

SEPTEMBER 11TH

September 11th impacted people all over the world and really made many people reassess their priorities in life. September 11th was already personally a day of dread since it was the day my Father died. Every year I felt like I re-lived that dreaded day. 9/11/2001 was the first year I did not think about my Father's death until much later in the day.

On September 11th, I was in Montreal for a conference I was co-hosting for Star Alliance airline partners. My husband and I had flown in early to make a long weekend get-away. It was simply a perfect weekend. The weather was fantastic so we visited the botanical gardens. We also ate amazing food, and I said that weekend, "If I had to do another career, I would absolutely go to culinary school". My husband laughed and said, "ok- but how will you fly coach again?". Thank goodness he flew home that Monday morning to pick up the kids from the Grandparents!

It was such a beautiful Tuesday morning in Montreal. I distinctly remember so many odd things about that day. The light was so pretty and the hotel we were at had lovely planters. I wished I hadn't packed my camera already so I could take a few more pictures.

I and my colleague, Neil King, were waiting outside our hotel for our friend from Air Canada, Patty White. Patty had offered to pick us up and drive us to Air Canada's headquarters for our meetings that day. As we got into Patty's car she said, "Guys, there was an incident in the US- a small plane, it appears to be sabotage". (Any type of accident, crash, etc. in the airline industry is usually referred to as an "incident"). Neil and I peppered her with questions, she said it "appeared" a plane had crashed into a building in New York on purpose but she wasn't sure exactly where and/or what the damage was. I remember chills on my neck- how awful. Were people hurt in the building, on the ground? Patty said we would find out more once we got to headquarters as there were large TV's right in the front of the building.

As we walked into the Air Canada building, the TVs were now a live feed. We watched as the 2nd plane, UAL #175, dissolved into the World Trade Center. That image was difficult to get out my mind for many years. I still haven't watched any documentaries or movies about that day. I try and then I have to turn it off. I

immediately felt sick. Truly thought I was going to throw up or pass out. The entire large open area went completely silent. Many of us started to silently cry. Patty grabbed my hand and said, "oh no, I'm so sorry, I'm so so sorry". "let's get you guys upstairs".

I didn't really cry until we got upstairs and into a conference room. The news started to come in fast and furious. The 1st plane was an American Airlines plane, also destroyed. The twin towers were both on fire, FULL GROUND STOP IMMEDIATELY FOR ALL NORTH AMERICAN FLIGHTS. Wow.

The first few hours were so surreal. I was able to reach my husband right away and he was relieved because airline employees are notorious for finding alternative flights/routes whenever or wherever we needed. While he really didn't think I was on either of the planes, he knew YUL-NYC-ORD was a real possibility for me if needed. I was on the phone with him when the twin towers collapsed. "What do you mean they collapsed? What does that mean??? They got everybody out, right?" He was completely silent and just let me cry. That's the point when I said "That's it- we're leaving the US. If everyone hates us, let's get out. New Zealand, Australia? Where do you want to go?"

Flights started to land at YUL (Montreal) very quickly. So many airplane tails I had never seen before. Neil was torn, he was a complete airplane nerd and was really geeking out watching all the planes, but it was such a terrible situation. All planes landed had to be searched and the nightmare of processing all those passengers had begun. I went into OCD mode. I don't say that lightly- I am actually diagnosed with OCD. When stressful things out of my control happen, I go into control freak mode and try to focus on what I CAN control. I immediately called the hotel we had just checked out of and booked as many rooms as possible. Thank goodness I had a company AMEX card at this time! There were over 20 of us that needed places to stay, I was only able to book a few rooms as the hotel was fielding a lot of phone calls. Since I was co-hosting this meeting, I was a mother hen, worrying about how to accommodate everyone. Funny how hospitality is at my core. Patty saw how stressed I was and asked me to come outside the conference room for a minute. Everyone in the scheduling department at Air Canada had lined up for us to tell us that whatever we needed, they were there for us. People offered extra bedrooms, dinner at their homes, extra clothes

or washing machines if we needed them. It was truly one of the most touching moments I had in the industry. 20 years later, I still get choked up thinking about that moment. I made sure each of my United co-workers had a room and then we started pairing people up as roomies. We gave priority to those stuck from other countries as driving home wasn't an option. I also started calling car rental places. Those phone lines were also jammed. Many people thought it would all be fine in a few hours, they would search all planes, the ground stop would be lifted, etc. We were all flying on business, so we had priority boarding over regular non-revenue employees. But, as a former inventory management planner, I knew there was NO WAY any of us were going to be able to get on airplane for days. I grabbed my purse and said, "Neil- let's go for a walk down to Hertz!". That was one of the best moves we made. I was able to book a car for pick up the next day. We got one of the last reservations available. In the meantime, others from airlines in other countries were truly stuck as driving home wasn't an option. We watched in absolute disbelief as our friend from Ansett Australia Airlines was told his company credit card no longer worked and his airline had ceased all operations immediately. My boss and I worked on our contacts to get him a flight home as soon as United was able to continue operations. Ansett filed for bankruptcy shortly after that day. He was never reimbursed for any of his expenses on that trip, but we felt good knowing we helped him get home.

An incident like this was one of my worst fears. Over the years, I had been on 3 flights that had "incidents" and it was an incredibly helpless and scary situation each time. Losing my Dad so young, having kids, and learning more about the little details of the industry; dying in a plane crash became a real fear of mine. When I first started at United, I was in cargo. In 1989, I worked the days of 2 different incidents, United flight #811 (explosion that sucked passengers out of the plane) and United flight #232 (Sioux City crash). Both times either myself or a close friend knew someone on one of the flights. At that time, when an incident happened, Cargo became one of the command centers. We handled locking down the passenger manifests and...human remains (HR). I will never, ever forget flight #232. I had called my Mom after the incident to say that I offered to stay for overtime and help with phones. My Mom was pretty shaken up; she had received a phone call from her old boss's wife. The wife had not heard from her husband and she was certain he was on that flight. She remembered that I worked at

UAL and was hoping my Mom could help her as all the reservation lines were jammed with phone calls. I will never forget watching his name be written on the whiteboard as an identified HR.

After cargo and before international scheduling, I worked in Inventory Management for United for many years. Yes- the hated department that oversells the airplanes. In Inventory, we received daily printed operational reports (DOR). They were helpful for times when we weren't sure why seats were cancelled or not available or a flight went out with a much different passenger load than expected. Reading those every day for so many years- there is a LOT of things that happen every day in the industry that thankfully don't make it to the news. Most would say that's great that so many little things get resolved before it becomes a bigger issue. Over time, I unfortunately read them as everything that could potentially go wrong.