Remembering Sept. 11,2001

This article is from the "Edifying the Body" section of the Church of God Big Sandy's website, churchofgodbigsandy.com. It was posted for the weekend of Sept. 11, 2021.

By Dave Havir

BIG SANDY, Texas—It has been 20 years since a group of Muslim extremists hijacked airplanes in the United States and flew them as bombs into three large buildings.

Much has been written through the years about the lessons learned from 9/11. In the weeks leading up to this weekend, the articles and editorials have increased dramatically. Many fine commentaries and tributes have been penned.

It is still easy to grieve for the families of the victims—the innocent people on the airplanes, the innocent people in the buildings, and the rescuers who died trying to save their fellowman.

In this week's edition of Edifying the Body, I want to quickly share a few thoughts with you—and then to print two articles that give interesting information about 9/11.

Survivor's guilt

All of us have become familiar with events that include the death of some people and the survival of others.

Let me take a moment to talk about a condition called "survivor's guilt."

As I understand it, this condition occurs because some sensitive people react to the fact that they survived a tragedy while others died.

The survivors are thrilled to be alive. Yet they feel badly for the families of those who did not survive.

Should the survivors feel guilty? Of course not! The survivors did not cause the death of the victims.

Should the survivors be mindful about how their expressions of appreciation to God can affect other people? Absolutely.

Appreciation to God can be demonstrated abundantly in private prayer and in private gatherings with family and friends.

However, survivors should be considerate about public expressions of appreciation to God that can actually become thoughtless, rude and cruel towards the families of the victims.

Notice some mistakes that people make.

- Some survivors gleefully express their appreciation—without regard for the suffering of the victims of the tragedy.
- Some survivors overtly express their view that God supernaturally saved them—drawing an unspoken conclusion that God did not supernaturally save others.
- Some survivors overtly attribute their personal faith or their personal obedience as the reason for God saving them—which directly implies that the other people did not have faith in God or did not obey Him.

While it is important that survivors do not manifest survivor's guilt, it is honorable for survivors to be thoughtful to the pain of the victims' families.

The first article includes accounts of people who somehow survived a potential brush with death on Sept. 11.

The second article lists many people who died on Sept. 11. These people were apparently not originally scheduled to be aboard the airplanes that were hijacked, but changed their schedules to be on those tragic flights.

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First article

An article by Madison Park titled "Small Choices, Saved Lives: Near Misses of 9/11" was posted at cnn.com on Sept. 3, 2011. Following is the article.

A scheduling error kept Elise O'Kane from getting on Flight 175, which crashed into the World Trade Center.

Greer Epstein never took breaks.

An executive director at Morgan Stanley, she rarely left her office on the 67th floor because she never had time.

But 20 minutes before 9 a.m., one of her buddies called. "How about getting a cigarette?" He wanted to talk about an upcoming work meeting. It was a calm day with clear blue skies—the most beautiful day she had ever seen from her view from the World Trade Center. Epstein figured why not.

While riding down the elevator, she felt a jolt but ignored it since the elevators had always acted strangely.

When she stepped outside to light up her Benson & Hedges, she saw people frozen in place, their eyes fixed to the sky. Paper rained down like chaotic

confetti. As she stared at the fire and smoke billowing from a hole in the North Tower, she wondered: "How do they fix something like that?"

That's when a plane flew through her office in the South Tower.

A cigarette break saved her life.

Every day, people make thousands of small, forgettable decisions—what to eat, when to take a break, which route to take to work.

But for a handful of people on September 11, 2001, those seemingly inconsequential decisions—stepping out for a smoke, dawdling on the commute to enjoy a beautiful morning, taking a different subway route, even waking up late because of the previous night's football game on TV—made the difference between living and dying.

Ten years later, some survivors are still haunted by their near misses. They've wept and wondered, "Why me?" They've felt pressure to be a better person, to make something amazing of this gift.

Others, like Daniel Belardinelli, shrugged it off, chalking up their fate to randomness and blind luck.

Belardinelli's uncle, William Cashman, had planned a trip to Yosemite National Park and invited him to come. Cashman used a friend's frequent-flier miles for United Airlines Flight 93 from Newark, New Jersey, to San Francisco on 9/11.

A week before the trip, Belardinelli backed out, telling his uncle he had work obligations.

His uncle never made it to Yosemite. He died along with the crew and passengers of Flight 93 who fought back against the hijackers and crashed near Shanksville, Pennsylvania.

At first, Belardinelli wrestled with survivor's guilt. But after months of grieving, he heeded his father-in-law's advice: "You gotta live your life. Disasters have happened in the past."

So Belardinelli said simply, "I went on with my life."

But for others their brush with 9/11 left them fundamentally changed.

Epstein realized later that, had it not been for that rare morning break, she could have lost everything.

"I never took a break before noon," Epstein said. "It was something that happened that day. And thank God for it. I was safely out of the building when the plane hit. A fireball went through my office. Had I been sitting there, who knows what would've been?"

Today she tells colleagues not to let their lives revolve around their jobs.

"I lived in Morgan Stanley land," she said. "My life was my job. Until I was laid off, I worked for them for almost 20 years. Everything was about your

work. I didn't take vacations. Now I tell people, 'Don't put it off. Take your vacation. Take your time with family.' "

Epstein is unemployed, but finds occasional work in financial consulting. Her current focus is supporting her ailing 89-year-old mother, who is in hospice care.

That day 10 years ago also gave her a break from one of her mother's lectures: "My mom never picked on me for smoking again."

A clumsy keystroke

Some survivors were convinced that someone else had died in their place.

United Airlines flight attendant Elise O'Kane had wanted to work her usual trip from Boston to Los Angeles that month.

But in August, when scheduling her flights for September on the airline's computer system, she accidentally inverted two code numbers and wound up with the wrong schedule.

She managed to trade flights with other attendants for all her trips—except for Flight 175 on 9/11.

So the night before, she logged into the computer system again and tried to request that flight. The system froze. By the time it finally processed her request, it was one minute past the airline's deadline for such changes.

Her request for Flight 175 was denied. She would have to fly to Denver instead of Los Angeles.

"I was not happy that I was not on that flight," O'Kane said. "I was driving to work steamed."

On the shuttle ride from the employee parking lot to Logan International Airport Tuesday morning, she sat near a cheerful reserve flight attendant, Robert Fangman. The 33-year-old was gushing about being called into the California flight and having a Bloody Mary at a Los Angeles beach spot.

"I'm just so excited," he said. "This is a great trip."

"I can't believe you got it," she replied. "I tried to trade into that last night."

Seeing his youthful exuberance, some of her anger faded as she told herself, "Just humble yourself and let him enjoy the trip." They chatted briefly.

Her Denver-bound plane left Logan between American Airlines Flight 11, which crashed into the World Trade Center's North Tower, and United's Flight 175, which struck the South Tower.

Fangman, as well as O'Kane's colleagues on her usual flight, were killed.

"Why me—out of all those wonderful people?" she asked. "What have I done? I'm not a saint or angel."

When colleagues learned O'Kane was not on board, they swarmed her with tears and hugs.

"God has a plan for you," they told her over and over. "You were meant to be here."

"That was the hardest part," O'Kane said. Although her colleagues meant well, she became frustrated wondering what grand, mystical plan lay in store for her.

Immediately after 9/11, O'Kane took a leave of absence. She felt the world had changed and so had she.

"I need to give back and fulfill myself," she told herself. "Something has changed inside me."

The idea of nursing popped into her head, which struck her as odd because she couldn't stand needles or blood. But she had a family full of nurses—including her mother-in-law, two sisters-in-law and an aunt.

She went to nursing school and graduated in May 2004. She specializes in cardiology and encounters life-and-death situations every day.

At the same time, she didn't want to give up her passion for flying and still works for United Airlines.

"I felt if I did not go back because of this incident, I would've been beaten by the terrorists—that they took me away from something I loved," she said.

Her first flight back was on a Tuesday in 2005, on the same route from Boston to Los Angeles as Flight 175. She went to the L.A. bar Fangman had told her about on 9/11 and had a Bloody Mary in his honor.

For years, she had searched for Fangman's family but had not been able to find them. She wanted to tell them how lucky she was to have met him on 9/11.

CNN learned of her story and in 2005 helped her find the Fangmans. His family told her not to feel guilty—it wasn't her fault. She still exchanges e-mails with them.

Nursing now remains her primary job focus.

Some days, she receives compliments from former patients who've recovered and returned to the hospital to tell her thanks. Some have looked her up in the phone book and called to tell her she was meant to be a nurse.

O'Kane just smiles. "It's almost like a confirmation," she said.

Healing has suited her.

Just blind luck

Rob Herzog doesn't believe divine intervention or some cosmic calculus kept him safe at the World Trade Center 10 years ago.

"I was lucky," the New Yorker said.

By 8:45 a.m., Herzog would normally be at Marsh & McLennan's office on the 96th floor of the World Trade Center's North Tower, where he worked as a vice president of operations for the insurance brokerage company.

That Tuesday, on his way to work, he stopped at a post office near his Upper West Side apartment.

Then he took a local subway train southbound and tried to transfer to an express at the 59th Street station, as he normally would.

"I tried to switch to the express A train," Herzog said. "It was so crowded, and I'm claustrophobic. I got back into the local train."

He was running late.

By the time he arrived at the World Trade Center, a Boeing 767 had crashed into his office building.

"I missed it by 5 minutes," Herzog said.

His company was located below Cantor Fitzgerald Securities, which lost 658 employees in the attack. Marsh & McLennan lost 295. Herzog knew several of them—a woman who sat next to him, another who sat behind him and a coworker who had invited him and co-workers over to her house for dinner.

"I had tremendous survivor's guilt," Herzog said. "All I could think of when I woke up was I should be dead, especially when I went to 15 different memorial services."

Immediately after 9/11, he observed a gentler, kinder New York in a city full of sharp elbows.

"Everyone was being 'Kumbaya' and being polite on the subway—that's not going to last," he thought.

He wondered: What could help sustain this spirit?

He had met his future wife playing softball a year before 9/11. His favorite memory with friends was playing in a softball league—which he described as a group of skinny Jewish guys going up against jocks who looked like they belonged in the majors. The memories made him smile.

"People want to play sports, hang out with new people," he realized. "What if I create a social sports league and incorporate charity into what we do?"

He quit his corporate job to launch ZogSports in 2002. The league has since expanded to New Jersey, Washington, Atlanta and Hartford, Connecticut. The teams play sports such as volleyball, kickball, touch football and dodge ball.

The teams pay a fee to ZogSports to participate in the league, and 10 percent of the profits go to a charity the members choose.

It combined what Herzog enjoyed best—sports, socializing and charity work.

"Part of what makes me happy is creating a company and work environment that makes people happy," he said. "I'm a connector. I bring people together through sports."

Today Herzog can be seen wearing a bright sporty T-shirt and a big smile around New York.

"I came to the realization that I was lucky," said Herzog, who after 9/11 married the woman of his dreams and became father to Spencer, 6, and Jackson, 4.

And he stopped trying to overthink why he survived on 9/11. With that, he found his peace.



Second article

Looking back to 2008, here are excerpts of an article by a man from the United Kingdom who blogs under the name Shoestring titled "Last-Minute 9/11 Passengers and Crews; Many Not Originally Booked on Flights" that was posted at zetaboards.com on March 31, 2008.

Below is a summary of these latecomers to the four planes: American Airlines Flights 11 and 77, and United Airlines Flights 175 and 93.

Replacement pilots

The pilot at the controls of Flight 11—the first plane to hit the World Trade Center—before it was supposedly hijacked was John Ogonowski. However, as *The Georgetown Record* reported: "American Airlines Captain Walter Sorenson of Groveland was scheduled to fly Flight #11 on Sept. 11, 2001. He was disappointed when he was replaced by Captain John Ogonowski, who had seniority over Sorenson and requested to fly that day . . . The last-minute change of pilots . . . spared Sorenson's wife Sarah the untimely loss of a young husband." [1]

On Flight 77, which supposedly hit the Pentagon, the pilot and co-pilot were Charles Burlingame and David Charlebois. But, as *The New York Times* reported: "Bill Cheng, an American Airlines pilot who normally flies Flight 77, changed his plans in late August [2001] and applied for time off on Tuesday [September 11] so he could go camping. When another pilot signed up for the slot, Mr. Cheng's application was accepted." [2]

Whether it was Burlingame or Charlebois that replaced him is unstated. And the pilot of Flight 93 was Jason Dahl. But according to *The Denver Post:* "Dahl piloted United Flight 93 on Sept. 11 because he asked to. At his request, [his wife] traded for the flight on their home computer. He'd wanted to get back to Ken-Caryl Valley sooner to start celebrating their fifth wedding anniversary. Days after the request, Dahl's terrorist-invaded plane took a nose dive in a Pennsylvania field." [3]

Dahl took Flight 93 in exchange for a flight he'd been booked on later that month. [4]

Unscheduled flight attendants

Flight 11: There were nine flight attendants on American Airlines Flight 11 the morning of 9/11. At least four of them were not originally booked to be on this flight, but had recently been assigned to it. Barbara "Bobbi" Arestegui "was not scheduled to work Flight 11 that day but had accepted extra flights. She was saving up vacation to take a trip with her boyfriend to Vermont at the end of this month." [5]

Jeffrey Collman "didn't normally work the Boston-to-Los Angeles route but made an exception to get vacation time at the end of the month." [6]

Jean Roger was a relatively new flight attendant, and every third month was placed on a "standby" work list. On September 11, "Someone called in sick and she had to go." [7]

And Sara Low also "was not originally scheduled to work the flight." [8]

Flight 175: There were seven flight attendants on this plane on 9/11, at least four of whom had only recently been assigned to it. Robert Fangman was a reserve attendant for Flight 175, and was on it by chance. He replaced Elise O'Kane, who'd been on the flight regularly for the previous six months. When she was signing up for her flights for the month, O'Kane entered an incorrect code into the computer, which scheduled her instead for flights from Boston to Denver. She later said "she had never made such an error in 16 years as a flight attendant." She had subsequently "made several attempts to switch onto the flight, but had computer problems." [9]

Another original attendant was Elaine Lawrence. However, "because she was going on vacation, she traded shifts with her close friend, Amy Jarret." [10]

Lauren Gurskis was also one of the original attendants. "In August of [2001], however, she switched assignments—trip-traded, as flight attendants call it—so that she could drive her son to his first day of kindergarten." According to *The Boston Globe,* Kathryn Laborie was most likely the attendant that replaced her. [11]

One more of the original attendants, Barbara McFarland, had "decided to spend an extra day with her son," and so she "swapped shifts with another attendant." The name of this attendant is unstated. [12]

Flight 77: Of the four attendants on this plane, at least two were not originally scheduled to be on it. Michele Heidenberger regularly flew from Washington's Reagan National Airport to Dallas, but on 9/11 was unusually flying out of Dulles Airport on Flight 77. When Heidenberger phoned her friend Toni Knisley, an administrator at Reagan Airport, shortly before boarding her plane, Knisley was surprised, saying: "What are you doing at Dulles? Aren't you flying your regular turn to Dallas today?" Heidenberger explained: "I'm working Flight 77 to LA because I want to take time off in October to go to Italy with [my husband] and the kids." [13]

Renee May was assigned to Flight 77 only during the morning of 9/11. American Airlines had earlier called another attendant, Lena Brown, and

asked her to take the flight, but Brown said she would be unable to get to the airport in time. "Renee May, the next flight attendant on American Airlines' list, accepted." [14]

Flight 93: At least three of the five attendants on this flight were not originally booked to be on it. Sandra Bradshaw "liked working first class," but "was in economy because she'd picked up Flight 93 late in the planning." She had "switched flights with another attendant." [15]

Wanda Green "had been scheduled to fly Sept. 13, but Green, who also worked as a real estate agent, realized she had to handle the closing of a home sale Sept. 13. She'd phoned her best friend, fellow flight attendant Donita Judge, who opened United's computerized schedule and shifted Green to the Sept. 11 flight." [16]

Deborah Welsh "usually avoided early-morning flights," and "was not originally slated to be on Flight 93, but was assigned to the flight when she swapped shifts." [17]

It wasn't just pilots and flight attendants who'd joined the doomed flights late. A large number of the passengers had similarly not originally been booked on these aircraft.

Last-minute passengers

Flight 11: Alexander Filipov "originally held a ticket for a Delta flight, but switched at the last minute to American Flight 11." [18]

Edmund Glazer had got a call from his company's home office in Los Angeles the night of September 10, asking for his help on a major project. "In his obliging way, Mr. Glazer boarded Flight 11 the next morning." [19]

Pendyala Vamsikrishna "was to leave Boston on Sept. 10, but hadn't finished his job, and rescheduled for the following day on American Airlines Flight 11." [20]

Brian Dale "was supposed to have flown Monday night. But the Warren, NJ, man instead opted to fly out Tuesday morning." [21]

Peter Hashem "had been scheduled to take an earlier flight but postponed the trip in order to make time to attend his son's soccer game." [22]

Robin Kaplan had also been scheduled to take an earlier flight, but "she would have had to get up too early, so she didn't." [23]

David Angell and his wife Lynn "were on board [Flight 11], even though they had originally planned to take a later flight." [24]

David Kovalcin "wasn't supposed to fly to California until later this week." But his company's managers "were looking for someone to leave on Tuesday to discuss a hardware problem with a supplier. He volunteered." [25]

Christopher Mello had originally "planned to return home on a red-eye flight the next day." [26]

And Kenneth Waldie "was supposed to leave Wednesday, but he got the flight the day before." [27]

Flight 175: Touri Bolourchi "was not supposed to be aboard Flight 175, but she decided to stay a few extra days in Boston to visit her daughter and two grandchildren." [28]

Francis Grogan "was not originally booked on Flight 175, but overcrowding on his original flight bumped him." [29]

Mark Bavis "was originally scheduled for the 11 a.m. departure but pushed it up a few hours." [30]

And Daniel Brandhorst, Ronald Gamboa, and their adopted son David, "changed their flight plans so they could return to Los Angeles from Boston on Sept. 11." Brandhorst's mother had "thought her son was flying the previous night." [31]

Flight 77: Barbara Olson, who flew on Flight 77 on 9/11, was originally "scheduled to fly to Los Angeles on the night of Sept. 10," but "changed her schedule... to be with her husband on the morning of his 61st birthday." [32]

Barbara Edwards "had gone to Connecticut for a wedding and was supposed to return home Saturday [September 8]." But "her friends talked her into staying with them so she took the flight that crashed into the Pentagon." [33]

Vicki Yancey "had planned to leave Washington earlier, but ticketing problems delayed her departure." [34]

After a vacation with their daughter, husband and wife Shuyin Yang and Yuguang Zheng were "scheduled to leave for China on September 10." But as they had only finished their vacation on September 9, their daughter "felt it might be a hassle for my parents [to] leave [in] just like a couple hours and to get on the plane. So, I have them to reschedule their flight ticket to September 11." [35]

Dora Menchaca was in Washington for two days of meetings. "The meetings ended late Monday [September 10], a day earlier than expected." So, "The next morning, flying on standby, she caught an earlier-than-scheduled departure to California." [36]

Ruben Ornedo was originally scheduled to fly two weeks after 9/11. But "during a lull in an extended Washington business trip he seized the chance to rush home for a day or two and see his wife." [37]

One group of passengers on Flight 77 comprised eight individuals: three teachers and three 11-year-old students who had been selected to participate in a program at the Channel Islands National Marine Sanctuary near Santa Barbara, accompanied by two staff members of the National Geographic Society. According to a close friend of one of the teachers, Sarah Clark, "She was originally supposed to go to Florida, but two weeks [before 9/11] they changed it and told her she was going to California." [38]

There were likely more passengers who were booked onto these flights only at the last minute, but I have simply not yet come across the reports describing this. And it seems reasonable to assume there were even more of these late additions to the flights, where the details of these individuals' travel arrangements have so far gone unreported.

In the case of Flight 93, however, since the official story revolves around the heroism of the passengers who supposedly fought back against terrorists, we have the fortune that a lot more has been written about these individuals and how they came to be on that flight. What has been reported is extraordinary: Of the 33 passengers (excluding the four supposed hijackers), at least 16 had only recently been booked onto the plane. Some only joined it early in the morning of September 11.

Flight 93: Environmental lawyer Alan Beaven arranged to take Flight 93 on 9/11 the day before, as he was duty-bound to go to San Francisco to help settle a case after talks had just broken down. [39]

"Normally," passenger Todd Beamer "would have left [for San Francisco] the night before." But on September 10 he had returned from a trip to Italy and wanted some time with his children before flying out. [40]

Edward Felt "was on a last-minute business trip to San Francisco." [41]

Sisters-in-law Patricia Cushing and Jane Folger had "moved up the time of their flight" in the days before 9/11. [42]

Mark Bingham "had missed his plane the day before because of a hangover from a friend's birthday party." [43]

Jeremy Glick "was supposed to leave Monday night, but there were problems at the airport: He decided to wait till Tuesday morning." [44]

Nicole Miller's "Monday night . . . flight back to the Bay Area was canceled due to weather. Miller re-booked on a flight the next morning." [45]

Lou Nacke "only booked his seat the night before. He had a customer on the coast with an inventory problem and offered to fly out first thing Tuesday morning to fix it." [46]

When she'd checked in at the airport on September 11, Georgine Corrigan switched to Flight 93, as it was non-stop, whereas her original plane would be making two stops on the way to San Francisco. [47]

A number of the Flight 93 passengers were originally booked on United Airlines Flight 91, scheduled to depart 1 hour 20 minutes after Flight 93, at 9:20 a.m. Deora Bodley "was supposed to take United Flight 91, but decided the night before to take one an hour earlier so she could get home sooner to her family and boyfriend." [48]

Christine Snyder "called to check on her flight, Flight 91," early in the morning of September 11, and "moved up to Flight 93 for an earlier start." [49]

Lauren Grandcolas "had been scheduled for United 91, but her car service had arrived at the airport early." [50]

Husband and wife Donald and Jean Peterson "arrived at the airport early for United Flight 91 . . . so they switched to Flight 93." [51]

Tom Burnett, according to author Jere Longman, "had changed his plans . . . He would be leaving at 8 a.m. instead of taking Flight 91." (*The San Francisco Chronicle* said, however, that he'd originally been booked on a Delta Airlines flight that afternoon.) [52]

Notes

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- [52] Jaxon Van Derbeken, "Bound by Fate, Determination"; Jere Longman, Among the Heroes, p. 8.