

## Where I Was on 9/11/2001

by Sam Seabright

*Everyone who is old enough remembers exactly what they were doing during the assassination of John F. Kennedy.*

*The same is true of 9/11; this is my story, but it is also about a colleague and friend of mine, Walter Edmonds. We were often speakers at seminars and conferences—but not this one on 9/11.*

Early up, I made the short drive to the Hilton hotel in Troy, Michigan for an all-day seminar about an overview of emergency response actions to terrorism: profiling suspects, security options, preventive measures and emergency response planning. The primary examples were the Oklahoma City bombing and the post office shootings.

Part of the seminar concerned the hazards of radiation. The primary example was cleaning and maintenance of the microwave antenna atop the North Tower of the World Trade Center in New York. All these subjects would come to life later in the day and again, with much greater detail, through the following decade.

During our morning coffee break, most of us wandered into the hotel lobby where a large-screen TV was blaring. What we saw shocked us.

At first, we thought it was some weird continuation of the seminars, done with special effects. A few people left but several of us were intrigued with how *real* it appeared. The infamous 1938 radio broadcast by Orson Welles, *War of the Worlds*, came to mind.

Most of our group missed part of the seminar to watch the TV reports. The North Tower burned while the TV showed the scene and reporters gave excited comments, updates, rumors and speculations. Occupants above the 44<sup>th</sup> floor were trapped.

Then another jet crashed into the adjacent South Tower, with similar results. In the next minutes, first the South Tower and then the North Tower collapsed because the structures were severely weakened by the burning jet fuel. Also, the Pentagon crash and the plane down over Pennsylvania were reported. All of us watched in stunned silence.

The next day, more details surfaced. I learned that the Marsh & McLennan Engineering offices were on floors 45 to 47 of the North Tower. It crossed my mind that Walt worked there. So I tried to call him at his home. No answer.



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I tried again a few days later and his wife answered. (Just how do you ask a woman if her husband is alive or dead?) I told her who I was. She said, “Walt’s right here.”

Walt told me it was the luckiest day of his life. He was stuck in traffic, fuming in frustration, on the Narrows Bridge from New Jersey, and very late for a meeting. He saw the whole event from the bridge.

For the next several years, the day 9-11-2001 brought special meaning, memories, and strengthened friendships. Walt and I sometimes dined together—once he even took my wife Brenda and me out to dinner at a nice French restaurant. I bought tickets for him and his son to see the last baseball game at Tiger Stadium. He had a good sense of humor and we often joked with each other.

We collaborated on a project to create a corporate Emergency Response Plan that touched on several seminar topics and the 9-11 events, and we became involved in radiation safety and fire protection at our global plants. Walt and I were speakers at environmental and safety conferences, often focusing on catastrophes or terrorism.

Many times, I have referred back to the seminar and events of 9-11. It is something I will never forget. ▼