

September 11, 2001

This year I wasn't going to mention "9/11". And I didn't on that anniversary. I thought I had blogged about my own experiences of that day *years* ago, but apparently, I never have. Ammo.com had sent me their article on the event, and I wrote back saying I wasn't going to mention it this year. But I guess I will after all. Just a little late.

In 2001 I was living in north-eastern Pennsylvania ("NEPA"), working in a small shop which built custom picture frames and framed art for Manhattan art galleries. New York City was about an hour and a half away, according to those who went there (I never did).

The shop sent a truck into NYC every Tuesday and Wednesday evening to deliver frames and framed art and pick up our work for the next week. Our schedule was always tight. On the morning of September 11, we were all working like we did any other morning.

A couple of people had radios at their work tables and one of them announced that she had just heard that a plane had hit one of the towers of the World Trade Center. I commented that it was an odd coincidence that such an emergency (a "9-1-1") happened on 9/11. I had a radio in the room where I packaged the finished frames and art for the truck (my main job), so I turned it on to see what they were saying.

There wasn't really much real news about it- they would just talk about "the accident" between songs, speculating on what went wrong and what kind of plane it was (there were differing reports).

Then they came back on and said a plane had just hit the second tower. I said to co-workers "that *wasn't* an accident". We all immediately suspected terrorism. Later they said a plane had hit the Pentagon and more planes had possibly been hijacked; they made it sound like there was a swarm of them (because at that point they just didn't know anything)- and that there was one "missing" somewhere over PA. I got a little nervous. We were in the middle of nowhere- literally in a cornfield- but as it turned out, Pennsylvania fields weren't completely safe either.

The radio stopped even trying to play music and went to constant commentary and reports from the scenes.

I was completely stunned to hear when the towers fell, one after the other- I hadn't believed it possible. Only a little more than a year earlier I had gotten my only glimpses of them (and the Statue of Liberty) as I flew into, and then back out of, the airport in Newark, NJ, on my first trip to PA. To think that they were now gone was unbelievable.

I can't remember how long it was before we got the first reports of the plane crash in

southwestern PA, but it was a while.

At some point during the confusion, they announced that all flights had been grounded country-wide. That didn't seem real, either.

Our manager updated us and said he hadn't heard from, or been able to contact, *any* of our customers. The lines were either down or overwhelmed- maybe both. We were working blind. He said to keep working as though the truck was going out... for now.

On lunch break, some of us went outside to eat. I looked up and saw no contrails *at all* in the sky. Something I had never seen before in that area- there were *always* planes visible in the sky. I told my co-workers to look up at the sky and make a mental picture because they'd probably never see that again.

Soon we got word from some source unrelated to our customers that no trucks were being allowed into Manhattan. The trucks weren't going anywhere that day. Or the next.

The mood at work was somber. And we were worried about our jobs.

As it turned out that was the last day I worked until the 13th of December (our workweeks always started on Thursday).

On a tangent: It's almost callous to admit, but those 3 months I was unemployed were some of the most fun months of my entire life. Karaoke 'til 2AM when the bar closed- then the huge after-party at a friend's house... 5 days per week. Going to bed at 8 in the morning- if at all. Much debauchery.

Soon after I got called back to work we started getting damaged art to re-frame from buildings next door to the WTC. Truckloads of it- anything that they thought could be salvaged. The broken frames all had a thick layer (an inch or more deep) of fluffy gray "dust" on (and especially behind) them. (I was as careful as I could be to not breathe it and to keep my hands clean, but I did save some.) The glass was shattered and the plexiglass was cracked. Some of the art had been pierced by flying debris. We kept the art at our shop until the insurance was all settled, then we began the repairs. We delivered the first repaired pieces back to NYC on September 10th or 11th (I don't remember exactly) of 2002.

And there's my story.

9/11 changed me, and not all in a bad way.