**Andrew Harper, Denver, CO (1)**

I woke up at my boyfriend's and as usual he made espresso and we read the newspaper spread out on the stove. On the drive home, I was still morning groggy and not paying close attention to NPR. I stopped at a stoplight and heard the commentator saying that a plane had flown into the World Trade Center. At first, I thought it was a joke. But it became clear from the urgent tone of the report that it wasn't. My head was buzzing as I tried to assimilate this news. At home, I parked my car and my neighbor Billy met me out in the street and said that terrorists had attacked the World Trade Center. I went inside and called my boyfriend and told him, "Terrorists flew a plane into the World Trade Center." He said, "You're kidding me." "No," I replied. "Turn on your TV." I stayed on the phone with him, watching the footage of the burning towers. After five minutes, he said, "I have to go to work." Of course, I had that feeling that this was something really big and that nothing was going to be the same.

\* \* \*

**Jeanne Carstensen, New York, NY (2)**

I was listening to WNYC in New York City. Suddenly, the reception got fuzzy and the announcer said there had been an explosion in one tower of the World Trade Center. Then the station went dead. Scrambling to find another station -- I had only just moved to New York and wasn't familiar with the local radio dial -- I heard that the explosion had been caused by a plane, and then that the second tower was in flames. And so on. I was afraid to be alone all of a sudden, and didn't have a TV, so I ran to a friend's apartment. We went to the roof of our 15-story building on the Upper West Side and watched the plumes of smoke blacken the sky some 130 blocks away. It was hard not to notice what a gorgeous day it was: hot but with an optimistic twinge of freshness, caused, perhaps, by yesterday's drenching thunder showers.

We rushed over to Columbia University to watch CNN on a movie-theater-size screen in the main auditorium of the Journalism School, where students and faculty had gathered in stunned silence. As the first tower collapsed in a graceful mushroom cloud, we let out a collective gasp. Some people wept; a woman passed out tissues from a package she had in her purse. Then the second tower imploded. More tears. More silence.

Outside, the silence was even eerier. No jets roaring overhead on their way to JFK. When a plane suddenly screamed through the sky, I hunched over in fear. Were we under attack? These were U.S. military planes, but I didn't know that at the time.

Later, I went downtown to gather a few quotes for The Chronicle. The subway was only running downtown as far as 34th Street. From there we walked down Sixth Avenue toward the plumes of smoke, which by then were starting to take on a golden hue from the late afternoon sun. Although traffic was halted on the usually busy avenue, there were lots of people on the sidewalks. Certain images stick in my mind -- kids skateboarding and yelling to each other to call if school was canceled the next day; an artist with an easel painting the chaotic street scene; long lines of ambulances from different cities. Many businesses were shut, but many were open as well. Some people sat in restaurants, while others shopped for food.

As we got further downtown we started to see more red eyes. Missing-persons flyers covered almost every telephone pole. Ambulances and police vehicles roared up and down the otherwise empty street. At St. Vincent's Hospital, the nearest to Ground Zero, I interviewed a union carpenter with a heavy Irish accident who had retired from working at the WTC only two months before and was sobbing as he told us he thought 400 of his fellow carpenters had died. A fireman from Staten Island who had just returned from Ground Zero and was covered an inch thick in dust told me that there "was nothing left but dust and steel." His eyes were blank. "This is all about body recovery," he said.

Back on the Upper West Side, near Columbia, the bars were overflowing. Everyone was drinking heavily and telling stories from the day (this drinking and storytelling would continue for months all across the city). I could smell the wreckage burning six miles away in Lower Manhattan.

**Anthony Vann, Oakland, CA (3)**

I was actually on my way to the dentist's office for an appointment. One of my co-workers knew I had family back East somewhere, so she left me a message on my cell phone, hoping that my family was okay. I was naturally perplexed, as I hadn't turned on the TV or radio that morning.

I turned my CD player off in my car and turned on the radio and just sat there stunned for, like, five minutes. I went back up to my apartment to look at the news and saw the videotape of New York City. It was incredible. It was so amazing and terrible, I thought I was looking at a movie -- only I knew it was real. I got back into my car and went to my appointment. Terrible way to start a morning.

\* \* \*

**Susan Waldron, New Orleans, LA (4)**

I was in New Orleans attending a conference, which was obviously canceled once all hell broke loose.

Nobody knew when planes would be flying, so I booked one of the last seats on an Amtrak train, scheduled to take three days to get back to San Francisco.

The train's passengers were an odd mix of Amtrak regulars and stranded business folks and vacationers. But we all looked out for each other -- sharing cell phones (mine died 15 minutes into the ride), sprinting to buy papers at our brief stops and then passing them around, and even some people who had sleeping compartments offered showers to those of us who were sleeping in our seats.

The Amtrak folks were great, although there was no way they could have been prepared for nearly twice their normal passenger load. They mostly kept their cool, even when squirrelly things happened (like the psychic who foresaw a train crash and caused the cops to be called to the Palm Springs station).

Because of boarding hundreds of extra passengers, and frequent strange stops (like the one in Palm Springs), we were close to 12 hours late into L.A. At the end, Amtrak ran out of food but came through by calling Kentucky Fried Chicken to deliver hundreds of boxed dinners to the San Bernadino station for us!

The closeness and cooperation on board that train went a long way to soothing some very rattled travelers, and reaffirmed our belief that we would pull through, regardless.

\* \* \*

**Sam Young, San Francisco, CA (5)**

At 7:30 am on 9/11, I was asleep, since I had the day off. Then my phone rang. Anyone who knows me knows better than to call me so early. I didn't answer it, but with my head buried in my pillow, I thought, "Oh, no, what happened?" So I checked my voice mail, and I heard my dad's voice say, "Our country is at war. Turn on your TV."

My first thought was "Oh, great. Bush found an excuse to bomb Iraq." Ironically, this is currently in the works, but it wasn't what happened that day.

\* \* \*

**Lorien McKenna, San Francisco, CA (6)**

Is that the phone ringing? It's only 6:30! I don't have to be at work for another two hours. I can hear my husband's muffled tone as he mumbles my thoughts, and then his rough "Hello?" Must be his office, I think, as I slide back into sleep. Suddenly, he's bolt upright, fumbling for the remote control. The TV's on. As I reach for my glasses, I hear it before I can see it: explosions and screaming. My god! The Twin Towers. My god! The Twin Towers have fallen down. We are stunned. I say, "I'm not going to work today."

I call my mother, who is camping at Yosemite with her fifth-grade class. I leave a surreal message. My mother grew up in New York. My grandparents lived on Fulton Street by the South Street Seaport. Although I'm a native Californian, New York has always been "home."

We watch TV for hours. We cry, we are horrified, we cannot believe that we are awake. We are angry, American and fierce. I become overloaded. I need a break. I leave my husband in the bedroom and wander into the living room. I have "Anne of Green Gables" in my hand. I spend the next two hours completely absorbed in innocence and green hills.

At the end of the day, we are wounded. We have called our friends and families, made the connections we needed to make. We are preparing ourselves to wake up tomorrow, when this will all still be real.

"Happy anniversary," I say to my husband as I turn out the light. "Happy anniversary, sweetie," he says back. And we sleep.

\* \* \*

**Darren Gewant, San Francisco, CA (7)**

I was surfing. Got up when it was still dark, put my wetsuit on and went straight to the beach. It was a beautiful sunrise, partly cloudy with a light offshore breeze and small, super-fun waves. There were only a few of us out that early, and none of us had turned on the TV or the radio. As it got later, guys started paddling out, and you could sense their bewilderment. Something was wrong. My friend told me the news, and I looked up, and there were no planes.

\* \* \*

**John Guynn, Raleigh, NC (8)**

I had just put some bacon in the oven when I grabbed the remote control and turned on the TV. There on the screen was the first tower, with smoke billowing out. I remember that a female reporter was talking about the first crash when suddenly she screamed. The second tower had been hit. I immediately called my mom, who lives in the Bay Area. "Get up and turn on the TV. Something terrible is happening," I told her.

\* \* \*

**Caroline Bridges, Vallejo, CA (9)**

My fiancé and I awoke at 6 am the morning of Sept. 11 and groaned together about another boring day of work ahead of us. As usual, he headed straight downstairs to wake up his brain via the morning news, and I headed groggily for the bathroom to clean up.

As I brushed my hair, I heard the news come on downstairs and made out about every other sentence: "We aren't sure what it was yet ...." "There are reports that people saw a flying object just moments before this video was shot ...." For some reason, the tone of the commentators' voices got my attention. I recognized it as the less-animated- than-usual tone used by national reporters, but it didn't strike me as being very serious yet. I just thought they sounded confused.

Amused, I thought maybe there'd been some sort of phenomenon that had people thinking they'd seen a UFO or something. It was early morning -- my brain was not fully awake. But that was about the last time I felt anything like amusement for a while.

I went down the stairs to see what my fiancé was watching, and saw something that made no sense to me at first -- smoke and flames on such a huge scale that I couldn't get my head around it. My fiancé told me what he could figure out -- that they thought maybe a plane had flown into the World Trade Center.

What?

I think I had a lot of the same thoughts then that others had that day -- Was it an accident? How could they fly a plane into a building that tall in such clear weather? It must be a malfunction. It couldn't be on purpose! Or was it a joke by the newscasters? I quickly scanned my brain to remember whether this was April 1 -- no. Then another plane hit. I didn't know whether it was a replay at this point or whether I was watching the real footage of the second plane. All I know is that I really felt like my world turned inside out right at that moment. Everything impossible was becoming possible, and everything possible was suddenly coming into question. I'd fallen asleep and woken up in a "Die Hard" movie.

Like the rest of America, I spent the rest of the day near or in front of the television, unable to turn away, unable to believe it would ever be over, now that such impossible things had begun. I waited to hear that they'd attacked San Francisco and thanked heaven that my fiancé hadn't gone into the City to his job in the Financial District.

My shock and horror were such that I didn't really notice I'd broken my little toes by walking into a pile of handweights while watching the first tower collapse -- I just hobbled over to the couch and later took some painkillers. Nor did I react as I would have otherwise when my boss called me to tell me that our company's president was annoyed no one had really come to work that day, that I had to call in for a phone meeting that afternoon because our software company was going out of business after 15 years and we were all going to be out of a job as of this Friday.

I listened to her describing the end of the most prestigious job I'd ever held at a great company full of wonderful people, but all I felt was annoyance that our company president couldn't put off such "trifling" things until the next day. Our world was ending, people had died horribly only hours earlier, families had lost loved ones -- what was a job? All I wanted that day -- and most days ever since -- was to be with my family and loved ones. It really put a focus on what my true priorities in life should be. I think our wedding the following month was that much more joyful and wonderful because we were all that much more aware of the importance of celebrating life and each other.

**Heather Randolph, San Francisco, CA (10)**

Our bags were packed, every last detail had been taken care of and we were leaving for the airport on Sept. 11 for our Sept. 15 wedding in Charleston, S.C. I had awakened to an insistently ringing phone at 6:30 am. (I found out later it was my sister in NYC calling to tell me the news.) Typically, I rush to answer late-night or early- morning calls, anxious that something may have happened to someone I love. But that morning, I rolled over and said to David, "Let voice mail pick it up. It's probably nothing. We're leaving to get married today!"

My alarm went off an hour later, and I showered while David slept. When he hopped in the shower, I turned on the TV to watch the "Today" show (like always), and there it was. Needless to say, we never made it to our wedding that Saturday. It was incredibly difficult to have to cancel such a life-defining event due to such horrific outside circumstances, and to simultaneously deal with the same shock, sorrow and worry the rest of the world was feeling. It didn't take us long to realize, however, that having our wedding canceled was nothing compared to the tragedy unfolding in front of us. We postponed, went a week later on our preplanned "honeymoon" to Europe to reccuperate and had a beautiful wedding on Jan. 19.

\* \* \*

**Jean Schanberger, San Francisco, CA (11)**

Sept. 11, 2001, started like many days -- in San Francisco's Hotel Monaco, my "home away from home" for weekly commutes to my job at Levi Strauss & Co. Travel routines were long established, and the Hotel Monaco's hospitality and extra- comfortable rooms supported the long workdays.

At about 7:30 am I checked out of the Monaco to start my regular half-hour Financial District walk to work. I had not seen TV news, and, coffee in hand, I strode through the City of the Bay's cool, just-waking streets. Lots of police cars were out. Just after the Transamerica Building, I started hearing snippets of radio news reports through open car windows ("...struck the Pentagon ..." "...Pennsylvania Avenue has been closed..." and, most ominously, "... in New York City ... at the World Trade Center." My pace quickened as I passed the Sansome Street Fire Station, whose doors were flung open and crews were scurrying about. By the time I reached Levi's Plaza and got into the elevator, my co- workers' faces were ashen. "What happened?" I asked. Someone replied, "Two planes have hit the World Trade Center."

When I reached my office, my assistant and the lawyer next door were in the open area, their faces streaked with tears. "The first tower just fell." Dropping my bag in my office, I thought, "This changes things forever." Something told me to phone my mother. As a group, we hurried down the hall to the Communications Department's TV and watched the horror unfold on the other side of the country. The company's most senior managers from around the world were in town, and we all stood together, alternately monitoring developments and activating contingency plans for employee notification and dismissal options. The city of San Francisco declared a state of emergency and ordered a number of high-profile buildings such as the Transamerica evacuated. Levi's Plaza is a low-rise building perched on the side of the Bay. Through our top-floor windows, we nervously glanced out at the empty sky, no one daring to admit the fear we all later acknowledged -- that our American icon- branded, Jewish family-owned company at the waters' edge could be a target in this crazy world.

The day's events unfolded, as the world knows all too well. Several colleagues offered me a home visit that night; as luck would have it, I had longstanding plans to visit an old friend in Danville and would stay with her. That night, in her TV room, we reminisced about the 1991 night in Cincinnati when we were on a business trip (my first) together and the Persian Gulf War started. "We have to stop meeting like this!" we said, laughing through tears as we heard early reports of the death of the FDNY chaplain and other top brass. Under the covers on the cell phone that night, I savored my boyfriend's soothing voice reassuring me that everything at home was okay and I should do what was needed there, then get home when I could.

\* \* \*

**Jennifer Rutan, Mechanicsville, IA (12)**

I was visiting my family in Iowa, and my return flight was the morning of 9/11. I was late getting ready and about to leave for the airport when my brother called and told us to turn on the TV. My flight took off five days later.

\* \* \*

**Tina Barseghian, San Francisco, CA (13)**

The shrill ring of the telephone yanked me out of a deep sleep. My husband answered it in the living room, so I didn't hear the conversation. Sounds of the TV then wafted into my room, an unusual sound for 7 am in our household.

Bleary eyed, I walked into the living room and asked what was going on. The newscasters on TV answered my question, as if I'd asked them. My husband and I sat on the couch and watched the towers burn. It was his parents who'd called. They were worried about their son Jon, who worked downtown. They hadn't been able to reach him and had no idea where in the scope of the World Trade Center his office was located.

I picked up the phone and dialed Jon's home number, figuring he would have escaped from work. "All circuits are busy," the announcement repeated over and over again. I hit redial and heard those three eerie, off-key tones before the same announcement a hundred times. Finally, I got through and the phone rang on the other end.

Jon answered, baffled that I'd gotten through but relieved to be talking to family. His voice quavered as he told us how he heard the first explosion from his office, then, while watching the North Tower burn, he saw the second airplane hit the South Tower.

He left his office, just a few blocks from the World Trade Center, and started walking north -- away from the chaos. He turned around just in time to see the first building collapse, hung his head and kept walking toward home.

\* \* \*

**Kelly McCloy, San Francisco, CA (14)**

I was sleeping when the phone rang around 6 am. groggily, I answered it. It was my stepmother, calling from Vermont. "You'll never believe what just happened,' she said into the phone. "Two planes just hit the World Trade Center.' Then, knowing that I work in the Financial District, she said, 'Please don't go to work today. Please don't go downtown.' I walked into the living room with the phone in hand, turned on the TV and watched the horror unfold again as my stepmother and I whispered "Oh, my God"s to each other.

\* \* \*

**Jay Cooke, Point Pleasant, NJ (15)**

Our story isn't about our location (at my parents' house in Point Pleasant, N.J.) the morning of 9/11, but, rather, where we were the day before: at the World Trade Center. We'd gone into Manhattan to see some friends and spent Monday the 10th walking the Lower Manhattan loop, from the Chelsea Piers down toward Battery Park City, then back around through the square and into Tower Two. It was $13 for the elevator to the observation deck. Too pricey, we'd deemed, opting for Krispy Kreme donuts (on the ground level) instead. I even remember saying it: "We'll check the view out next time."

We had Newark-S.F. tickets for Wednesday, Sept. 12, which were canceled. So we migrated to Atlantic City and joined the Greyhound cattle call.

\* \* \*

**J. Ganion, Sacramento, CA (16)**

It was my second day in Sacramento, and I was still bunking with two friends. At about 6:45 am, another friend, from Seattle, called to tell us we were in the midst of a terrorist attack.

Right.

Groggy and irritated at the early call, I rather stridently stated that he was obviously attempting a not-at-all-funny practical joke.

But there it was, on live television, the first tower hit and burning. What seemed like seconds later, we watched in awe as the second plane hit.

I was the only one in the living room watching as the towers fell. As viscerally horrified as I have ever been, I remember walking into the bathroom, where one friend was taking a hasty shower:

"Chelsey."

She turned the water off. "What?"

"I think the towers are ... gone. I think they're gone. I think the World Trade Center is gone."

And it was.

**Richard Oliva, San Jose, CA (17)**

Driving north on San Tomas Expressway towards 101, which would take me to my job in Sunnyvale, I was listening to KGO radio. This was my normal routine to catch news, traffic, and sports. I was waiting for the sportscast when the first word came of a plane hitting one of the towers. My first thought, Stormy in New York, low ceiling, small plane got lost and hit the tower. The sports were delayed and KGO had a gentleman from New York on the phone who was describing what he could see from his apartment. He suddenly began to scream that the second tower had exploded. The announcers then stated that they had seen the second plane hit on a monitor. As a chill ran up my back, I knew that terrorist were behind this.

All thoughts of those at work were for the people in those towers. Anger had not set in yet. As one woman stated, Those people were doing the same thing we were. Grabbing coffee, working our job, talking to friends. And the next moment, gone.

\* \* \*

**M. Fallah, Redwood City, CA (18)**

I remember having that day off so I got up a bit later then usual I believe around 9:30am. I had got on my computer and saw that I had recieved instant messages from a friend saying the twin towers were attack and then a message saying the pentagon was attacked too. I always leave my computer on so its not unusual for me to return to messages already on my screen. I remember thinking that it was not funny to joke about things like that. I remember not believing it. I was told to turn on the news. I remember just feeling utter shock. I was in tears. I saw people falling/jumping out of buildings. Those images still don't fade away. I woke my husband up and we just held each other and cried together. I had been in and on the roofs of twin towers several times. I knew what walking in those streets surrounding it was like. He and I being from the east coast knew many people in the towers as well as in nyc. I can not believe anyone can do such a destructive act to hurt so many people.

\* \* \*

**J. Williams, Nimes, France (19)**

My partner, a friend and myself had left Barcelona, Spain on the morning of Sept. 11th. We had spent a wonderful week in Paris, then a long weekend in Barcelona and were heading back by car to a hotel in Nimes before heading to an isolated auberge in the country side of Provence. Upon arriving at our hotel the desk clerk heard us speaking english to each other and told us to immediately take our room key and turn to the BBC. "Something has happened in your country." The first image we saw was just moments after the second tower had collapsed. It at first appeared to me that the greater part of Manhattan had been destroyed. In those confusing moments as we understood what was happening, I felt the greatest ache to be at home that I have ever felt. I felt so far away. We immediatley began contacting family. We all had the same strange urge to tell everyone we were ok, even though we were much farther away from what was happening than anyone we called. Then the mental lists we conferred with each other on. Do any of our friends work in or near the towers? Concern for our friends who worked in the new store of the same company I work for in San Francisco. What were they going through? At dinner (which we had to force ourselves to go too) a few hours latter we discussed what to do with the rest of our vacation and pushed around uneaten food on our plates. We had another week left and knew we couldn't get home if we wanted too. We decided to go on with our plans. I don't think any of the three of us stopped shaking all through dinner. The rest of the trip was very strange. We had a difficult time enjoying ourselves. We felt a little guilty the few times we laughed. People in France were wonderfully supportive. Strangers would stop and ask us if were American when they heard us speaking english. Without exception everyone expressed sympathy and support. I felt very empty and alone still. Our scheduled flight to leave Paris was on the second day that flights were allowed back in the US. The line for standby at the airport was probably five hundred people long. I spent a lot of time reliving the events with friends. I was hungry to know how people had coped. For the three of us that had been in Europe, it was difficult to not have been with our friends and family while dealing with the initial shock. We still feel somewhat behind in dealing with it.

Hopefully, being here on the one year anniversary will help with that.

\* \* \*

**Clinton Ho, San Diego, CA (20)**

Well on the day of Sept. 11, I was at MCRD San Diego going through my last couple days of Marine Corps boot camp. We were graduating that weekend and that day we heard over a radio about what had happened. That night, we no longer heard the planes flying in and out of San Diego Airport and the base was on complete lockdown. Who would have thought we were finally about to become marines and now we were all in a Holy War. Now I'm deployed to the Middle East doing my part of Operation Enduring Freedom.

\* \* \*

**Jean Pierre R. De Oliveira, San Francisco, CA (21)**

September 11, 2001

The alarm clock read 4:00 am as my eyes flashed open the day I was to be sworn in as a citizen of the United States of America. I was so excited about the whole ceremony that I could not fall back asleep. I got up, got ready, and began my drive to Masonic Auditorium at six o'clock in the morning while listening to music in my car. When I arrived at the auditorium it was 6:30 am. I paid the flat rate of ten dollars to get into the parking structure. Already there were enough cars parked in the structure to fill the parking lot up to the fifth floor, where I parked my car. Filled with a range of emotions going from excitement to nervousness I proceeded to the lounge where I registered myself and afterwards entered the main hall. Everyone was very happy and extremely well dressed as they awaited the ceremony. After all it was an extremely important occasion. We were all becoming citizens of the United States of America.

After entering the room, I found a seat and sat down in the auditorium waiting for the program to start with the procession of the color guard. The room was filled with noise and excitement as an esteemed gentleman walked into the room and asked everyone to be silent. Rather than saying that the ceremony was about to begin, as everyone had expected, he stated that something terrible had happened, and that for this reason we would not be able to be sworn in by a judge nor partake in an actual ceremony, but would instead be sworn in rapidly. Such an announcement produced both a great deal of anxiety and nervousness among those gathered in the hall.

We were sworn in and then asked to evacuate the building silently. Confused and disappointed, I proceeded to the parking structure only to find a vast amount of chaos and confusion. There were cars everywhere as people were trying to exit the building as quickly as possible. The whole parking lot was in a state of panic. Eventually those in charge had to open an emergency exit in order for me, and others parked in the same location, to exit the parking structure.

The roads outside where in no better condition. As a result of all the fear, anxiety, and confusion felt among all the citizens of San Francisco the traffic was terrible. The cars were practically bumper-to-bumper. The chaos and turmoil presented before my eyes was overwhelming. It was not until I turned on the radio that I realized what that gentleman in the main hall of the auditorium meant when he stated that something terrible had happened. The twin towers, one of the greatest landmarks of this nation, along with thousands of hardworking citizens had been the victims of a terrorist attack.

\* \* \*

**Janie Workman, Alamo, CA (22)**

I was going to San Francisco for one day at my partime consulting job. It was the only day that I could get into the city as we were suppposed to leave on Friday for vacation. The clock radio came on and I was half asleep and half listening when they said a plane had crashed into one of the World Trade Center towers. What a wake up call - we immediately turned on the TV and then saw the second tower explode. There was a part of me that really felt there was a reasonable explanation, but when they showed the slow motion of the jet crashing it was such a cold and dreadful feeling. I went in to work via carpool a little later and we were all listening to the news and watching the sky carefully. By lunch most of the financial district was deserted and the few of us left had to search for a place to get lunch. But I stayed for the day and finished the job because there didn't seem to be anything else to do. . . We did get to New Orleans for our vacation a day later than planned and found ourselves in a ghost town - no crowds anywhere! It was a strange week and so terribly sad...

\* \* \*

**Debbie Thornton, Santa Cruz, CA (23)**

I was too annoyed to answer the phone when it rang at 6:05am. It occured to me the caller was a friend from the east coast, and I was right. I listened to the message at 6:45 when my 2 1/2 year old daughter woke up. "Hey it's me!" the voice of my friend said "Turn on the news, a plane just flew into the World Trade Center. I'll call ya later."

As I crossed the room to the TV, my first grim thought was "Bad Weather at LaGuardia". As I clicked on the TV, I saw a replay of the 2nd plane going into the WTC, and my life as a Corporate Travel Agent went into overdrive, as did my phone line. "Mother! Come get Michaela NOW! I've got to sign into work NOW! Oh, by the way, turn on the TV, 2 planes have crashed into the World Trade Center. With my mind panic stricken and in overdrive I frantically turned on my business computer in my home office. I woke my boss and her assistant knowing their day would prove to be far worse than mine.

I was calling my co-worker when I heard of the plane crash in Philadelphia, or was it the Pentagon? In a brief panic stricken conversation, we activated all the reports that might tell us who in our company might have been on any of the flights. The next call I took came in from one of the secretaries. Did we have any way of finding out if so-and- so had checked out of his hotel yet?? He was scheduled for a training class at the World Trade Center. We tried but the phone lines at his hotel, the Marriott World Trade Center, was down forever. His cell phone had a fast busy. And so it was as the day wore on, call after call, the TV droning in the background. CEO memos came across the email,and friends and family called to check in.

Late in the afternoon we learned that our employee, the only one in the company at risk had escaped WTC1 with the clothes on his back.

**Paul Wade, Walnut Creek, CA (24)**

I was about to leave for work. I had done pretty good that morning and was getting out early. I was brushing my teeth and went into the living room to watch my last bit of KRON 4, and then they said they were switching over to breaking news. There it was -- that image of the North Tower burning. They said that a plane had flown into it. It was that surreal moment when you are looking at something that shouldn't be happening -- almost makes you dizzy.

That's the image that's burned in: The newscasters are doing their best on-the-spot reporting in all the confusion. Then it happens -- out of the corner of the screen, another plane just comes out of nowhere and slams into the second tower. I saw it the moment it happened. Then I felt fear because something was very wrong. The craziest thing I remember was a reporter saying that the planes must have been guided into the buildings by mistake -- I know I heard that, but I never heard mention of it again. I remember thinking that this could not be a mistake. I didn't know what to do at that point, but I felt it would be best to be around others, so I headed into work, thinking I would hear about it on the radio. I was shocked when the people on the radio were talking about it rather matter-of-factly. If they had witnessed what I had just seen, I think the mood would have been different.

When I got to work, a lot of people had gathered in the conference room with the TV, and I went in and joined them. By that time, the first tower had fallen. It had never occured to me that the towers would fall. We all just sat there watching and hardly saying a word. The second tower fell, and I remember turning to an older, wiser co-worker and saying, "What is happening?" He just looked at me -- he had no words. To this day I remember thinking that this was the beginning of the end. The end of what, I guess I really didn't know at the time. Not the end of the world or anything like that. Just the end -- of innocence, of trust, happy times for a while, feeling completely safe and free. I remember thinking that.

\* \* \*

**Alexandra Cheng, Honolulu, HI (25)**

I heard the phone call at around 4:30 am. Half awake, I wondered in the dark whether our family was all right, since who else would call? My dad trudged into the living room to the couch, where I slept when visiting them. My sister in Florida was distraught, asking for information about our sister, who lived and worked in New York City. Had we heard from her? Was she okay? A co-worker had said that she was in Boston and due to fly back to New York that day. Boston?! The newscasters did not specify the destinations of the Boston flights that hit the towers until much later. My traveling sister called us from her hotel and left us e-mail informing us that she was fine and not to tie up the lines trying to find her. Yay!

\* \* \*

**Janny Ng, San Francisco, CA (26)**

I was taking the bus to school and turned on my Walkman to listen to the radio. At first, all I heard was comments about "how horrible this is" and "how unbelieveable everything seems." I was getting confused until they mentioned a plane crashing into Tower One. I looked around the bus and thought I was hearing wrong, so I changed the station. And on every station I heard the same story -- a plane crashed into Tower One.

As I walked into my school, I looked at everyone around me to find some answer, but it seemed as though no one knew what happened, since they have already been at school for an hour. I walked into one of my classrooms, and my teacher had the TV on. I looked at the screen and saw smoke billowing out of the building. Tears rushed to my eyes as I thought about my close friend, who just got a job two weeks earlier at the World Trade Center with my help.

The principal made an announcement over the PA that school was dismissed for the day, and I walked out of my classroom, crying. I was confused and dazed as I walked though the halls, and my peers looked at me as though I was overreacting. My friend and I went back to her house, and I had this feeling that something more was going to happen. I have never wanted to be so wrong in my life.

\* \* \*

**Rocha Chen, San Mateo, CA (27)**

On the morning of 9/11, I was driving to work. I had to drive over the Golden Gate Bridge. I heard the news on the radio while I was driving. I was shocked that the terroists flew the plane into the WTC. When I got home from work, I watched the news.

\* \* \*

**A. Tsang, San Francisco, CA (28)**

I was at home when my co-worker called. He told me to stay home and not to come to work that morning. I asked him why, and he told me that the United States was being attack. He told me to turn on the TV.

As I was watching the news, I was horrified as I watched the two planes crash into the World Trade Center's towers. It looked like it was in a movie, but this time it was for real.

I watched as the Twin Towers collapsed, and I was praying that I hope people were getting out all right.

I'd picked my daughter up from preschool that morning. I thought to myself, I would rather be with my family very much! I believe everyone felt the same way.

\* \* \*

**Susan Elizabeth Rice, Orange County, CA (29)**

I woke just before dawn and swam a bit in the dark blue morning, under stars closing quickly against an encroaching, red horizon. The pool was private, and the water, perfect, and I wondered about maintaining the peace of that morning throughout the later day, when public Internet forums bloated to explosion with reactionary political woes, and foes of those woes.

An hour later, over a steaming cup o' joe, I reclined before an early-morning CBS news broadcast and anticipated reapproaching the online issues of too many empty words.

Dan Rather appeared at a later time that morning, interrupting the Southern California traffic reports and stock market muses, his voice cracking and frank: A jetliner had impacted one of the World Trade Center towers in New York City, but that's all there was.

A moment or two later, Rather's incredulous voiceover remarked, "AP is reporting ... that one of the towers has collapsed ...."

Everyone knows the events that followed, viewed time and time again from our mostly comfortable homes, before our mostly comfortable television sets, from within our mostly comfortable communities.

I stayed with Dan Rather on CBS as long as they maintained live coverage of the day of Sept. 11, 2001, and thanked dear God that I was alive that day to survive to another, and I prayed for those souls who were not.

The Internet, which had been, only the night before, a battleground of archly, extraordinarily verbose "conservative" disdain of and about us liberal spirits, became a comforting source for the national anguish, horror and anger that was mostly felt on the night of Sept. 11, 2001, and thereafter by mostly us Americans and me in particular.

\* \* \*

**Shelley Wright, Tonawanda, NY (30)**

I was at work and, for probably the only day of the year, I didn't turn on the radio. My boyfriend sent an instant message saying a plane had hit one of the towers. At first we thought it was a small plane. I scrambled to turn on the radio and heard that the second one had hit. We knew at that moment that it was no accident. Then a plane went down. What was happening? Who was doing this? When the first tower collapsed, we decided to go home. When the second one collapsed, so did I.

That moment, my life changed forever. Although I knew no one personally in the buildings or on the planes, I felt them in my heart. My son is training to be a firefighter and was thinking about going to New York City. He said, "Mom, they really need me now." Knowing all those firefighters were running in while thousands of others were trying to run out was devastating. It was the most helpless feeling I have ever felt.

I have a firefighter friend who went to Ground Zero and attended three funerals in one day, and when he came home, he wasn't the same. At first, I was angry and wondered, how could God let this happen? Then it occurred to me that he was there holding up the buildings to let thousands out and kept a minimal number of people on the planes and chose his passengers carefully. He prevented others, one way or another, from getting to work that day. He chose Father Mychal to assist him with the thousands going to heaven. The sons, daughters, nothers, fathers, firefighters, EMTs, police officers and Port Authority workers, and especially those who waited for a rescue that never came, are in my nightly prayers, and they will never be forgotten. God bless America!

\* \* \*

**Gretchen Jones, Oakland, CA (31)**

On Sept. 11, 2001 at 5:45 am, I was at the Oakland International Airport, having just arrived for a trip to my former employer's L.A. offices. I had gone through security and had just settled into a chair with my boarding pass. After waiting for 15 or so minutes, I realized that people were coming off aircraft in large numbers, but no one was going on to the planes.

Bored, I turned on my Walkman, but when I could find no music (all the DJs were talking about something happening in New York), I turned it off -- I have a fear of flying and did not want to hear anything negative before boarding the plane.

Two businessmen sat across from me, upset over the delays and confused when I mentioned hearing that something was happening in NYC.

Fifteen minutes after this, an airport supervisor jumped onto a chair and announced that due to events in New York City and Washington, D.C., all flights were suspended. In a very surprisingly orderly fashion, we lined up to turn in our boarding passes, and I left the airport to go back to BART and then to the office. I still had little idea of the severity of what occurred and heard the first "real" details of the events through the BART driver, who provided frequent updates on the way back to San Francisco.

Not knowing what else to do, I returned to my office in San Francisco, where I huddled with my co-workers around a radio and received e-mail confirmations from my New York friends that they were okay (getting a phone line was impossible). Eventually, our CEO made the announcement that everyone needed to leave the office, and I was dropped off at my apartment by a co-worker. My memories of the rest of the day are of CNN reports and telephone calls -- all a bit surreal-feeling.

\* \* \*

**Amy Shoffner, Pleasant Hill, CA (32)**

I didn't hear about the attacks until I was on the way to work at about 8 am. As I was on the way to BART, I turned on the radio and caught some of the news. It was a bit difficult to tell what had happened, but I gathered that a plane had crashed into the WTC.

I immediately called up a friend (and former boss from American Express Bank in Germany) who was working in WTC building #7. I wasn't able to get her on her cell phone, so I called up her former manager in Frankfurt to see whether he had any news about AmEx's New York City office. Unfortunately, he hadn't.

After I got into San Francisco, we were told to go back home because there were some question as to the whereabouts of the fourth hijacked plane. I sat at home with a friend all afternoon, watching all the developments and trying to reach my friend on her cell.

Eventually, I was able to get through to her at 4 pm. I have never been so happy and relieved to hear her voice! She gave me the names of several people to call to let them know that she was okay, because cell-phone coverage was so sporadic out of Manhattan.

So many people have been touched by the events of 9/11. I consider myself lucky that none of my loved ones lost their lives on that day, and my heart goes out to those who weren't as lucky as I was.

\* \* \*

**Vanessa Henry, Redding, CA (33)**

I was spending a relaxing moment with traveling family in Redding when my cousin LeeAnne came in, yelling that what she heard reported was that the Pentagon, and Twin Towers and the White House were destroyed and gone! After my cousin told me what she had heard, I told her that what she said was not funny, but the look on her face told me she wasn't joking. I am just glad that my niece and nephew, who were watching the TV were only 1 and 2 years old.

The truth of the matter at the time was that only the first tower had been hit and that the Pentagon had also been hit. We saw on CNN when the second tower was hit (granted, this could have been footage), and much later, we heard that the plane that was thought to be heading toward the White house had crashed in a Pennsylvania field.

My parents live in Las Vegas, and I live here in San Francisco, but members of my family were in the area of Ground Zero, within a mile of the World Trade Center, and I am glad they were late leaving the house. They were supposed to be in the tower where the second plane hit. The Goddess smiled on them; I wish she had done so on the rest of those inside and on those on the ground.

Donald Lee, San Ramon, CA

Unlike most others who were home sleeping when the attacks occurred, I was on BART on the way to work in San Ramon.

At the time of the first attack (around 5:45 am PST), I was about 15 minutes away from my destination, Walnut Creek. At the time of the second attack (around 9 am), I had just gotten off the train to catch my connecting shuttle.

I arrived at my office around 6:30 am and got the first word of the attacks from my co-worker, who said a plane had hit the World Trade Center. My first reaction was rather subdued, as I thought it was a small plane and that it was an acccident.

But I soon figured out it was serious when I tried to access CNN.com and a few other news sites to get more news and I could not.

My first full confirmation of the attacks were from my friend in Boston, who informed me via Yahoo Instant Messenger. The rest of the day was spent in a daze as we tracked the happenings from the Internet.

\* \* \*

**Shannon, Antioch, CA (34)**

I was at home asleep and my mom called me. I had the unwanted task of telling my roommate what was going on. Her (now) husband is in the army, so I knew it would have an impact on him. I sent my child to school but did not feel good about it, then went to work myself and worried about her and my best friend, because he works in downtown San Francisco and I had a bad feeling that something was going to happen there.

After I went home just an hour after getting to work and picking up my daughter, I called him over and over and did not hear from him till 10:30 that night. Even though nothing had happened in San Francisco, I worried all day about him.

After 9/11 I made a lot of changes, the most important one being that I moved away from California to a place that would allow me to spend more time at home, something I was not able to do in California because of the high cost of living, etc.

\* \* \*

**Joseph Rys, Oakland, CA (35)**

I was listening to the radio, and they broke in with an important story about the World Trade Center being hit by an airplane. So I turned on the TV, and they then said that another plane had hit another World Trade Center building.

That was becoming uncomfortable and outright scary for me. I was watching it on TV while preparing for work. Then they said that the Pentagon had also been hit by an airplane, and I couldn't stand it anymore, so I shut it off and took a shower, hoping that it was all just a horrible dream. Unfortunately, as we all discovered later on, it wasn't.

\* \* \*

**Gwendolyn, Castro Valley, CA (36)**

I was at home working on some volunteer projects before I went to work. I had the radio on in the bathroom to get the traffic report when I caught the end of something terrible happening. I thought it had to do with the freeways backing up or something like that. I turn on the TV and discovered what had happened.

Sept. 11 is my birthday, and until the time I had to leave for work, I sat in front of the TV, not believing what I was seeing. I just sat and thought, "How could humans to this to other humans?" My birthdays will never be the same again, just as the United States will never be the same.

\* \* \*

**Shannon Schwartz, Mountain View, CA (37)**

As was my normal routine, I was working out at the gym after 5:30 am on 9/11. What was not my normal routine was to take my headset radio with me, but for some reason that day, I did.

I was listening to news radio when they announced there had been an explosion at the World Trade Center. I was only slightly alarmed at this, but I went into the cardio room (which has TV sets) just to see whether there were pictures. Soon there were, of course, but the details were still sketchy. As I stood there watching, interested and slightly puzzled as others continued on the treadmills and elliptical machines, I witnessed the second plane live as it happened.

I then became horrified, yet it was calm and eerie looking around and seeing most of those around me just continuing with their workouts (as most of them did not have radios and were't fully aware of what was happening). I rushed home to alert my partner before he left for work. I still got ready for work and boarded Caltrain, and again it was unusual in that many of my fellow commuters were completely unaware of what was going on as I heard on my radio that the towers were collapsing.

I got to the City as all the office buildings were being evacuated and everyone was heading home, so I had to turn around and head home in the unusual 9 am reverse commute.

I spent the day at home alone, except for a shopping trip to Target. I didn't really need to buy anything, but I was thankful that it was open, and it was comforting to be around other people for a while that afternoon.

\* \* \*

**Greg Hardy, San Francisco, CA (38)**

I was driving across the San Francisco Bay Bridge to my employeer, United Airlines. I was listening to the local radio station when they announced that there was a large aircraft that had just plowed into one of the twin towers in New York City. They were not sure which airline it was on. At first they were saying it was an American aircraft.

By the time I got to the airport, I heard that American Airlines and United Airlines were both involved. On the employee-bus ride into the airport, I remember shedding a few tears, but they weren't tears of sadness; they were tears of anger.

\* \* \*

**Jane, San Francisco, CA (39)**

I woke up that morning at 7 am. As I was getting dressed, I turned on NPR as usual and only half listened to the voices talking. I was thinking about the meeting I had to get to at 9:30, feeding my cat, etc. Then something kind of tugged on my ear from the radio. "We don't know what the full effects of this attack will be for quite some time," said the voice. The interviewer continued in a banal way, discussing terrorism generally, as those words stayed in my mind: "this attack." What attack?

So I slowly walked to the living room, sat down on the couch and turned on the television. The screen was a chaotic blur of words and graphics and pictures, and right in the middle, the World Trade Center in flames. I just stared, my mouth hanging open like an idiot. It didn't make any sense yet, but the images repeated on a loop, and the story pieced itself together. The towers fell down. I felt very sick. "Oh, no," I said. I shouted across the quiet house for my boyfriend to "get up and get in here right now!"

Like everyone else, we watched TV for about five hours. Then I had to stop. I went down to the Mission to see a friend and sit in Dolores Park. The people on the Muni train were absolutely silent. We got something to eat and sat on the grass. The park was full of people; everyone had the day off. I looked up in the sky. It was an empty and silent blue canvas for the first time in probably 50 years.

As I lay in bed that night, my mind was overtaken, imagining the people on those airplanes. In the morning, I woke up and lay there, hoping that the previous day had been a nightmare, and that it hadn't happened at all.

I've never been to New York City. I am going for the first time this October.

\* \* \*

**Renee, Redwood City, CA (40)**

I was just waking up. My alarm went off, and the usually loud and raunchy shock jocks were somber and quiet. I knew something was wrong. I put on the news and watched in horror and disbelief. I woke up my family, and we all gathered on the edge of the bed to watch. On the way to work, it was quiet, and people had glazed-over looks on their faces. On the radio, the DJ cried as the tower collapsed. At work, we all walked around like zombies. The hardest part was explaining it to my 6- year-old daughter. How do you explain hate?

God bless America.

\* \* \*

**Caroline Posynick, Alameda, CA (41)**

Our family was just getting back into the back-at-school routine. The boy had started preschool a week before, and the girl was beginning first grade. I was a stay-at- home mom, but my husband did (and still does) a lot of the breakfasts and, therefore, I have time to get ready for the day while the kids eat.

That morning, I ran upstairs for my shower. Right afterward, as I toweled my hair, I snuck a moment to check out (you guessed it) SFGate.com. I get chills remembering the downloading image of the first tower burning and thinking, "Hmmm, must be the anniversary of the 1993 WTO bombing." Then I looked closer.

I turned on the TV and ran downstairs to tell my ever-attentive husband that something awful had just happened. In an instant, an image, our world changed.

Of course, a lot of other shocks continued that day. Talking to other parents, we wondered what we should tell our children. (We had watched the second tower fall "live" on television; what more could we say?) But the first place that told me was here, online. That first burning image, that first double look and disbelief. I only wish we didn't have an anniversary photo to look at this year. Or maybe I just hope that we never have that awful sinking feeling again.

\* \* \*

**Purisima Macaspac, Daly City, CA (42)**

I was at my sister's house. The TV was on all the time, but the volume was low and I did not bother to look at it. I was too preoccupied with my kid, who was about to go to school. When I was done, I picked up my baby nephew and approached the TV set to change the channel. (I couln't find the remote.) What I saw (an image of the WTC on fire with the caption "America Under Attack!") made me hug the baby tighter and utter, "My God! My God!" For a couple of minutes, these were the only words that came out of my lips. I could not believe that what I was seeing could happen in America.

\* \* \*

**Alex Taylor, San Francisco, CA (43)**

I got a phone call from my girlfriend at 7 am. I woke up in a peaceful world, and the first sentence she spoke included the words "terrorists," "planes," "World Trade Center" and "Pentagon." I couldn't really understand these words all together until I turned on the TV. When I saw what was happening, I went to the front window to take inventory of our skyline. The BofA building and the Transamerica were still intact, so I figured it was safe to continue watching television, which I did for the next six hours.

\* \* \*

**Jim Smith, (44)**

driving to work on I-880 from Fremont to Sunnyvale, CA

Tuesday morning, Sept. 11, 2002. Get in my car at 6:15, turn on KCBS, like every other morning. Get about two blocks away and realize something incredible is happening. Turn around, go home, pick up my 3-inch TV set, wake my wife with the news that a jet has hit one of the Trade Center towers. Merging onto I-880, I notice something very strange. Everyone, trapped in their little boxes, looking at their radios in utter disbelief. No one is paying attention to the traffic. Then the news of a second jet, hitting the other tower. More disbelief. Then unconfirmed reports about the Pentagon being hit. Everyone driving around me seems to be in a daze. How many more jets and/or bombs do these SOBs have?

The reports are becoming more nightmarish by the minute. Suddenly, I get this panicky feeling that World War II is about to break out, and here all of us are, stuck in traffic. I have never felt more unsure of my perception of reality in my life.

Nothing seemed real, and nothing else seemed to matter. I was becoming numb, conscious of facts yet unable to emotionally accept this new reality. It seemed that everything was awry. My need to talk to someone was almost overwhelming.

A quick phone call on the cell to my brother in Louisiana helped to momentarily normalize my senses, until he said, "Bro, I think this could be the beginning of the end." I say a quick prayer that it won't be true. I finally get to my office, and my employees are crowded around the television set, incredulous. It was then that the toll in human life began to emotionally affect me.

For the next week, I found it virtually impossible not to think of all of those who lost their lives in this tragedy. May God grant peace and serenity to their families. May God rest their souls.

\* \* \*

**Stan, Reno, NV (45)**

I was at a family gathering. We turned on the TV after the first tower collapsed. We were confused by the mix of live and taped footage. The tone of the news people did not help the understanding of the situation. When there was a long shot, I tried to remember my trip to New York years ago. The reality was so incredible that it took a half-hour or so to sink in. We watched a couple of hours, the dressed and went to breakfast, thankful we were together.

**Pete A., San Francisco, CA (46)**

I was on a conference call for work, and it was organized for U.S. and European attendees, so it started at 5:00 am PST. Someone from New York who called in from home told us about the attacks, and we had to take a break so everyone could turn on the TV. Funny thing was, the East Coast participants voted to continue with the call (scheduled to go four-plus hrs), whereas the Europeans said no. Eventually the Europeans dropped off, and most stopped listening, so it had to be called off for the day.

The most unfortunate thing is, I found out a few hours later that we were directly affected by it. I will never forget my reaction; it was shocking to begin with but numbing when I found out someone we knew was killed due to this senseless act.

\* \* \*

**Diane H. Johnson, Reno, NV (47)**

My husband and I went to Lake Tahoe on Sept. 9 for a few days. We stayed at our usual hangout, Harvey's. We had such a good time! We ran into friends we hadn't seen for quite a while, and the party was on.

On the morning of Sept. 11 we awoke rather late, as we were up late the night before. I remember my husband was up first, and, as usual, he turned the TV on to check the stock reports. When I glanced at the TV and saw a picture of smoke, I said "What happened? Did we have an earthquake or something?" My husband said, "They think an airplane hit one of the towers at the World Trade Center in New York, but they're not sure if it was an accident." I jumped out of bed and said, "Oh, you mean it was an airliner with lots of people on it? Oh, those poor people!"

About then as we were staring at this horrific scene, the second plane hit the other tower right before our eyes! I said, "Oh, those bastards!" We now knew this was no accident. For the next few minutes, we watched the drama unfold as the towers collapsed one by one, unbelievable to our eyes. All the reports of other crashes and all the evil events taking place within minutes was shocking.

We hurriedly got dressed and went down to the Casino main bar, where it was eerily quiet, with all TV sets on this horrific scene. As people approached and asked what was going on, the story was told over and over about what we witnessed as we all sat there, helpless in disbelief. We decided to cut our trip short and get home to be with our loved ones. We knew our world was never going to be the same again. We will visit Tahoe on this tragic anniversary and pray for all our fellow Americans who lost their lives that fateful day.

\* \* \*

**Lucia, San Francisco, CA (48)**

I was at home with my two young children, who were getting ready for school. I made breakfast for them, crawled back into bed and clicked the remote to a local channel. The shocking pictures were all-too-real, and then the two boys jumped on the bed. They saw me looking dumbfounded at the TV and took interest. After a few minutes, my 5- year-old, Marcello, asked, "Is Joaquin OK?" Joaquin is his friend who lives in New York. We got on the phone and dialed Joaquin's number. His mother answered! He was okay. After a while, the news reported that local schools would be closed, so getting dressed further was out of the question. We all stayed in bed and hugged for most of the day.

\* \* \*

**Michael, London, England (49)**

I was on a return flight from London to SFO. We had left London about five hours before the first attack, so I had absolutely no idea what had happened. About halfway across Canada, the pilot came on the intercom and told us that we would be making an emergency landing in Alberta.

There was no explanation. I was a little perplexed. I thought perhaps we had to pick up someone important. It never occurred to me that there might even be something wrong with the plane itself, and thankfully there wasn't.

After we landed, the pilot came back on and told us all that four civil aircraft had crashed on the East Coast that morning and that U.S. airspace was closed until further notice. He gave us no specific details.

About six other planes were diverted to the Edmonton airport, and all the passengers were shipped into Edmonton for the night, and I was able to see the events of that morning for the first time on CNN. I couldn't believe my eyes. I started crying at the thought of all of the lives snuffed out so quickly and so violently -- and so pointlessly. The next day, my flight, and all its passengers, luggage and crew, was being recalled to its point of origin, London. I could have tried to get a rental car from Edmonton to San Francisco, but I wouldn't have my luggage until who knew when, so I opted for the return flight. It's funny what priorities we put on things in times of stress.

I was stranded in London for the next four days, waiting for the airspace to reopen and for the first flight to take me back to the States. It was a horrible experience for me to be so far away from my friends and family, in a foreign, albeit sympathetic, country. I felt so helpless and powerless. I was treated well by the airline and the hotels in London when I was there, and for that I am grateful.

On an up note, when we did finally return to U.S. airspace, our pilot flew directly over the Golden Gate Bridge upon returning to the Bay Area. It was a beautiful. sunny day when I returned. I had never seen the bridge from that perspective, and it felt great to be home again. I wasn't directly affected by the attacks and didn't know anyone who was.

\* \* \*

**Mary Maas, New York, NY (50)**

Living about a mile from the WTC, I was just outside the entrance to the subway when I heard the first plane hit -- a thundering boom, like an explosion or fireworks. Around me, several people looked up and I heard mutters of "Oh, my God, oh, my God" in utter disbelief. I looked up but didn't see anything unusual in my immediate view.

I got on the subway as usual, hoping I wouldn't be too late for work, yet I couldn't avoid this horrifying feeling. My 20- minute ride on the subway was spent feeling anxious and nervous, scared and worried. I got off the subway at Fifth Avenue, four blocks from my office. Around me, I heard pieces of conversation -- "A plane crashed into it" "A small plane?" "Was it an accident?" "They don't know."

I saw people turning around and looking down 5th Avenue, so I did the same, to see a giant column of black smoke rising. I began walking quickly, anxious to get to work and find out what had happened. Finally arriving, I called my parents in Mendocino County, waking them up. "Turn on the TV." "What?" "Turn on the TV now. Some planes crashed into the World Trade Center" "What? Are you serious?" By this time, we could no longer get to any Web sites to get further information, and no more calls could be made.

Around 10:30 am, we were told to go home immediately. My co-worker, nearly eight months pregnant at the time, and I walked across the street to the CBS studios, where they were playing the news over the loudspeakers and on several televisions. The plaza was full of people watching the news in silence. Occasionally, a plane would fly by overhead, and everyone would look up in terror. Suddenly, my office building looked like a huge target, the tallest building in a five-block radius.

As I walked home, I passed hospitals with dozens of gurneys lined up, ready to take in injuries or casualties, dozens of people ready to give blood or to find out whether their loved ones were there. As I got closer to my apartment, I began to see people walking by wearing business suits covered in dust, wearing dust masks. About four blocks from my apartment, I was asked for my ID to enter the blocked-off zone that my neighborhood had become.

While I alternately watched the news and looked out my window to watch a stream of thousands walk across the Manhattan Bridge back to their homes in Brooklyn, I dialed the phone over and over again, only to receive an error message each time, trying to reach loved ones in California to let them know I was okay; trying to reach loved ones in New York to make sure they were okay.

For the month following, as I exited the subway each day after work to an acrid smell of metal burning and smoke billowing, streets and lampposts covered with flyers and photos of missing persons, I would pass trucks that hurried up and down streets, closed indefinitel,y to unload their burden of debris and return for the same heartbreaking journey -- a daily reminder of what had occurred just a mile away.

\* \* \*