge floor. He was going around, to the other side. "Be calm, don't run, We are going to get down safely." He was serious, he was concerned about others and making sure. He

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went completely around the floor to make sure everyone was getting out.

I came out into the skylobby. I was not sure what to do. I hear the announcement. Something like, "Building one has been hit, please be careful, don't panic, you can go back to your floors." At that point I am thinking maybe I have a chance to go get my bag. I was looking around for any familiar faces. I did not see anyone. I just started thinking real fast. On a normal day, you can't get your stuff that quickly anyway and get out of there. I was standing there two to three minutes. I saw people going back up in the elevators. Many others were just standing there.

She decided to go down.

Interview by Eric Lipton

97TH FLOOR

Edgar Emery, victim
Fiduciary Trust

Edgar Emery worked in human resources for Fiduciary Trust on the 90th floor of 2 World Trade Center. He escorted five coworkers to the 78th floor skylobby after the first plane hit the other tower, then went back up to evacuate others and eventually met up with his Fiduciary colleague, Alayne Gentul. They finally both made calls to their spouses from the 97th floor, where they had gone to evacuate colleagues in the company's technology department.

This is the story that Elizabeth Emery, Ed Emery's wife, tells of that day:

I've been waiting seven months for someone to take an interest in the story of those on Sept. 11 who were certainly heroes just like the police and the firemen.

Ed was in his office. He always got in at about 8:30. We took the same train in. He was on the 90th floor. There was a training class scheduled with a visitor.

When the first tower was struck, there was of course the sound. And the smoke and paper flying in the air. Ed came out of his office. People were reacting and screaming. "What happened?" I spoke to several people that Ed had escorted down moments thereafter.

He came out of his office and gathered his group together. He said, Okay, everyone out, everyone out. Which is five women. I have spoken to each of them. He got them down the stairwell from the 90th floor to the 78th floor. And reassured them. They were very frightened. One woman was recovering from cancer. Another woman had been in the towers in '93. And she was incredibly frightened.

He got them to the 78th floor and they asked him do we continue down the stairs or take the elevator. He pressed the button for the elevator. It arrived. He put them on the elevator. [Ed goes back up.]

I must clarify that it was not his job title or professional responsibility to do that. He chose to do that out of decency. He worked in human resources. But he was not the H.R. director. He was not in charge of evacuation.

He also knew there were other people up there. He went back.

In any case he returned upstairs. And he met Alayne somewhere between the 90th and 97th floors.

He called me and the first thing that I asked him was can you get out. Because I

had been in the trade center in '93. And I knew how difficult it is to get out. I said can you get out. And he said, ``I don't know, it's very smoky." And he said, ``I called Port Authority to come rescue us."

For him to say that to me means that he knew he was trapped. Then he paused and he told me that he loved me. And I said I love you too. And we were cut off. I did not get a dial tone. The phone went into dead air.

[During that call] I could hear Alayne. I could hear her screaming. She was right next to him. I could hear her saying, ``Where's the stairs? Where's the stairs?"

It was like she was on the phone as well. Obviously I had a very precious conversation with him.

I could hear her screaming. And I could hear the words that she said. That's how close they were. Then there were other screams and confusion. I could hear some kind of an announcement. But I couldn't make that out. I was in shock as well.

Interview by James Glanz

97TH FLOOR

Jason Jacobs, victim

Fiduciary Trust

[Portraits of Grief: He Found His Happiness](#)

His wife, Jennifer, spoke with him briefly after the first plane hit the other tower, but before his own had been struck.

I knew something was wrong by the tone of his voice.

He called to tell me that a plane had hit the World Trade Center. But he wanted me to know he was okay. He was telling me it was the other one.

He described what he saw outside the window. They saw this big fireball come up. And paper flying all over. He said people were running around the floor. He wanted me to know he was okay. He did not know whether they were going to evacuate or not. He said, ``I might be home early or I might not be."

I said that if he called me and I wasn't home, not to worry because I was fine. The last thing he said was that he loved me and that he loved our little baby, Zoe. That's the last I spoke with him.

Interview by James Glanz

97TH FLOOR

Edmund McNally, victim

Fiduciary Trust

[Portraits of Grief: The Joy of Shopping](#)

He spoke with his wife Liz after the plane struck the north tower. He then called back twice after his own building had been struck. This is her account of that call:

The first thing he said to me, he said that I meant the world to him and he loved me. He said tell the girls he loved them very much. This is what a courageous strong person he was. He was not even concerned about himself at that point. You know what he did? He said now Liz, don't forget about the life insurance. Don't forget about these different programs he had with work. The different contracts -

bonus programs. And he went down an A to Z of his life, and what I needed to address.

I told him to pray to Michael the archangel. We said we loved each other. And we said goodbye. Supposedly I was in such physical shock, my body was totally shaking. But I was able to talk to him calmly. That's what my friend was telling me.

But I got another phone call from him. He called me back to tell me that he felt silly because he had just booked a trip to go to Rome. He said, "Liz, you have to cancel that. You have to take care of that."

At that point, I said, "Ed, you're getting out of there." I said the firemen are coming up to get you. I said you are a problem solver. You're going to get out of there.

That's when he said to me, "Liz, this was a terrorist attack. I can hear explosions below me." He said stuff about the data center. That's why I think he was on the 97th floor, because the data center was on the 97th floor.

Then he said the floor was buckled. And he said it was getting really hot and hard to breath. His voice was actually very calm. It wasn't like someone calling up panicking. He sounded a little winded the first time I spoke to him. The next two times, it was amazing how calmly he was talking to me. In that last phone call, he did whimper. He whimpered once. I just said to him, "Ed, I love you very much." I said I want you to go. I said, "Ed, conserve your energy." I said they are coming up there to get you. And with that we said our last goodbyes.

Not once was he concerned about himself. I always look back on it.

Interview by James Glanz

93RD FLOOR

Gregory Milanowycz, victim

AON Corporation

[Portraits of Grief: A Bundle of Energy](#)

He spoke with several people, including his father, Joseph, and a business colleague of Joseph's, Marcia De Leon. This is Greg's account. Joseph spoke first with his son after the plane has hit Tower 2. Then Ms. De Leon spoke to Greg. The cellphone call lasted from 9:29 a.m. until 9:56 a.m., minutes before the south tower fell.

JOSEPH MILANOWYCZ: "By that time, I guess, the plane had struck the south tower. He told me he was trapped, with another 20 people, on the 93rd floor. I don't think there was damage to the building on his floor. It was just heavy smoke at that point."

GREG: "Can you call someone, can you tell them we are here in the northeast corner of the 93rd floor...Heavy smoke, hard to breathe."

JOSEPH: "Can you get to an exit?"

GREG: "No, the smoke is too heavy."

JOSEPH: "I gave my phone to a colleague and I said, 'You keep him calm, I am going to get in touch with the fire department.' So I called 911, I got through 911 and said you already got the report of this, I just need to tell someone that there are people trapped on the 93rd floor...I said to him that my son and 20 other people

are trapped on the northeast corner of the 93rd floor.'

The dispatcher ``said to me, `OK, this is what you have to tell them what to do: `Get as close to the floor as possible, don't talk to conserve oxygen, and if they are in room and have access to water or something try to wet clothing or towels and wedge them under the doorways to try to stop smoke from getting in there."

``The guy from the fire department said, `We have set up a command post already down there. We are on our way up' and in all honesty, in a cool voice I will remember to this day, he said `We will get him out of there.' It was not bravado. It wasn't like this is what we tell everybody. It was this cool, calm, we know our stuff."

``So I go back to the cellphone, I pick it up and I am talking to Greg again. I tell Greg just what the fireman had said: `Get as close to the floor as possible, stuff damp cloths under the doorways, do not talk to conserve oxygen.'"

GREG: ``Everyone's got to get on the ground. The only one that is going to talk is me. I am talking to my father and I will let you know anything that he knows."

JOSEPH: ``Hold on, tell everyone to hold on, they are on their way up. I told Greg that the Fire Department had said that they had a field command center set up and they were working their way up to them."

GREG: `They are coming. My dad's on the phone with them. They are coming," he yelled to the others on the 93rd floor.

JOSEPH: ``Then, things get progressively worse."

GREG: ``Dad, the smoke is really thick. It is really getting hard to breathe. Can you call them back and ask them, can we break a window. We need to get some air."

JOSEPH: `I wasn't thinking, so what did I do, I gave the phone up again to one of my colleagues, and went back to 911."

JOSEPH MILANOWYCZ HANDS THE CELLPHONE AT THIS POINT TO Marcia De Leon, a colleague of his. She had never met Greg, or spoken with him before.

MARCIA: ``He said he was on his way down, but he heard on the announcement for everyone to return to their office, it would be more secure to stay inside. He went back upstairs. He was calm about the whole thing. But I think he was angry at the whole thing. That he listened. He kept saying, `Why did I listen to them? I shouldn't have."

GREG: ``Can you believe that all this is going on and I just came back from vacation?"

MARCIA: ``I was just telling him that it would be ok. His dad was trying so hard. He was reaching the Fire Department. He said there were 20 or 30 people with them. But no windows were open. He said they were very close, sitting together on the floor. It was some kind of an office, but he did not describe it. I said, `You have to save your breath, just listen to me.' He sounded calm, but scared."

GREG: ``It doesn't look good Marcia. It doesn't look good....It really, really doesn't look good here. This is bad. It is hard to breathe."

Greg asked Marcia to call his girlfriend, which she did, giving the phone briefly to another colleague. MARCIA DE LEON reached Greg's girlfriend, passes her a message, and then MARCIA comes back to the phone.

MARCIA: ``For whatever reason, he knew things were going to turn to the worse."''

GREG: ``Tell my dad, that I love him very much. And make sure you tell my mom that I love her."''

Greg briefly also spoke again with his father. His father said he told him that the Fire Department could not offer him advice on whether it would be ok to throw something through the window. Joseph Milanowycz said his son also passed on a message to be given to his twin brother. Marcia was apparently the last to speak with Greg. This is that final conversation between Greg and Marcia.

GREG: ``This is not good. This does not look good Marcia. It really, really doesn't look good."''

MARCIA: ``Please, please, let me talk."''

GREG: ``Marcia. The ceiling is caving. The ceiling is caving."''

MARCIA: ``Just save your breath. Be quiet. Everything is going to be ok. We are going to meet you downtown, everything is going to be ok. I don't care if it is during my working hour, I am going to buy you a beer. Everything is going to be ok. All of a sudden, I realized he was not on the other line."''

MARCIA walked over to a private office and tried to dial the number again and again.

MARCIA: ``I am screaming, `Joe I lost him, I lost him. I am trying to reach him again."''

Someone then came into the private office and told Marcia that the tower was not there.

MARCIA: ``So I just kept dialing the number."''

Interviews by Eric Lipton

91ST FLOOR

Michael Taddonio, victim

Euro Brokers

[Portraits of Grief: Many Best Friends](#)

Michael Taddonio worked on 84th floor. He spoke with his family during his attempt to go up after the second plane hit. His brother Marc provided this account of the conversation.

``He said that he was on the 91st floor, on the south. He implied he was with other people, by saying ``we.'''

``I am fading, I don't think we can go any more. I don't think we are going to make it," he said.

He was with other people, but he did not name them.

``I am fading, we can't go any more. Tell the kids I love them, and I love you, mom, and tell dad I love him," he said.

He said he could not go down. He said he was on the south side of the south building.

Interview by Eric Lipton

90TH FLOOR

Paul Rizza, victim

Fiduciary Trust

He spoke with his wife, Elaine. This is her account:

I received the first call from him at 8:45. He said there was an explosion and they were telling him to evacuate. He had said, "We're going, we're evacuating."

At 9:56, I got a call from his cell phone.

When he called me, then I said, "Where are you?" He said, "I'm on the 108th floor."

I didn't want to panic him. I said, "What are you doing on the 108th floor?"

I said, "Are you hurt?" He said, "I cut my hand because I had to break the window. It's very smoky and I had to break the window."

I asked if he was with other people, and he said he was. Then the call cut off.

At that point some people came into my office. They said the towers have fallen.

I assume what happened is that he went up. He never told me where he was. He just said, "I'm trying to get air. I'm hanging out the window trying to get air."

Interview by James Glanz

89TH FLOOR

Bradley Vadas, victim

Keefe, Bruyette and Woods

[Portraits of Grief: Chasing the Best Deal](#)

Kris McFerren, his fiancée, reached him on the phone. What follows is the story of those conversations, which began when the first plane hit Tower 1. When the second plane hit the South Tower, it entered between the 78th to the 84th floor, so Mr. Vadas was caught above the impact zone.

"He said, 'You wouldn't believe what I'm watching.' He was there in '93. I told him, 'Don't watch.' He was telling me, 'I just saw a guy rip his shirt off because it was on fire and jump.' He said, 'Listen, I really got to go. Could you call my mom.' And then he said, 'Let me tell you something. I just want you to know how much you mean to me.' He'd never told me that from the trading desk. We weren't the kind who woke up every day and said, 'I love you.' Still, I think he thought he was OK, that it could have been him [in the other building], but it wasn't."

While she was calling family, a colleague told her a plane had hit Mr. Vadas's building.

"I dialed his number, and it was that out-of-order busy sound." She went to the apartment of a friend whose husband also worked at Keefe. No one was home, but she could hear inside someone leaving a message on the answering machine. It struck her that Brad would call her at home. "I called home. There was a message on the answering machine. It was him saying goodbye, he said some things that

weren't easy for him to say. He gave me a real gift. That was at 9:19, he knew it was over then. He said, 'Kris, there's been an explosion. We're trapped in a room. There's smoke coming in. I don't know what's going to happen. I want you to know my life has been so much better and richer because you were in it.' He said he would do his best to get out. He said, 'I love you,' and he said goodbye. I think he had been crying, but he stayed strong for me.

She keeps in touch with others who lost loved ones, and says they're just now coming to terms with their losses. One of the stages of grief is anger, and they sometimes find their anger now -- directed toward the government, or even toward the firemen. Their loved ones shared with many of the firemen a death whose circumstances are shrouded. But unlike the firemen, their last minutes have not been celebrated simply because of who they are.

"He didn't sign on to be a hero," she said. "He just went to work one day and didn't come home." She believes it's highly likely that Mr. Vadas or his colleagues -- tough, smart, dutiful young men who probably died because they too were doing their jobs, manning the phones when the market opened even though a plane had hit the opposite tower -- were just as likely to have been heroic, or selfless, as well.

Vadas also called his father, Donald, just after the first plane hit, and then later.

"He called and said, Dad, a plane hit the world trade center, but don't worry about me. It was a short conversation," said his father.

Mr. Vadas talked to his father again after he realized he was trapped. His father said it was 9:14 or 9:15. "It was a minute or two minutes. He said, 'There's smoke coming in and I've got to go.' He said, 'You're the best dad in the world.' It was our last conversation."

Interview by Ford Fessenden

89TH FLOOR

Stephen Mulderry, victim

Keefe, Bruyette and Woods

[Portraits of Grief: Family and Basketball](#)

Mr. Mulderry called from a conference room on the 87th floor, where he was apparently with about 12 other people. His brother, Peter, spoke to him. Here is his account:

I called over to his office. One of his colleagues picked up. He said, "Yeah, we're okay, but my God." Then Stephen came back to his desk. He said, "What's up, brother?" -- his usual salutation. "Are you all right?" I asked. He said, "Yeah, I was just over at the window, but my God, I don't know if people were falling or jumping, but I saw people falling to their death." I said, "Oh, my God." He said, "They're human beings." Then he said, "I gotta go. The lights are ringing and the market is going to open." In the background, I can hear the public address system, which I later learned was saying there has been an accident, the safest place is here.

[While they are off the phone, the second tower is hit; Peter can't get through to Stephen; he calls other family members; they haven't been able to get through either.]

I would try intermittently. My girlfriend was working at CNN as a producer, and I spoke to her, and she said, "Isn't Stephen in that building?" It was very tense. The phone rang about 20 minutes before Tower 2 fell. He said, "Hey brother."

I let out a real big groan of relief.

``Thank God, you're okay."

He said, ``I'm really not."

``You're not out?"

He said, ``We've tried everything. We tried to go up. We tried to get down. It's just too hot and it's too much smoke. We've found a room, a conference room, and we found a phone that works."

There was one phone, I came to understand, and he was having his time with it.

He said, ``I need Mom's number." My mother had recently moved to a new home and none of us had really committed her number to memory.

I asked, ``Are you sure there's no way out of that room?"

He said, ``No. Like I told you, we tried everything. We're just going to wait for the firemen to come get us. But it's a long way for them to come, and the smoke's really bad. Some people are talking about throwing the fire extinguisher through the window, but I know that will be the end of us. But if someone panics and does it, there's nothing I can do."

Then he said, ``I really gotta call Mom. In case I don't get out, I love you brother." He wasn't crying. I said, ``I love you, too."

He got through to my mother on her answering machine.

I haven't heard the tape. [The essence of the message is:] A plane has hit the building, I don't have much...I just want to tell you I love you. No matter what, I'm going to be okay.

[Stephen also called a friend and left a message on her tape.] ``He got her answering machine. He told her, whatever happens, he was going to be okay. He had said all the prayers his mother had taught him and he was going to be fine."

I think there were 12 other people in the room; it was on the 87th floor, a New York State office, and a conference room. Mainly it was men from the trading room -- mainly college athletes.

I feel pretty strongly that people had passed out in the room before the end.

Stephen did say, ``We tried to get to the roof."

Interview by Jim Dwyer

88TH FLOOR

Eric Thorpe, victim

Keefe, Bruyette and Woods

[Portraits of Grief: Ball Carrier on Wall Street](#)

He spoke to his wife, Linda Perry Thorpe, several times, both before his building was hit and after. This is her account of that communication:

He called right after the first plane hit. He said, ``I'm sick to my stomach." Their company was in negotiations to be bought out, and I thought, ``Oh the deal fell through." I said. ``What happened with the deal?" ``No, no," he said, ``I just

wanted you to know that a plane hit the other tower. I'm okay -- but here we go again." He had been at Keefe in 1993 during the first bombing. "I wanted you to turn on the TV because it's going to be the top story of the day," he said.

After watching for a minute, I felt that the building was in jeopardy, so I called him back

"Honey, get out." He said, "No, it's okay -- in the background, an announcement started over the PA, a woman's voice saying that there was no need to evacuate. A moment later, we each got other calls and signed off. Then the second plane struck.

The phone rings about 5 minutes after the plane hit the building. I'm screaming at this point. I thought I lost him. "We're just waiting to be evacuated," he said. "Take Alexis and go to Ilene's." [Alexis is their baby, and Ilene is a neighbor.]

I already had taken her there.

"Go down there -- I will call you at Ilene's. What is the number?" he said.

I give him the number.

"I will call you there," he said.

At 10 to 10, the phone rings and it's him -- only he's not saying anything.

Hello - Rick - Rick.

I hear everything in the background:

"Where is the fire extinguisher?"

"It already got thrown out the window."

A lot of coughing.

Some of them sounded calm.

One man went beserk, screaming. Couldn't understand that he was saying anything, he just lost it. I heard another person soothing him, saying "It's okay, it'll be okay, to calm him down."

I didn't know where he was; I don't know if he dropped the phone and couldn't find it again; I don't know if he dialed the number and then went unconscious; I don't know if he knew he wasn't going to make it and he wanted to hear my voice.

I knew something wasn't right.

I kept saying, "Please hang on, I love you, Alexis loves you. I passed the phone to my girlfriend and her husband. They heard it, too. Then the building came down.

I learned from other families that they were in a conference room on the 88th floor, a place where there was less smoke. They all tried to go up to the roof, but were stuck in the stairwell. I'd say 15 to 20 were in the conference room. They couldn't get past 87.

Interview by Jim Dwyer

84TH FLOOR

Stephen Dorf, victim

Euro Brokers

[Portraits of Grief: 'I'm Lost Without Him'](#)

He spoke to his sister, Michelle. This is her account:

He called at 9 a.m. that morning. He said, ``Did you look at the TV?" I put on the TV and I saw the other building burning. He was very hysterical on the phone. He could see bodies being thrown from where he was in the building. His window had to be facing the north. He saw that people were throwing themselves out.

He was suggesting that the heat intensity, it was like do or die. He was on the 84th floor. His building was fine. I told him to go downstairs to get out of the building. He said that the building was safe. He was a fire warden. He was helping other people get out. He was helping people go down stairs.

He obviously could have gotten out of that building but he didn't. He was helping other people. He obviously risked his life.

There were people screaming, very frantic, at what they were seeing, through the window. It was terrible. My brother normally gets nervous. I felt the fear in his voice. He was very strained.

I told him to get downstairs. He did not sound like he was rushing. He said we have time, we have to get everyone downstairs.

He went to Port Authority classes to be a fire warden.

They were hysterical. A lot of people were just afraid to go downstairs.

Interview by Eric Lipton

84TH FLOOR

Richard Fern, survivor

Dave Vera, victim

Euro Brokers

[Portraits of Grief: Point Man in a Clinch](#)

Richard Fern was on the 84th floor, at the top of the impact zone, when the second plane hit the South Tower. He quickly found a stairwell and survived, making him one of 18 people to get out of the tower from at or above the impact zone. After he got out, he heard Dave Vera, a Euro employee who was still in the building, on a walkie-talkie, pleading for help. He never got out.

I was in the Euro Brokers computer room of 2 WTC on the 84th floor where I am employed as an IT Manager when I noticed the lights flicker. I did not hear anything because of the loud AC units that cool the room. I went out to the Trading Floor and saw all the Brokers clamoring by the North side windows screaming that a bomb had just exploded across from us in 1 WTC.

When I looked out the windows I saw the flames and papers coming from the upper floors across from us. I then went by my office where I was again watching the papers and flames. At this moment CNN was reporting that a plane had flown into the 1 WTC. The Port Authority Emergency PA system was then announcing, ``that a plane had accidentally crashed into 1 WTC and 2 WTC was secure." I went back to the window and was looking down for debris from the wreckage but later learned I was looking at the opposite end of where the plane went in. About this time people started jumping from 1 WTC to escape the flames.

I returned to the trading floor to I saw one of the partners, Brian Clark. [Mr Clark survived] I told him I had seen people jumping from the other building. Brian then went to the window when more people where jumping. Both of us turned away in disbelief at what we where witnessing. I told Brian I was leaving and went back to my desk.

The Port Authority Emergency PA system was now announcing ``if you wish to leave you can."

I then headed for the elevator pushed the hall button and stepped in when the 2nd plane crashed into my building throwing me first into the left wall then the right wall landing on the floor on all fours in the dark. I then jumped from the elevator before the doors could close and risk being trapped, now I headed for the nearest emergency stairway opening the door to find it unlit and filled with smoke. I started running down the stairs following the white glow in the dark stripe on the steps. When I arrived on the 78th floor I was shocked to discover the stairs ended. I reached along the wall and found a door handle and was relieved to find that it opened and saw daylight coming from the opening. Upon entering I heard someone yell ``do not go down that staircase, use this one".

I walked briskly to where I heard the voice coming from and passed a woman who was bleeding and being helped by a man, but otherwise OK. I then started down the next staircase; I was moving quickly and passing people on the staircase. I then turned a corner and saw a woman and man standing on the steps in front of a wall that fell in from the explosion and blocked the way. They said to me that they ``could not pass". I did not even acknowledge them; I just put my hands under the wall and lifted. The wall came up and came to rest on the banister, just enough for us to crawl under. I continued down to the next floor where a smaller portion of a wall had fallen and blocked the stairs. I jumped from the stairs on top of the wall and rolled over onto the landing and continued my descent.

Further down I ran into another co-worker Peter whom I was about to pass. He stopped me and said, ``We should stay together". I remember responding, ``OK but he would have to keep up with me". About this time I switched my 2 -way radio to the channel our Facilities people use. I heard one of our security person Jerry Banks [he survived] who was outside the building calling Dave Vera [he did not survive] who is in communications department. Dave was still in the building telling Jerry that there was a lot of smoke and to send help.

At the time I was surprised we did not see many people in the stairway. But thinking back a lot of people must have left when the 1st plane struck. When we reached the 30th floor my legs where shaking and I was concerned that I would collapse, but I kept on going. When we reached the bottom we were directed out of the building by Port Authority Police and Security people.

We exited on Church Street by Borders Book store. As we walked up Fulton Street along side the church cemetery Peter stopped and started to look up at the building. I grabbed him and said lets move before something falls on us. We continued to Broadway then up to Park Row stopping in front J & R electronics store where a group of Euro Brokers employees where gathering. Peter and I separated. I then sat down on the curb before I would collapse. I stopped in a Deli on Beekman Street to purchase a liter of water. I was surprised when the clerk charged me \$1.59, since I was covered from head to toe with soot and ash.

I walked to the Barbershop where I normally get my Haircut. When I entered the door Antonella helped me into one of the chairs and another Barber wiped me down with wet cold towels. I was now asking if I could use the phone to call my wife Christina. Unable to reach her I called my mother in Brooklyn and told her I was OK and to call home for me. While resting I would listen to the radio and could still hear Dave saying his situation was grim and pleading for someone to help. I then decided I would leave Manhattan and walk over the Brooklyn Bridge and go to Christina's cousin Joe store on the other side. As I was preparing to leave, we heard a most deafening rumble, which sounded much like a jet going

overhead. People in the street were screaming that a 3rd jet was going to crash. I walked into the back of the Barbershop till the noise stopped. We now learned that one of the Towers had fallen. I also noticed that I did not hear Dave anymore. I then thanked Antonella and told her she should leave herself.

Account written by Mr. Fern

84TH FLOOR

Brian Clark, survivor

Euro Brokers

Brian Clark worked on the 84th floor of Tower 2, the south tower, in the offices of Euro Brokers. He was one of several fire wardens on the floor, meaning he had been issued a flashlight and trained in how to evacuate people. After the plane slammed into the south tower, he encountered a number of other survivors from Euro Brokers, including Bobby Coll, Dave Vera, Kevin York and Ron DiFrancesco. Only Mr. Clark and Mr. DiFrancesco would survive, as Mr. Coll, Mr. Vera and Mr. York decided to go up in the stairwell, instead of down. On the way down, Mr. Clark heard someone from the 81st floor screaming for help. Mr. Clark found that man, Stanley Praitnath, and saved his life. Finally, on the way down in the stairs, Mr. Clark and Mr. Praitnath encountered Jos e Marrero, a facilities manager for Euro, who was headed up the stairs to try to help Dave Vera. Mr. Marrero also died. This is Mr. Clark's account:

When the first plane hit, our group of fire wardens started yelling to get everyone off our floor and most of our people did start down. But then we started to get news from the televisions around our floor that it was the other building, not ours. The remaining people began to linger. I would guess that perhaps 40 of our people were still on the floor when the building announced, "Building Two is secure." Some of our people actually returned to our floor after that announcement.

About eight minutes after the first plane hit, I had wandered to an area near the northeast corner where I found Susan Pollio. Susan didn't know what was happening. She saw somebody jump and was horrified. She spun around, ran back to me and said, "Oh, Brian, it's terrible. People are dying." I tried to comfort her and I said, "Let me take you to the ladies room."

We left the trading floor, which ran along the east wall, from south to north. That's where all our brokers were. That's where we lost most of the people, at least 50 of the 61 people. So she went into the ladies room and I kept going. By that walk, she took me away from where we lost everybody. I don't know what happened to Susan. I know that she's been lost. I think she went back to the trading floor herself.

The impact:

I was totally surprised. I was in a conversation two to three feet away from a gentleman named Bobby Coll. He had told me that after the first plane hit, he had gone down but with the announcement he had come back up with Kevin York. There was sort of like a double noise, like a bang, thump. With the second thump everything just fell apart in our room. The first noise was the impact; the second noise was the explosion and the shock wave of the fuel igniting.

I went into what I've called a football ready stance, like a linebacker. We sort of spread our legs and braced ourselves, hands out for balance. Well, it was just a reflex. We're talking and then all of a sudden it's like this. And part of it is almost, in a way, a reflex to duck what might be falling from above, you know your hands go up and ready to protect yourself, that sort of thing.

It was those first 10 seconds after impact that were the only time I was terrified the

whole day. My sense was that our building swayed a long way toward the Hudson River, to the west. I was used to it swaying in the wind a bit. And then it stopped and then it came back to vertical. And there was no back and forth. It didn't vibrate, that sort of thing; it didn't oscillate. And at the conclusion of that 10-second period, I immediately sobered up. I had my flashlight in my pocket from when the first plane impacted, and clicked it on, because we're suddenly in darkness and light dust everywhere, like construction dust, not black smoke from an explosion, even though there was a fireless, smokeless explosion in our room. That's what it felt like: an explosion without fire.

Doorframes fell out of the wall. Some of the raised floor even buckled and that was like concrete slabs on pylons. That again could have been part of the torque, I don't know. But light fixtures and speakers and stuff dangled from the ceiling. And I clicked on my flashlight and we started down this hall. And when we got to the center crossroads I could have gone any of three directions. For whatever reason I turned left and went to Stairway A.

There was a group of seven of us. And I can't remember all the names, even though I know everybody. Kevin York, Bobby Coll, Ron DiFrancesco for certain was in there. And David Vera, another of the fire marshals.

So we are going down, and we met a heavy-set woman coming up from below who just was insistent, and spread her arms and almost wouldn't let us go by. She was on the half landing between 80 and 81. She said, "Stop, stop, you've got to back," walking up toward us. "You've got to go back. The floor below is all in flames and smoke. We've got to get above it." And we got into a debate. I had my flashlight and I went from face to face. Whoever was talking, I shone the flashlight at.

I was not involved in the debate initially. I actually didn't even make a comment. And in the midst of this debate I heard this banging, and a voice calling, "Help, help, I'm buried. Is anybody there? Can anybody hear me?" And miraculously -- I'll say it that way -- I concentrated on that voice as the others were deciding to go up. And I grabbed Ron DiFrancesco by the shoulder and I said, "Come on, Ron, we've got to get this guy."

I recall seeing David Vera with his walkie-talkie, and Bobby Coll and Kevin York -- each had a hand under the heavyset woman's elbows saying, "Come on, we're in this together. You can do it." So they were being good Samaritans. Based on the data they had they were doing the right thing. And up they went. I went in with Ron and the flashlight was sort of cutting through the fog.

We're into the floor and this voice (I didn't know who it was at the time) was calling us, directing us to him. He kept guiding me until all of a sudden I could focus on him. It was strange how close his hand was when I got there. It was so dark. I just had my flashlight. I think it was pieces of desks or doorways, doorframes, that kind of thing that was restricting him. It was some heavy stuff. He could stick his hand through a hole of some sort. And as I approached him, he was screaming, "Can you see my hand? Can you see my hand?" And I couldn't until I was literally less than a yard away from him.

Ronny was overcome with the smoke. He had been using a gym bag or his briefcase or something to cover his face, but it wasn't doing him any good. And I can remember seeing him sort of squint and crouch low and back off the floor with an agonized look on his face. I was, again miraculously, in a bubble. I can remember squinting a little bit but it was as if I had this bubble of clear air around me. I wasn't coughing at all, breathing normally. And the trapped man had been crying, "Help, help, I can't breathe."

As soon as we got to the man, Ron disappeared. He went back to the stairway and I didn't know what happened to him at that point. [Mr. DiFrancesco went up the stairs, then went down, getting out of the tower just before it fell] I guess it took

me 30 seconds to a minute to get most of the stuff away from the trapped person, until this last thing we couldn't move. That's when I encouraged him to do the jumping. I reached over the top and I looked at him and I said, "You must jump. You've got to jump out of there." He jumped once and I couldn't connect with him. He jumped again and I grabbed him. I pulled him over the top and we fell in a heap and hugged. I said, "I'm Brian," and he said, "I'm Stanley," and we made our way back to the stairs.

They started down:

Some of the firewall, or maybe it had come from ceilings, I don't know, had blown in on the stairs. Sheets were lying, or leaning on angle up against the railing. So we had to move those. Some were lying on the stairs. Water seemed to be dribbling out somewhere, I don't know where, and making the stairs wet. And it was running sometimes on this drywall that was lying flat on the stairs making it like a slide. So we had to be very careful. We were holding onto the railing, hand-over-hand, kind of going down those slippery areas because we were standing on slippery drywall.

Somewhere around the 77th floor, the stairway walls were cracked, and you could look through the cracks and see flames. They were just quietly licking up, not a roaring inferno. And there was some smoke there, but again I think the stairs were pressurized, pushing the air out so we had less smoke in the stairway than you might imagine.

We didn't encounter anybody until the 68th floor. We are now in fresh air, lights on, normal conditions. And on the 68th floor we came across JosÀe Marrero [Euro Brokers employee who dies]. JosÀe had taken some of our people down into the 40's and 30's, other witnesses have told me later. And I said, "Jose, where are you going?" He was alone, carrying his walkie-talkie. He said, "I'm going up to help Dave Vera, I can hear him on the walkie-talkie." I said, "I'm getting this man from Fuji Bank out (Stanley was all cut and bruised.) Dave's a big boy. He'll fend for himself. Come on down with us." He said, "No, no, I can help him. I'll be O.K." I said, "Well, all right." Of course, we didn't know what was about to happen.

Stanley and I continued down and our next encounter was at the 44th floor. We went in and we met a security guard. He quickly said, "Do you have phones?" And when I said, "No," I asked him why and he said, "Well, I'm with this man who's injured." And I looked down behind his booth and there's this man with massive head wounds. Stanley recalls something about his back being missing or something. I don't recall that, thank goodness. But he said, "I'll stay with this guy, but you've got to promise me that you'll get a stretcher and medical attention for him." We said, "We'll do our best." And we left him. So there's a hero, an unsung hero that nobody really knows about. He was one of the blue jacketed World Trade Center or Port Authority security guards. He was an older man.

I'm guessing he was at least 60's. He could have been 70. He was certainly mature. And this other man was on the ground moaning in pain. How he got his head wounds, or how he got to the 44th floor, I have no idea. Didn't ask. It was normal conditions there. Just two people there. Just eerily silent. Electricity was on, but the phones weren't working. Now, why his phones weren't working and yet they were working on 31, I don't know.

We went back to the stairs and started down once again, still seeing nobody. We went in on the 31st floor. (That was just a coincidence, because 31 was the floor our offices used to be on in 1 World Trade Center.)

We got into a conference room or something. I called home, told my wife that I was fine. Stanley called home. I don't believe his wife was home. And I called 911 and I had quite a session getting through to somebody who would actually take my message. I mean, there were some real delays there, very frustrating. I finally sort

of read them the riot act and said, "Look, I'm just telling you this once, don't put me on hold because I'm going to hang up when I'm finished." And I did that and we left. My guess is that we were on that floor between four and five minutes.

Back to the stairs and we went all the way down to the plaza level where we came out on the north wall facing the plaza. And it looked like a moonscape. Fortunately, I didn't see any carnage. I wasn't aware of it. There were broken windows that maybe blurred my view. But we were looking at something that looked like an archeological find that had been abandoned for 100 years.

We went down a flight of escalators and we casually walked through the revolving doors and along the hallway past some shops. And that's where we started to see firemen who were quietly going about their business. There was no running or panicking, and it was not densely filled with authorities at all. Some of them were walking around, putting on their gear.

When we got to the south entrance of Building 4, a policeman at the door warned us: "If you are going to cross Liberty Street, you had better run for it. There is debris falling from above." I snuck out and looked up. Seeing nothing coming down, I told Stanley, "If you're ready, let's go." And we ran across Liberty Street and head south on Greenwich Street.

We stopped at a deli. That's the first stop. And I asked the deli owner, I said, do you have water? And he said, yeah, sure. They were just staring up at the towers. So he went in and came out with some water and a breakfast platter: sliced cantaloupe and sweet rolls and the cellophane. And he said, "Here, nobody's coming for this today." And I said, "Thank you." And we walked to the west side of Trinity Church. There's a bridge there that comes out of the backside of the church. And underneath it there were two ministers, and that's when Stanley more or less broke down. "I think this man saved my life." And I said, "Stanley, I think you might have saved mine, too. You got me out of that debate." And the ministers gave a prayer and said, "The church is open if you want to go inside." So we looked at each other and agreed, "Why not, yeah, let's do that."

We walked around the south side of the church, but halfway up the hill on Rector Street, we stopped and looked up at the burning Trade Center towers. Stanley said he thought the tower might fall down. I said, "No way. That's a steel structure." I didn't finish the sentence when it started to slide down. And we stood looking at it while it did it.

And we stood staring but not believing quite what we were seeing. And at that time, I thought only the top third of the building had fallen. We didn't run immediately because we didn't realize this dust debris was rolling down the street. It wasn't until it kind of went literally up and over the church, that's when we started to run. And I still had the darn fruit tray, the breakfast platter. I felt like an idiot when I realized I had it in my hand, but I'm running down Broadway holding the thing. You're not thinking. We ran down Broadway to 42 Broadway, dove into the lobby, and stayed there for 45 minutes. Stanley gave me his business card. And we got to know each other a little better and just stayed in there.

We left the building and wandered eastward toward the FDR Drive. Somehow, we got separated. I'm screaming, "Stanley! Stanley!" And I couldn't see him. And I'm running back and forth with my hand up in the air, "Stanley." And he was gone. And it was a bizarre feeling. And then that feeling swept over me, "My God, Stanley isn't real. He was an angel sent to get me out." And then I realized, there was his business card, so I knew he was real.

Interview by Eric Lipton

81ST FLOOR

Stanley Praimnath, survivor
Fuji Bank

Mr. Praimnath was on the 81th floor, at his desk, when the plane hit the south tower. These are excerpts from an interview with Mr. Praimnath, who credits Brian Clark, a man he did not know but who worked on the 84th floor, with saving his life. Mr. Clark and Mr. Praimnath are two of 18 people known to have escaped from at or above the impact zone in the South Tower.

I'm seeing fireballs coming down from the sky. [The adjacent north tower has been hit, it is 8:46 a.m.] And I'm like, oh, man, what's going on? So I pick up the phone and I'm dialing my boss who works on the 59th floor of 1 World Trade. I'm getting no response. I hung up the phone, I said, Delise, (a temporary employee in his office) ``Let's get out of here."

We ran down the corridor, back to the elevator, took the local elevators, went back to the 78th floor. While we waited there, me and Delise, 18 other people from my company were waiting there: the president, the C.E.O., the head of human resources, the head of general affairs, all these big guys are there. We took the elevator and went downstairs to the lobby. We're about to exit through the turnstile, and the security guard says, ``Where you guy's going?" We said, ``Well, we saw fireballs coming down." ``No, all is well, go back to your office," the man said. The building is secured. Sent us back up.

For no apparent reason, I turned to Delise and said Delise, why don't we take the rest of the day off. She was happy. I don't know why I told her, probably the wisest decision I made in my life. But these people were standing up there, they're looking at me rather funny like I made a wrong judgment call. And I mean, these are the ... bosses, and they're looking at me strange, I'm standing up there, waiting for the elevator with these guys, one of the guys, Jack, he's making a joke of me. ``Stan, the man, you're not scared to come in the elevator."

So , I'm telling one of the guys, Brian, the head of human resources, I said, Brian, ``It's a good time to take a look at relocation." Brian was looking at me and he said ``You've got that right."

So the elevator came, we jump in, we're gone. We get back to the 78th floor. Once we reached there we took the local elevators - some went to the 79th, some went to the 80th, I got off at the 81st, and some went to the 82nd. I walked back into my office. The phone is ringing again. This time there's a young lady from Chicago, a business associate. "Stan, are you watching the monitor, are you watching the news to see what is going on?" she asks. "Yes, I'm fine."

And for no apparent reason in mid-sentence I just raised my head and looked to the Statue of Liberty and what I see is a big plane coming towards me. This plane is coming, eye level towards me. Eye contact. I'm seeing a big gray plane, with a red stripe, and I can still see it in my eyes now. I dropped the phone, screamed, dove under my desk and I don't know why I said what I tell you now. "Lord, you take over. I can't do this."

"And I don't know, I do not know, as God be my witness, and I'm a deacon in my Sunday school and church and I'm a Sunday school superintendent, I would not tell you a lie here. I don't know why I said it, but I screamed."

The plane impacts. I try to get up and then I realize that I'm covered up to my shoulder in debris. And when I'm digging through under all this rubble, I can see the bottom wing starting to burn, and that wing is wedged 20 feet in my office doorway.

So I'm pushing stuff out and I'm crawling and I'm crawling and I'm screaming, ``Help me, help me. I'm trapped. Don't leave me here." Then I see this flashlight. I can't believe it. So I crawl toward it, the length of one floor, which is like a short

city block. And I crawled through the loan department into the lounge, into the computer room, into the communication room and I realize I can't go farther. There's a Sheetrock wall. And I can't breathe. And I'm saying "I'm here, I'm here. Don't leave me." And I can hear a person saying, "Knock on the wall, knock on the wall and I'll know where you are." And once I got closer, I'm knocking on the wall. But even before he was there I was pounding, pounding. I'm hitting everything possible. Making my way forward. So he is hearing this banging from wherever he is. The man said his name was Brain Clark, I think he's a vice president for Euro Brokers. I've never seen this man in my life. And I've worked 13 years in this building. He said when he heard me screaming. He stopped to rescue me. Bottom line is, I said ``Lord, just this one time give me strength." And I'm punching, punching, punching, punching. And then he said, "I feel a head." I said well, when you see my head, yank my body through.

This wall would have been a drywall. It was not a strong wall. A regular partition wall. Part of it's broken and part of it's intact and is standing up. And the man just pulled with all his might and I fell on top of him. (Mr. Clark says that he told Mr. Praimnath to jump.)

The next thing I know, I'm telling this man, I give him a big kiss and a hug, my guardian angel. And this man is looking at me as if I'm a nut.

Anyway we made our way down. While we're going, we stopped at a floor. We saw a man. This man was crying like a baby. I think his back was broken. And he's crying ``Tell my loved ones that I care for them; I love them." We're hobbling down, hobbling down. We got to the bottom, the ground floor. My hand looked like a balloon. My leg, my left leg, behind, the muscle behind there, the calf, it was opened up because I had like a long leg wound. I was cut, bloody, bruised all over. And I was sore. Black and blue.

Interview by Eric Lipton

78TH FLOOR

Mary Jos, survivor

New York State Department of Taxation

There had been no question in Mary Jos's mind that everyone should leave the South Tower when the North Tower was hit by a plane. A supervisor at the New York State Department of Taxation on the 86th floor of the South Tower, she had discussed it with Dianne Gladstone, another supervisor, and they both agreed that everyone had to go. Mary Jos was on the 78th floor skylobby of the South Tower when the second plane hit. The plane entered the building from the 78th to the 84th floors. Ms. Jos was badly burned, but she survived. Ms. Gladstone did not.

After the first plane hit the north tower, ``I don't think there was really any doubt. I went back to my section and I called [husband Dave Jos]. He was home cleaning the bathroom. ``I actually took my satchel. I wasn't planning to come back, I guess we weren't in a panic to leave."

``I don't remember leaving the 86th floor. People told me I took the elevator, but I don't remember." She went to the 78th floor to transfer to the express elevators. She missed the last one to leave before the second attack. ``I was also told I was stopped by someone to talk. They can't remember, and I certainly can't."

The first thing Ms. Jos does remember about the 78th floor was waking up, covered with pieces of what she thinks was wallboard. As she struggled to emerge from the debris, her first recognition was of heat on her back painful enough to convince her she was on fire. Automatically, she rolled to extinguish the flames. What happened next she finds the most difficult of her slowly emerging memories. She rolled into bodies, so numerous on the floor that they couldn't be

avoided. "Unfortunately, there were people around me that were not alive. It's not something you want to remember."

As she began to try to get her bearings, her next sensation, quite vivid now, was the lack of sound, the "eerie silence" in what had been -- one or many moments before she couldn't be sure -- a room crowded shoulder to shoulder with evacuating office workers.

Ms. Jos was at the north end of the 78th floor sky lobby, farthest from the south wall through which the wingtip of a Boeing 767 had torn with an impact that, eight months later, she still can't recall.

Everyone she could see in the dim light of fires that burned overhead and in the elevator shafts was dead. Unaware of her grievous injuries, she crawled to the door of a nearby stairway, pushed it open, and called back to tell anyone else who might have been alive that she'd found an exit, and started down.

"I get down one flight, and my impression is that the door had to be open. There was a young gentleman there by the name of Eric Thompson, as I later found out. I didn't know him at all, a complete stranger. He worked for a computer company there on 77."

"He literally helped me down 77 flights stairs. He talked about my family. He talked about everything under the sun other than my injuries. He tried to keep me away from that. My shoe was blown off my left foot. My watch was blown off my left wrist. I lost a third of my upper arm. I didn't know how badly I was hurt."

She got into an ambulance on Church Street with co-worker Ling Young, who had also survived the crash on the 78th floor. The ambulance was only a few blocks away when the tower came crashing down.

Interview by Ford Fessenden

78TH FLOOR

Judy Wein, survivor

AON Corporation

Ms. Wein worked on the 103 floor. She left her office almost immediately after the North Tower was hit. She had reached the 78th floor skylobby when the second hijacked plane arrived. Dozens of people in the skylobby were killed. She is one of 18 people at or above the impact in the south tower to get out.

She had arrived at work at 7:15, had a banana, her low-fat yogurt and mint tea. It was a normal morning. From her corner office on 103 floor of the south tower, she looked out over the Hudson River, to NJ, and if she turned, she could see the north tower. As she was there, she heard a enormous boom, she turned her head, looked toward the northwest and out her window she saw a giant fireball.

"The heat was really intense. My cheeks felt hot. I ran out of the room, screaming, "Everybody get out!"

Within less than a few minutes, she was at the emergency stairwell, headed down.

"I thought, fire don't go in an elevator." "I just left. Something kept me moving through the whole thing."

"There were a large number of people in the stairwell already, people were moving two abreast. There was no apparent panic, but people were moving with a certain urgency"

As she approached the 78th floor, where the skylobby is "something made me stop on 78. I don't know what it was. I thought, at 78 maybe, we would get some information. There was the communication desk there. I got out, other people got out, still other people continued to go down. "

Shortly after she arrived at 78, she heard an announcement over the intercom telling people that the north tower had been hit by an airplane, but that the south tower was safe. That means it was just before 9 a.m.

"It was like worst than rushhour, the place was totally packed, wall to wall people. There were more than 100," at the skylobby floor. People were getting in to the express elevators as they came up.

Ms. Wein was standing on the northern half of the building, where she said two of the six express elevators were not working. After the announcement, the group from Aon was standing there trying to decide what to do, should they go back to their desks, or continue down. Wein had left her pocketbook in her desk. A woman from her office, Gigi Singer, also had some personal items upstairs. They talked about possibly going back up to get them. "Should we go back" Judy said, recalling the conversation. But Howard Kestenbaum, Ms. Wein's Aon colleague, said they should not worry. If they needed money to take the subway home, he would give it to them. "Let's just go," he said.

Ms. Wein was standing there with Gigi Singer, Mr. Kestenbaum, and two others from her office, Vijayashanker Paramsothy and Richard Gabrielle. Ms. Wein cannot recollect any roar announcing the approach of the plane, just the explosive sound of the impact. The plane enters from 78th to 84th floor, from the south side.

"A bang," she said. "It wasn't like we heard engines coming. It was just the sound of the impact. There was a boom, an explosion."

The building sways, lunging Ms. Wein toward the ground. She lands on her right side, fracturing a bone in her lower arm, cracking three ribs and puncturing her right lung. But before she can regain her footing, the building sways again, lifting her up again and tossing her toward the express elevator. The impact of the plane had apparently knocked open the doors to the elevator shaft a bit, and as she fell toward them, she could see flames billowing up and down the shaft, a spot she terrifyingly thought she was headed. But she came to rest on the ground.

The lights had been knocked out and it was dark. The ceiling had collapsed in places. Marble from the walls had broken loose. There was a terrible silence, then the sound of people moaning, crying and calling for help. Ms. Wein called out for her boss, who she had been standing next to. He did not reply. But Vijay Paramsothy yelled back, saying that he was near him. "Judy we are here," Mr. Paramsothy said.

Her eyes gradually adjusted to the darkness, as there was a bit of light coming in from the northern windows, which had been blown out. To the south, it was dark. She walked in the direction of Mr. Paramsothy, having to step over bodies to get there. Up an escalator, that connected to the 79th floor, she could see fires raging up there.

People's faces were coated in a powder, from the pulverized ceiling or walls. She encountered one young man whose shirt was red from the embers of a fire, and tried to pat it out. She found Mr. Paramsothy, and her boss, Howard Kestenbaum. He was on his back, expressionless, motionless. She reached over and touched him.

"I bent down and touched his arm, and it kind of like twitched. But there was no expression or anything. Then I looked up and I saw Vijay and he looked ok. Then I saw Rich," her other colleague, Richard Gabrielle, "and I saw the marble on his legs. I said 'How are you,'" and he said, 'I think my legs are broken.' I went to try to

pick up the marble. I only had my left hand. He said, "no, no, no, leave me alone," as he was in great pain.

"Then we were sitting, I realized I was sitting in warm water. Then Rich said, "I went to lift it, it was hurting him. If I had both my arms, I am not sure I could do it."

After that "I said to Vijay what should we do, he said, we should look for a way to communicate or for fire extinguishers, toward the south side. I headed there, toward the communications desk. It was gone." But she found Gigi Singer over there, she had been burned, but she was otherwise OK.

"I turned around and I said I would be back. I found that it was lighter on the north side. I called Vijay over and we kind of like sitting there waiting." I found a roll of paper towels, which she used to wipe blood off her injured right hand.

A man with a red handkerchief over his mouth and nose appears, asking if she or Vijay knew where he might find a fire extinguisher. "I found one, the guy with the red handkerchief picked it up" The man with the handkerchief then pointed them to the stairwell, encouraging those who could leave to leave, those who could help others, to help others leave.

Vijay, for a reason Judy will never know, decided to stay behind. He would not survive.

Gigi and Judy, along with a man she had never before met [Ed Nicholls, also of Aon, who is interviewed separately] headed into the stairs. One at a time they moved down. Judy moved quickly down the stairs, so fast that she left Gigi at times behind her, one or two flights. Gigi would yell out Judy's name on occasion, Judy announcing the floor numbers as they went down, 60, 55, 53. It was somewhere in the 50s that they encountered the first firefighter, she said. They were moving in small packs, carrying a load of heavy equipment, which clearly slowed them down.

She told them that there were many injured people on the 78th floor, please help them. And they continued up. They told her to keep going down to the 40th floor, where there was an elevator bank. Her legs were trembling by the time she got there. She encountered two security guards and a firefighter, they told her to calm down. Not to rush. Take her time. But Judy just wanted to get out.

An elevator came. Within another 10 minutes, they were outside. She was in the ambulance. The door was closed. She heard a noise. She turned to look. The south tower was coming down.

Interview by Eric Lipton

78TH FLOOR

Donovan Cowan, survivor
Fiduciary Trust

Mr. Cowan worked on the 97th floor of the South Tower. After the first plane hit the North Tower, he took the elevator down to the 78th floor sky lobby of his building to get an express elevator to the ground. But before they left the skylobby, the second plane hit. Mr. Cowan and his friend, Doris Torres, were two of 18 people who were at or above impact at the time the South Tower was hit who got out alive. But Ms. Torres, who was severely burned, died several days later.

"I was with a friend of mine. Her name was Doris Torres. We heard the announcement that said the buildings were OK, that that building was OK.

``So, when we heard that, we decided we were going to go back up to 97 and call family and say we were all right. We went into the elevator. As soon as I hit the button, that's when there was a big boom. We both got knocked down. I remember feeling this intense heat. The doors were still open.

``The heat lasted for maybe 15 to 20 seconds I guess. Then it stopped. At the time, when this happened, the elevator was shaking and I thought it was moving. But actually, it never moved. So when it stopped, me and her were able to walk out of the elevator, like into the lobby. She said to me, she couldn't feel her feet. I can't walk. She said she was going to stay there. So I said all right, I was going to try to get some help.

``All I remember was looking around after that and seeing people on the floor, just sprawled out, knocked out, blood everywhere, people crying. One guy had his insides they were like totally out, like a horror movie. So I was just trying to fathom what had happened. I thought it was a bomb, I didn't know it was a plane.

``So there was smoke all around, and I walked around towards the windows, and I found an open window that had gotten shattered through. And I started to breathe through that open window. I was there about three minutes and then this guy, I don't know who he was, he said, I've found a staircase. He could walk a little bit better than anyone else, and he was trying to get people out.

``I was just trying to get some air. If I had thought the window was going to come down, I would have been in a lot more panic.

``I found the staircase, and I started to make my way down the staircase. So I went down 78 flights. I remember being bloodied up, but I don't remember pain from my burns. It wasn't until I got down to the bottom that I started to feel weird."

Doris also got out, he doesn't know how. He thinks her burns were worse than his (his were on 50 percent of his body, he said), even though he was closer to the door of the elevator at impact, and he actually thought he had protected her. `I was covering her and covering up my face. She was not a big person, just 5-1 or 5-2.` But Ms. Torres died in the hospital a few days later.

Interview by Ford Fessenden

78TH FLOOR

Ling Young, survivor

New York State Department of Taxation

Ms. Young was waiting for the express elevator on the 78th floor of the South Tower when the impact from the second plane came at 9:02 a.m. She doesn't think she ever lost consciousness, but was immediately aware of being covered with blood. She couldn't see through her glasses.

Ms. Young is one of 12 people to escape from this floor, and among the 18 overall who are known to have escaped from at or above impact in the south tower. No one in the north tower above impact is known to have got out alive.

``I cleaned them and looked around. I just saw a piece of flat land, just like dead bodies all over the place. I saw some people up against the wall, people just chopped up. I mean, their legs were just chopped off."

Ms. Young, who had come down from the 86th floor offices of the New York State Department of Taxation, was standing about 125 feet from the south wall, where the plane's wingtip entered. She is surprised to learn that a dozen people on that floor survived. ``Only in my area were people alive, and the people alive were from my office. I figured that out later because I sat around in there for 10 or 15

minutes. That's how I got so burned."

The people were Dianne Gladstone, 55, of Forest Hills; Diane Urban, 50, of Malverne; Sankara Velamuri, 63, of Avenel, N.J.; and Yeshavant Tembe, 59, of Piscataway. "That's the only people I know. There was another woman lying on the floor, she was hurt, we couldn't help her because we didn't know what to do. If I remember correctly, she lost her leg."

The five were there for 10 to 15 minutes, worried that if they tried to move the floor would collapse. Finally, a man with a red handkerchief came up to them to say he'd found the stairs and they should go down.

Ms. Young tried to lift Ms. Gladstone, who was injured and found it difficult to walk. Ms. Gladstone put her arms around Ms. Young's neck, which was so painful that they abandoned the effort, and Diane Urban took charge of Ms. Gladstone. It was Ms. Young's first recognition that she was burned.

Ms. Young went down the stairs first, and noticed that a tall thin man was behind her. She doesn't know who he was, and is not even sure he came from 78. She said the man with the red handkerchief was behind her, and spoke several times to her through the next dozen floors, telling her not to get separated.

Then, somewhere in the 60's, the man with the red kerchief stopped, and Young noticed for the first time that he had been carrying a black woman on his back. He put her down, and went back up. She's not sure what happened to the woman. She continued down.

At the 51st floor, she met two firemen, and one of them decided to go down with her. She wasn't aware of the fact that he had joined her until they got to the 40th floor, when he told her they could take the service elevator the rest of the way. She got out to Church Street, where she was placed in an ambulance. Moments after the ambulance pulled away to take her to a hospital, the tower she had been in fell to the ground.

Interview by Ford Fessenden

78TH FLOOR

Donna Spira, survivor
AON Corporation

Ms. Spira worked on the 100th floor. She was on the 78th floor, at the skylobby, waiting for an express elevator, when the plane hit the South Tower. Eventually, she met up with two colleagues from her office, Kelly Reyher and Keating Crown. All three survived, making them three of the 18 people known to have gotten out of the building alive, from at or above the impact zone.

I worked on 100th floor. We evacuated when the first plane hit. And we made it down into the seventies, the staircase in the seventies, when they made that announcement that it was safe to go back up. And instead of walking all the way back down (they still intended to leave, but would take the elevator now) what a couple of us did was head toward the 78th, where the skylobby is. So we just walked up there. There was me I'm not going to mention any names because they all died. I was with five of my friends. Yeah, five of my friends.

I asked, "What are we going to do?" And [one of my friends] just turned around and said, "Well. I'm not going back up." And right after she said that the plane hit. It threw me across the room, you know, to the floor.

It was very dark. I just remember being pushed. I don't know if I was hit with something or just pushed. I remember looking over and I remember seeing flames

in one of the mirrors. And I never looked back. It was so dark and things were blowing in my eyes anyway. I couldn't see my friends. I only saw one of them. She was just lying on the floor. My pocketbook fell on top of her along with my cellphone because I was burned, I guess from the jet fuel, the heat from the jet fuel. And my pocketbook fell, my phone and my wristwatch fell off my arm.

And then I just I don't remember if I fell or I just started crawling. You know, the first thing you remember is get down when there's smoke. Because I had a gash on my knee. The way I was facing, I wasn't facing the way the plane came in. I was facing the opposite way, so that's why, I'm assuming my face didn't get scarred or anything, my hair was singed.

And then all of a sudden I met up with Kelly [Reyher]. At the time I didn't know it was him. I grabbed on to somebody's arm. Because he was on the floor and I'm like "Please don't leave me. Please don't leave me." Then all of a sudden we got up and there was that guy in the doorway saying over here.

I remember a guy [no name] directing us to the door. And I don't know who this guy is. After the plane hit it was just weird. He was like in the doorway, this guy. He was just in the doorway. And he directed us toward the doorway. [This may be the man with the red handkerchief that others also reported seeing.] I'm working there seven years almost and I never knew there was a doorway, you know. I never knew there was an exit sign there. He just yelled "Here was the exit," to go down the stairs.

My adrenaline I guess was I didn't know I was so injured. I felt my arms burn, that was about it. I didn't know all the injuries that I had until I was in the emergency room actually.

Kelly wrapped his shirt around my arm, my hand. Because my hand, I didn't know at the time, was broke, fractured. And it was bleeding. I didn't know this. And he wrapped it before I could even see anything. Then Keating [Crown] was there. And here I am thinking I'm holding on to Keating all the while going down the stairs. And in a split second, like all of a sudden I was holding onto Kelly. It was just weird. I don't know what happened.

I remember the stairs being blocked at one point. Keating and I think Kelly lifted something up. They lifted a piece and then we just went through it. There was a piece that was blocking it. And we just you know, we went I don't know if it was Sheetrock or whatever it was. And they lifted a piece of it. And then we just climbed down.

Interview by Eric Lipton

78TH FLOOR

Kelly Reyher, survivor
AON Corporation

Kelly Reyher worked on the 100th floor. He survived despite being on 78th floor, in an elevator, at moment the second plane hit. He is one of 18 people known to have escaped from at or above the impact zone in the South Tower.

On the scene in his office when the first plane hit the North Tower: "Started at 100 and went to get coffee with a colleague of mine who didn't make it. And immediately felt the building rock and went to my office which faced the Empire State Building. The first impact. You could feel it rock in our building. So we ran to the window and that's when, we didn't know what happened but it was catastrophic. And you just froze for a second watching the flames come out. And then people started to fall out of the hole in the east side of the building. And what it looked like was it looked like that they were blinded by the smoke and couldn't

breathe because their like hands were over their faces. They would just walk to the edge where the jagged floor was and just fall out. So I think that they were completely confused about where they were and what had just happened."

On the moment during his descent in the emergency stairwell when she saw people transfixed by what was happening in the north tower: "I think it was about 92. I wasn't really paying attention. And I didn't stay very long. I was just curious why the door was open and people were standing there. When I saw what was going on, you know, it was like one of those horror movies where you don't want to watch but you can't not watch."

On his decision to try and go back upstairs and the moment she was in an elevator when the second plane hit his tower: "I had decided that my Palm Pilot was up in my office and given the fire I saw I didn't think we were going to be back there any time soon so I wanted to have all my data. So as I was stepping into the elevator when the plane hit. And it just blasted me into the elevator, you sort of just smashed off the back and didn't realize what had happened. The doors had almost closed, or as much as I could tell, and it was just a complete firestorm. The elevator split at the seams, the floor blew up. You could just sort of look right through the corner of the elevator into the elevator shaft and it was just all fire. And the elevator was filling up with thick, black smoke; you really couldn't breathe.

On his climb to escape: "This probably was maybe five to ten seconds after it hit. And I actually thought, you know, you sort of have this thing that goes through your mind which is how stupid was it to get into an elevator during a panic situation. And you always want to know how you're going to die and I thought to myself, well, now I know. I'm going to die in an elevator. I mean obviously there must have been a bomb or something and there was one in each tower, etc. No one thought it was a plane. However, what I noticed was the doors hadn't closed all the way. They were still open about an inch. So I was able to sort of reach, and the flames were coming up through the floor because of the gap between where the floor had buckled, so I was able to sort of kind of reach through the fire, I had to get my arm singed but I was able to pull the doors back open again, put my briefcase in between the floor and the, I guess the elevator door and then crawl out. So I was able to crawl out. And then when I crawled out you just saw an absolute scene of destruction. Across from me, because when you crawl out you're facing the other elevator bank, they were completely destroyed. There was fire just shooting out those. The ceiling had collapsed. There were bodies like blown into the alcove a bit. It was probably about a foot of debris. And the first thing I did when I tried to get out of the elevator was stand up. But the smoke was so hot that you couldn't stand up. So I had to kind of put my shirt over my face and crawl from the elevator shaft out of that little alcove. But as you're crawling you're crawling over bodies. And I'm realizing the gravity of what just happened because I was sort shielded by the steel elevator door. The windows are broken. And as I'm crawling out you just, there's just body after body and I'm shaking them to see if any of them are alive. There is one person who I see alive who's a woman. I don't know how old she was, probably middle-aged. Because I had figured out by that time, sort of after the shock wore off, where I was in the lobby and where the staircase was I came from. So the first thing I'm thinking is I have to get to the staircase. And the woman was between me and the staircase. So I was just yelling to her, follow me, the staircase is somewhere over here. But you really couldn't see all that much except for the light coming in from the north side of the building. Kind of crawled over and as you're crawling along you're just shaking the bodies to see if the person is alive or not alive."

On his ability to recapture his composure and get out: "It was seconds. I used to do kickboxing, it's almost like getting a really, really hard kick to the head where you have that blinding white light sensation where your bells get rung. And then all of the sudden you sort of figure out, O.K., I'm on the floor, I've got to get up. Where am I? In an elevator. O.K. What just happened? I have no idea. I've got to get out of here."

Interview by Eric Lipton

78TH FLOOR

Ed Nicholls, survivor
AON Corporation

Mr. Nicholls, who worked on the 102 floor, was on the 78th floor at the time the plane came in, waiting for an express elevator. He ultimately escaped the 78th floor -- where dozens of people died -- with two other people from AON, Judy Wein and Gigi Singer. These three are among the 18 people who escaped from at or above the impact zone in the South Tower.

Before the plane hit, he was right next to Karen E. Hagerty, a colleague from Aon. The two, among others, had been waiting for an elevator. Ms. Hagerty, who was known for both her humor and her love of animals, joked as one man squeezed into an elevator, "I have a horse and two cats," as a rationale for why she should have been allowed in.

Within a few minutes, though, the plane hits. Mr. Nicholls is thrown to the ground. His right arm from near his right shoulder is severely injured.

The lights went out. Walls had been knocked down. A blaze is burning right there, about 20 or 30 feet from the windows on the north side of the building. People are moaning, crying. Many others are silent, already dead. Mr. Nicholls does not think he was knocked unconscious. But he has a hard time determining how long he remained on the 78th floor from the time of impact.

As he tried to collect himself, he saw Ms. Hagerty lying on the floor beside him, motionless. He tried to rouse her, she did not respond. He checked her pulse. He could not feel anything.

Mr. Nicholls got up and then started to look around, to try to find the stairwell. He could not. He went over to a window that had been smashed open. He found an elderly man standing there, who was having trouble breathing, also at the window to try to get fresh air. He also found Judy Wein and Gigi Singer, two of his colleagues from Aon Corp. As they are there, two other men approached, coming from a different section of the 78th floor, away from the elevators.

"When Judy and Gigi and myself," he said, referring to two other Aon employees who survived from this floor, "were up there with these two guys who came from other side of building. Walls were down. Girders were down. All that. They came from other side of building, trying to determine what situation was like on our side of the floor, by the elevators."

"And there was an older gentleman, who was also up there, I don't remember what he looked like, he was having difficulty breathing, standing over by the window, on the north side, trying to get some fresh air."

Mr. Nicholls had spent several minutes search for the stairwell, which he still could not find. He was not sure what to do. "These two guys came over. They were trying to figure out, because the fire was getting so bad We knew we had to get out of there."

"The fire was not too far from us. We were watching it burn. It was decided between these two guys, one of them said, 'Lets go back over to the other side where they came from.' He thought that might be the best way to get down." The other guy said "No, I don't think so, I think there is a stairway over here. At this point it was getting very smoky."

One of those men pointed to the stairwell. [Other accounts say this man was

wearing a red handkerchief] This was to be the route to safety.

"And then the three of us, myself, Gigi and Judy headed toward that stairwell and started to go down the stairs."

Interview by Eric Lipton

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