

9/12/01

Wednesday. 7:30 am. Oksana, a friend and co-worker, calls and wakes me out of a deep sleep. Asks if I'm going to work.

"No," I reply, "I already listened to yesterday's corporate broadcast message."

"There's a new one," she says.

"No, I'm not going." I'm sure I sound cranky to her. The connection begins to sputter and the phone goes dead.

I call the office voice mail system. The new broadcast message is more definitive. The office is closed. No mention of "use your discretion." Closed.

I get up, turn on the radio. So much for my Luddite tendencies. No TV. No cell phone. Dammit. I go downstairs. Pick up two NY Posts. For posterity, I think. No other paper is out yet. Not even the New York Times.

The headline reads: **ACT OF WAR**
World Trade Center destroyed; many dead

The paper is gruesome, ghastly and I find it hard to turn away from the pages. The front cover features a picture of the World Trade Center as the second plane is hitting the building. It's hard to hold back the gasps, the tears. I shove the paper aside. Check my e-mails. Friends around the world are e-mailing me. People I haven't been in touch with for years check in. An old boyfriend from Australia has called a mutual friend in London to track me down. Sends his love.

Even this far uptown, smoke is in the air. Some pedestrians sport face masks, like the ones construction workers use.

Around noon, my friend Jim calls. "Come on over. Keep us company."

I tell them I'll come later. I fall asleep 'til 1:30. Jim calls again and I let the machine run. "We're going to shop for food. Walk with us." I call him back 15 minutes later and then head over to their apartment.

Of course, the TV is on. Tensions are high. Jim, a DEA agent, is waiting for the call to go down to Ground Zero to help out. His fiancé Evelyn is nervous, tells him not to be a superhero. She talks about how people who have waited in line to give blood are just as frustrated. "How can you compare the two?" I ask.

We then proceed to discuss back and forth this issue. I'm finally exasperated and ask her "So, when my brother was sitting in Japan, waiting to be mobilized and

moved to the front during Desert Storm, that's just as frustrating as people at home who feel helpless?" She basically says yes. I finally tell her that I don't want to discuss this any more. But as she moves from room to room, she's still presenting her case. Near tears, I stand up and walk out of the apartment.

The elevator cannot come quickly enough for me. She opens the apartment door: "So, you're just going to walk out?"

"Yes," I murmur and take the stairs.

Walking back to my apartment, cops are everywhere. Sirens blare. Emergency vehicles race past. People sport surgical masks.

I get home. Paula calls from Donegal to check up on me. I check my e-mail. Turn on the radio. Fall back onto the bed for another nap.

At around midnight, I take the elevator to the rooftop. The sky is eerily lit up to the south. Still more sirens. It's unreal.

I check my company's voicemail system. We can report for work on Thursday. By 2 am, I'm fast asleep. Sort of.