

I was in my Time Series Analysis class when the first plane hit the World Trade Center. By the time I arrived at my office, around 10:30 am, Atlantic Daylight Time, all hell had broken loose in New York City, Washington DC and in the air. Rumors were flying and I couldn't confirm anything because the Internet was jammed. Things were moving in slow motion. Moments after a tenth futile try to log on to the New York Times, CNN, Los Angeles Times, even Fox News websites, my new supervisor poked his head into the office to say the South Tower had fallen over. Not down, but over. I couldn't comprehend anything but dozens of buildings shattered and burning in Lower Manhattan – and my brother lost among the ruins. Terrible thoughts of my friends being burned alive or smashed into unrecognizable pieces pulsed through my mind. Everyone in the office knew I had just moved from New York City to Halifax 10 days earlier and that I had connections to the city. Word went out that there was a TV in the workshop on the 2nd floor of the building so an officemate took me down to it. We found about 15 people crammed around a blinking 15-inch screen, complete with multicolored rolling static. I squeezed my way to a dilapidated orange chair with an exposed metal frame near the front. Wet eyes and silence surrounded me. As the North Tower started to collapse, I was overcome with feelings I had never combined before: rage, fear, disbelief, helplessness, paralyzing sadness and pain. Tears dribbled from my eyes and I felt red. Not in the sense of embarrassment but the actual color red permeated me. My head felt larger, my face throbbled, my arms were numb. I watched with unknown millions as the cloudy mass hung in the shape of the North Tower and thought, "It went down like an elevator." One of the secretaries asked me where my brother was and I sputtered out that he has no business in that part of Manhattan but I simply didn't know where he was at the moment. After the first of what would become innumerable replays rolled on the screen, I fled back upstairs where my supervisor let me call my parents to find out about my brother. I reached my mom at work.

And I cried. I didn't know what else to do but cry. She said Peter had called to say he was ok but the New York City phone system was overloaded now and it was impossible to get through. We knew he was safe but for how much longer, well we didn't know. After hanging up the phone and regaining some type of composure, I walked to my office but didn't know what to do. My supervisor told me I could go home if I needed to make calls. I stood outside with an officemate for a while before leaving. I can recall the stillness that seemed to have sucked the air away, like the deep breath before plunging into frigid water. I called my sister when I arrived home and she and her husband were wondering if San Francisco was a target for the unaccounted plane that was heading west from Newark. By this time, I was shaking with anger about the attacks and stammered out, "You better believe that someone's going to pay because you can't attack the nation's largest city and not expect a fucking response." I didn't mean to use such a word while talking to my sister but she let it pass without even a sigh, probably because she sensed and shared my rawness. Soon after we hung up, I went upstairs to watch TV by myself. Strangely, I found myself needing Tom Brokaw of NBC to tell me what was happening, that the world was still in existence and this was some technical problem. My roommate and I didn't have cable though, so I was left with Peter Mansbridge of the CBC to guide me through the day. I noticed how much his voice was like Brokaw's in cadence and tone, even in tenor. I ate some carrots and a small sandwich and started wobbling with confusion. When Mansbridge repeated that the border with the United States was sealed indefinitely, it hit me that I could not go to be with my brother in what may be the most sickening moment of his life. I couldn't get back in my own country! I was stuck in Canada! No one at the border would care that I was from California or that NYC had been my home for a year, ending September 1. I added the vacating feeling of being alone to the blender of my emotional state. I turned the TV off with tears blurring my vision around 1:00

pm. For a little while I just sat in silence on the gray-painted wooden floor. I moved the breadcrumbs in my plate around pensively. I decided that if I can't be there in person to help my country, I could at least send part of me. So I called the Canadian Blood Services and asked if they were open. The woman said they usually closed at 2 pm but today they were staying open later. I drove to the building and was at the front end of a surging line of people trying to do the same thing to help. People spoke softly and there was no laughter. Again, the air was gone. I sat with my own thoughts as the TVs in the waiting area flashed between New York City and Washington. The questions about my sexual history seemed so pedestrian and trivial. Didn't they know what was happening? How can there be any rejection of blood or plasma on this day? But I didn't have the energy to argue. While I was finally in the process of giving my blood, local TV crews came swarming through the area. I didn't hear what anyone was saying but suddenly, cameras were in the faces of people lying prone on beds with plastic tubes warm from their own blood curling to plastic bags on the floor. I called to one reporter

without a camera and asked him what they were doing. He told me they were asking people what they were doing here today and how they felt about the attacks. Next thing I knew, a blazing yellow light was heating up my face and the man asked me where I was from and what I thought of the attacks. His eyebrows ratcheted up as I said, "I'm an American graduate student and I just moved from New York." The people on the beds next to me rolled as best they could to see me. I kept talking, first about the people I



*Heather and me on the top of the WTC, January 2001.*

*A picture I snapped while reporting downtown, April 2001.*

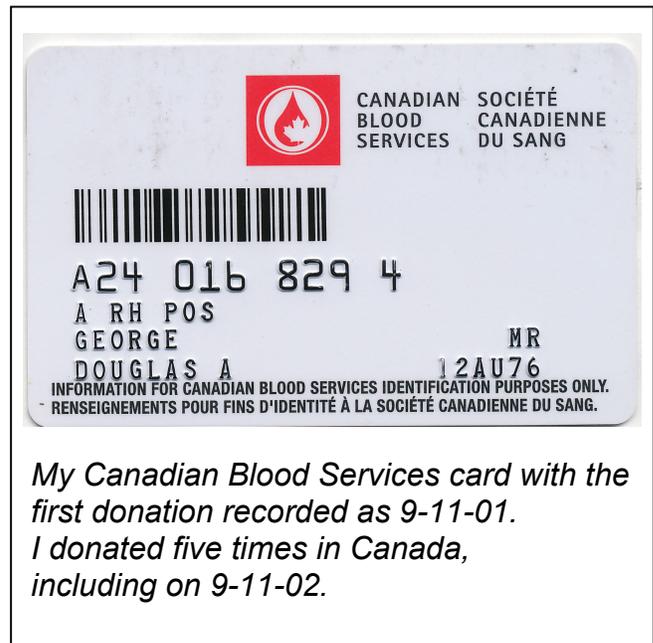
*Winter night's view from the Empire State Building, January, 2001.*



loved there and then how giving blood was the only way I thought would help. Who knows? Perhaps my blood would save one of those people's lives. The light clicked off and the reporter placed his hand on my non-bleeding arm and wished me the best. Apparently, I was the lead on the CTV broadcast for local responses to the attacks but I never actually saw it. I went home and convinced my roommate to volunteer our house for US-bound travelers grounded in Halifax. I called the shelters and drove to the nearest one to register our place. Nevermind that we didn't have a couch or extra pillows. Nevermind that we didn't have carpet on the floors. Nevermind that one of our windows was missing. I wanted to be with my brother and if I couldn't get that, some other American would suffice. I wouldn't care about their politics, morals or music taste; I simply wanted to be with another American experiencing being frozen out of our nation. Unfortunately, when I arrived at the shelter, all 15,000 grounded air travelers had been lodged for the night. I was disappointed. But I had given blood and opened our house, which was all I could do. As the sky began to twilight, I returned home and settled in for a long night. I called people and tried to track others. The intensity of the day ebbed with the sun and

unexpectedly, I found the darkness comforting because I knew that September 11, 2001 was almost over. I dreamed about falling buildings that night and woke up with a wet pillow. At some point, I must have cried in my sleep.

- Doug George, 2004



Sito Helen and I on Ellis Island, May 2001.

