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Content: {I don't remember too many details of this story, but I'll focus on what I do remember to try to keep it going. 4th Grade was an interesting year for me, during it I both stopped getting angry when things didn't go my way, and started not doing my homework. Thinking back on it now, perhaps 9/11 in a way made me start to feel sad and want to stop caring about things and people.

It started like any other day, I must've slowly and begrudgingly gotten out of bed, changed, and eaten my cereal. I don't remember the kind of cereal, but around then I could never finish it before it got soggy. I finished a little after 7, pretended to brush my teeth, and walked to the bus stop with my dad. The school bus ride was pretty boring, and I always got on at the first stop, and watched every street go by. I'd know who got on where, and wondered if it was the day when we'd finally have to stop at a red light in front of "Blue Moon," a Mexican cafe on 1st avenue and 75th street. It wasn't. I got off the bus at school and walked inside.

There were 50ish kids in my grade, split into two classes, that of Mr. Salds and Ms. Shell, I was in Mr. Salds class. (Do you recall the name from my text a couple days ago about spelling?) They'd mix up the grade into two classes every year. In my classroom, we were split among 5 or 6 hexagonal tables, each with 5 or 4 kids, respectively. I don't remember who sat at my table except for Carly Collender. She had dark brown eyes like mine, and long, light brown hair which complemented her white skin. You could say I had a crush on her, you could say most of us did. She was as popular as you could be in 4th grade and cute as a button. I liked her smile and on the couple occasions she talked to me, I'd do my best to make her laugh. However, we had assigned seating and there was usually someone sitting between us, like there was today. At 8:15ish, Mr. Salds called our attention to the front of the room.

In front of the room were two marker boards, one very large one my teacher would usually use and a small one that was maybe about 2' X 3'. On the first day of school, he had explained that alphabetically, each student would, on one of the three computers in the room, have to go to [www.quotationspage.com](http://www.quotationspage.com), look at random quotes until they found one they liked, and write it on the smaller whiteboard. We would then start the day by going over and explaining the quote. (Come to think of it, it was in fourth grade that I started looking up quotes, too) It was still near the beginning of the year, and I remember it was Harriet Band's turn to look up a quote. I don't remember what her quote was though.

After we finished talking about it, Mr. Salds said something like: "Excellent, I hope you all are learning how important it is to read these quotes. The internet can have a lot of useful information if you know where to look. I am more used to reading the newspaper to get my information though. How many of your parents read the newspaper?" Many of us, including myself, raise our hands. "Good, and how many of them read the New York Times?" Several hands go down, but maybe half the class, including me, keep them up. "You should try to ask your parents to talk about the news they are reading, it is very important to stay up with current events." My arm was getting tired. "You may put your hands down." We did with a sigh of relief. I think Carly was doodling something in her notebook. "I've started to look up news online, too. Not all websites are as interesting as the New York Times, but I'll see what I can find." He gave us math problems to solve while he looked on the computer.

The math problems were pretty easy for me, as was usual back then. I finished them on my own and looked around the table. A couple of the other kids, including Carly, weren't finished yet. I spun my

pencil and paper around, leaving them upside down, to make it easier for her to read if she wanted to. She didn't notice, but even if she had, my handwriting was barf back then anyway, and when working together on stuff, most kids would complain that they couldn't read it. A couple minutes later more kids finished the work, and started talking. Some were arguing over the answers, and some were teasing or playing hand games. It got pretty loud, loud enough that usually Mr. Salds would tell us to quiet down. He didn't. I looked over at him, he had taken his glasses off and set them on the table, he was rubbing his eyes, and he was frowning.

I can tell you that before that day, I hadn't seen people look deeply sad without crying. I wasn't sure what expression Mr. Salds was really wearing on his face. Sure people frowned when they cried, but people had only cried when they got hurt, picked on, or broke a toy. Mr. Salds did look hurt, but he definitely wasn't crying. He got up and wiped his glasses before putting them on. "Children," he said, and some kids stopped talking. "4th Graders!" He said, louder. Enough kids stopped talking to make the others notice that they all should. "I have some very terrible news. A jet plane has crashed into the World Trade Center."

"What?" "Where?" some kids were calling out. I wasn't saying anything. In my head I remembered when I had visited the towers four years earlier with my German cousin. There was a long crowded elevator ride, and everyone in it groaned as our ears all popped. When we got to the top, I couldn't hear much, but I grabbed my cousins hand and led her to the window. I wasn't very tall, but the windows reached the floor, and the view was amazing. I have always been a fan of picturesque land and cityscapes, and I can tell you that that one took the cake. The building itself shone in the light too, because the walls were made of metal and glass, like airplanes. Could metal break other metal? Was the plane sticking out of the side of the building? I blinked and was back in the classroom.

Mr. Salds was talking again, very slowly, as if he didn't want to, "A second plane has crashed into the other tower now, too. Both were near the top. People are trying to escape, and they're sending firefighters down there to help get them out." Around this time the phone began to ring, and Mr. Salds answered it. His side of the conversation was something like, "Yes, I know. I read it online." He sighed and said, "No, I've already told them. They should know. Parents? Yes, I'm sure some will want to pick up their kids, perfectly understandable. What? Oh, Parents..." He looked like he was in pain when he asked, "Do any of you have parents who work in the World Trade Center?"

I and many others quietly shook our heads, and one girl close by said, "Yeah, my Mommy works on the 97th floor." She sounded a little proud, proud that her Mommy worked so high off the ground. The whole room turned to look at her, it was Carly. She looked worried, now, "Did she call? Are you talking to her now?" I can tell you with certainty that no student in the room put two and two together and thought her Mommy was in trouble. None of us said anything at all, though, we all just looked at Mr. Salds. Into the phone he said, "Yes, one, Carly Collender. Alright. Let me know." He hung up the phone and said to Carly, "We're gonna call your dad, and he'll come to pick you up, OK?" Carly nodded, and said "OK" but didn't understand. She frowned, now too. I had tact enough at that age to not try to make a joke, even though I did want to see her smile. I'm sure now that all she wanted in that moment was a hug. "To the rest of you, your Parents might come to pick you up too. We might as well consider this a half day of school, now."

Normally we'd all have been excited about half days of school, but we were all quite confused. I recall feeling something very strongly, something I didn't quite understand. We all sat in silence for a while. I thought about my parents, and how they'd probably not come to pick up my brother and I, because they'd usually get home late. A sitter usually picked me up from the bus stop in the afternoons.

We started going over the math problems, and few people were paying attention, I don't think any were at my table, we four were looking at Carly, and she was looking at her paper. None of us knew what to say, but sitting there worried and sad with her seemed to be the right thing to do. After the solutions were on the board, Mr. Salda said we could eat our lunches early. As we got our lunches out from our cubbies, he mentioned a plane that hit the pentagon, and that another crashed in Shanksville. One girl named Karen kept talking about how the pentagon was a reinforced steel building, and would be fine. I don't think she was talking very loudly, but everyone in the room could hear her.

There was a sort of stunned silence in the room. I'm sure I could speak for the class when I say that none of us could fully process what was going on. I knew something bad had happened, planes aren't supposed to crash into buildings, but I didn't know what that meant. I didn't realize that many people were going to die, or had already. More people than I had ever known in my nine years. In my experience, only my paternal great-grandmother and maternal grandfather had died. I remember meeting each of them only once, and didn't have much of an emotional connection with either, unfortunately.

I don't really remember what we did next in class, we had a kind of free time in which we couldn't play any games or draw anything. Some of us talked, about math or cartoons, and some of us didn't. One by one parents came into the room to pick up their kids, and I remember creating a scale in my mind to measure each adult. On one end, there was what would almost look like happiness, a fake smile one would put on to comfort others, or possibly fool themselves. Of the parents I recognized, most had this on when they entered the room, or put it on once they made eye-contact with their child. They came in with an expressionless face, the one I'll usually wear when I'm not smiling, one you acquire from having spent much time frowning directly beforehand. The next step of the scale was frowning, and I had never seen so much of it in one day. Of the ones that frowned, the yet sadder people had pain when they spoke. They spoke as if they were in physical pain, as if each word they said was a struggle. I later learned that it was because they knew friends or relatives that either worked there or were firemen. One girl in my class, Sapphire, actually lived in Greenwich village, about 6 blocks away from the WTC, and she and her family had to stay at a friend's house for the rest of the week. Her mom was at that stage of sadness too.

It was kind of interesting to see everyone's parents. I remember trying to guess who was who's parent. I was bored, and didn't quite understand the magnitude of what had happened until I saw the worse end of the sadness scale. I saw that the emotion of pain that everyone was wearing was in fact sadness when I saw him. He was tall, white, and had somewhat curly brown hair. He was standing hunched, as if he was carrying a heavy load on his back, and his head was tilted downward. His mouth was very shaky, and struggling not to frown as his pink wet eyes scanned the room. His eyes stopped at my table, but not at my seat. The sight of his daughter must've reminded him of his wife, for when he tried to open his mouth to speak, he choked as one does when they try to speak through sobs, and a couple of soundless tears went down his face as he wiped his eyes and called her name.

Carly looked up and smiled. "Daddy!" she exclaimed as she ran over to and hugged his legs. He managed a fake smile and said, "Go get your things, sweetie, we're going home." She said, "Ok," and went to get them. There were maybe half the kids in the class left at this point, but most were watching. As she returned to him, she asked, "Where's Mommy? Will she meet us there?" Swallowing hard, he again said, "Come on sweetie, we have to go." She frowned then and asked "Daddy? What's wrong?" He picked her up, shared a glance with Mr. Salda, and left.

I understood then that something was very wrong. What if not everyone's parents were coming because not everyone's parents could? What if people's parents were stuck in the World Trade Center? I frowned then, and realized that the scale of pain I had measured people by was what happens in stages before someone cries. Usually, they just happen much faster. With practice, you could catch yourself before you're forced to start crying. I learned then that you had to practice being sad to make people think that you aren't.

Shortly afterward, my brother arrived. He currently attended the high school that was housed in floors 2,3,and 4 of the building, where the elementary school was only the first. He was there with his friend Dominic, who like my brother, had attended the elementary school, and had taken classes with Mr. Salds just 5 years earlier. Mr. Salds recognized them both, and asked them how they were. My brother said something along the lines of, "We're alright. Dominic's dad is going to give us a ride to his house, where we'll wait for our parents to come back from Queens." Without needing to be told to, I got my backpack and joined them. I waved good-bye to Mr. Salds and my remaining classmates, and headed out with my brother. I waited till after we left the eerily silent building to ask if our parents were okay. "Yes," he said, forcing a fake smile.

In the car ride up to Dominic's house, which took awhile because he lived 90 blocks away in Washington heights, my brother and Dominic spoke of what they had experienced in the High School. Students had been passing around the few cellphones they had so that everyone could contact their parents. Many people were crying in the hallways and/or bathrooms, or were trying to comfort those who were. Supposedly, one girl had been skipping around after her call to her parents, until teachers had told her to stop. Not many people had left, because almost all the high-schoolers had student metrocards and took the subway, but it was on the fritz, hence our drive. Almost all their classes were canceled, but my brother and Dominic waited to get me because they weren't sure if the stricter/meaner teachers were still having class. Security Guards and the principal had been going from classroom to classroom quietly telling each teacher what had happened, as not all classrooms had phones.

Upon arriving Dominic asked his dad, "Do we know anyone who's down there?" To which his father replied, "Not sure, I asked Mark the same question, but he hasn't gotten back to me since telling me they asked him to go down there." Dominic covered his eyes, while saying "Oh, God... Mark." Dominic's dad, Mike, put his hand on Dominic's shoulder and said, "I'm sure he'll be fine, he's been doing this for years. Besides, not much fire to fight anyway." Dominic visibly didn't appreciate the comment, but said nothing more. I don't know anything else about Mark, including whether or not he's alive.

When we got inside, Mike gave us all some juice. My brother and Dominic went into his room and I sat down next to Dominic's two or three year old brother, Bernie. He was playing with a toy plane that had Elmo flying it. Mike came and picked him up and carried him into the other room as my brother and Dominic returned with his playstation and began hooking it up to the TV. I picked up the toy plane and a pillow and imagined the crash again in my head. I wanted to ask them what was the result of the crash, but Dominic just glared at me and said, "No, put them down." So I did. I then watched the two of them play video games until my parents arrived, which was much later.

My father had driven to get my mother from work at Queensborough community college, but after a drive that was an hour and a half longer than it was supposed to be, he and my mother received a call from my brother, and decided to come get us by public transportation. This meant taking the 7 train end-to-end, to get to times square, and then the A or C line to get to 181st street in Washington heights, and it was making all local stops. When they arrived, they thanked Mike for taking us in, but when we

walked to the train, they were angry with my brother for not asking to stay with a different family friend who was a couple blocks from the school. This would have much lowered travel time, but my brother wanted to be with his best friend. On the long local train ride from 181st street to 14th where we lived, my parents told us about their day, and then took out books to read. I remember asking my mother if we knew anyone that was down there, to which she replied, "No, we don't. Do you not have a book to read?" I shook my head and watched the tunnel lights go by through the train window, pretending I was just on the school bus home. She seemed more stressed out than sad, but she always did back then.

The train we were taking ended at 14th street, because they weren't letting anyone father downtown than that yet. Walking home from the train, I saw a huge orange-gray dust cloud in the sky coming from downtown. One couldn't normally have seen the twin towers from my street, but right then I doubt you could've seen farther than a mile downtown anyway. The cloud was taller than any building I had seen, and much more ominous. We had a quiet dinner and watched the news, and I saw shaky street footage of the bottom of it collapsing, causing debris and dust to fly everywhere. They then spoke about the troops we were sending out to the middle east, and my parents turned the news off once they showed Bush talking.

I didn't have school the next day, and the day after some people came in to talk to our class about what had happened. It was a balding man and a young woman, and they basically told us that everything was going to be okay, and that we shouldn't talk about what had happened, because we didn't know who had lost someone. They had a longer talk in the other room with some of Carly's close friends. I realized then that her mother had died. Carly wasn't in school for the rest of the week, and when she was, it still took awhile for her to smile again.

Every year on September 11th in my elementary and high school we had long moments of silence, and the general mood of the day was sadder than normal. After Sapphire's birthday party, we went to her house, and when I looked down the street I could still see the half-destroyed shell of the north tower. It was just the outer wall of a corner of the building, but it went up to almost ten floors. I'm still not really sure how I felt when I saw it, but I remember feeling a deep emptiness. I felt as though a part of my country, city and self was missing. I never saw the towers go down, I didn't lose anyone that I knew of, but I did learn about sadness that day. Sadness that probably, at least in part, made me stop doing my homework and realize that it's pointless to get very angry or emotional in a world where someone's mother could be killed in a terrorist attack. I know many people had much worse experiences, and have had much harder truths to deal with, but that was what I learned.

Epilogue: In ninth grade, the five-year anniversary of the attacks, my global studies teacher told us about how on that day five years before, she had been boasting about how lucky the US was in that it hadn't been a target for very wide-scale attacks, and that no major wars were fought on it's homeland in a long time. She then found out about the attacks, proceeded to cancel classes for the rest of that day, and cried in an empty classroom. For us, however, she asked if we knew anyone who had died, and one girl who had gone to the elementary school said, "Patricia Collender, she was a friend's parent." my teacher, Ms Littlefield wrote the name on the board and we had five minutes of class in silence.

I hung out with Ron last year during the fourth of July. After seeing the Hotdog eating contest at Coney island, we went to the WTC memorial, and I have to say they did a great job with it. Once you're inside, there is very little sound of cars and traffic from outside the garden. They had built massive deep fountains where the buildings were, which gave a feeling of looking into a void. They're giant square holes in the ground with water endlessly flowing down into them, as if trying to fill a place in

ourselves that will forever be empty. Around the fountains are thick copper railings with the names of all the people who died carved out of them. There are too many names though, and many are on stone plaques elsewhere in the garden. The areas around each fountain are lettered, and there are computers in which you can enter a persons name and it will tell you where their name is inscribed. I entered in Patricia Collender, and found her. I put my hand on her name, closed my eyes, and silently remembered the above story.

Afterward Ron asked me, "Did you know her?"

"No," I replied, "but her daughter sat across from me in fourth grade."

Raising his eyebrows he said, "Shit."

I silently nodded, frowned, and forced a fake smile.}

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