



Having been invited by the September 11 Digital Archive staff to submit a five-year retrospective story of the attacks, and recall in writing for a second time where I was that day, I found new meaning in the small details. I have come to view 9/11/2001 as the day I escaped a fiery fate purely as a matter of chance and for no reason other than the time I chose for my American Airlines flight to California.

The Boston skyline was unusually clear and defined that day. My son, Erik Silvestri, drove me to Logan Airport for my early morning trip to join my husband, Mark. My son walked me to the gateway, gave me a kiss, hug and a wave. I found my seat. The attendant made an announcement about seat belts. A few minutes later, I looked up as she made her way to my seat and handed me my black leather jacket. "Your son said you almost forgot your jacket," the woman said with a smile.

Now it seems incredible that just before my plane was towed out to the tarmac, my son was allowed to pass through security with no boarding pass. He was able to walk down the gateway to my plane, right up to the door, and hand over my coat which was in turn brought to me by a friendly attendant. "I'll bet that was just about the last time that kind of thing happened in America," my husband says.

That "last time thing" was soon followed by a "first time thing." While we were waiting to take off, the pilot announced that we would be delayed. He did not say why. Then he made another cryptic announcement. "There has been a national grounding of planes. You will have to de-plane, but you will not be allowed to leave the terminal." That was all he said.

I looked at the woman sitting beside me. "What the heck is a national grounding of planes? I never heard of that before," I said. She reached in her purse, took out her cell phone she had been told previously to turn off, gave a quick look around and then called her husband who was watching CNN. I thusly got more information from a stranger than I did from the pilot of the airplane in which I was sitting at the airport from which two planes had just been hijacked.

When I got off the plane, the airport looked altogether different. The place was packed with people, most trying without success to use cell phones. I tried a pay phone but there was no outside line. In the distance at the security scanners, I saw a line of state troopers and canines. I noticed that a huge line had formed outside the bar where there are usually few customers at that hour of the morning. Everyone was craning to watch CNN as the carnage was televised.

Suddenly, I realized that my two youngest children might be watching the same broadcast in school. I knew they were not likely to remember my American Airlines flight number so they would have no way of knowing if my plane was one of the ones hijacked. An ice-cold feeling spread throughout my body as I contemplated their fear. I was frantic to find a phone. As I was looking for a booth, and to utter amazement, I saw my son Erik. He never left the airport because he decided to wait until my plane actually

took off. I asked Erik to help me try to reach his siblings. We never got through. Someone photographed my son as he, like thousands of others, tried to reach other family members. The picture was published in a newspaper the next day. Clearly, no one anticipated that all those phones would be completely useless.

While we were still at the airport, riding down an escalator, we heard someone say, "A plane just hit the Pentagon." It seemed inconceivable to me that the very symbol of our military might could be vulnerable. I wondered if it could get much worse. It could and it did. Shortly after that, the fourth plane crashed in Shanksville, Pennsylvania, about twenty miles from the home of my nephew. It was his birthday.

Eventually, Logan airport was evacuated. Ill at the time, it took me forever to get from one place to the next so we were among the last people to leave Logan. When my son reached the toll booths, there were no cars traveling inbound. There was no one manning the booths. Oddest of all, there was not one plane in the air.

As it happened, Avon Public School students were aware of the coverage on CNN and so my children, Heather and Adam, knew that two planes from Logan had crashed into the twin towers. It was several hours before my oldest daughter, Carrie, could confirm, and then tell them, I was not on either plane. When I finally saw them, we all wept, hugged, kissed and wept some more. At that moment, and countless times since, I thought about the children whose parents did not come home. It's still unbearable.

Since that day, I've read countless articles on the subject and watched every documentary and movie that's come to my attention. I've discussed the events with others many times, hearing arguments about whether or not Americans are more secure today, whether or not Americans can win a war on terror, whether or not Americans are truly hated by a sizable percentage of people on the planet. After all of this, I haven't found any solid answers. As to personal safety, I've resolved to develop my own survival plans on an as-needed basis. I've concluded that the only one truly looking out for me is myself.

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