



# Remember Morning

Ours is a tale that has many beginnings, and even as I begin to tell it, I still do not know where it should start. I know only that I hope it is a tale that we shall never see end. When I look back and try to express how I feel, where do I begin? Where do I begin to measure our patriotism? How do I gauge such a thing? Do I begin to measure in the 1700's when my forefathers came to new world from England? Do I imagine what it must have been like to make a supreme sacrifice for my beliefs, just as I imagined during the hours of solitude I spent in a Union Cemetery in downtown Marietta, Georgia a few years back? Do I start by trying to imagine what the Atlantic Crossing was like for our forefathers from Salerno? How did that compare to my great-great grandmother's journey north to California in a covered wagon? Maybe I should start by telling of the smile I remember on my great-great grandmother's face when I was younger. At 90 years, oh the tales she had to tell.

Though the foundations of patriotism are there, is patriotism not lost if it so easily forgotten, or gone out of style from lack of use and remembrance? Much like many of us today, there are so many questions floating around in my mind that I could ask end-on-end for days without repeating a single one.

For us, patriotism owns these long roots back into history. Tales of our family that I was told second-hand laid the foundation. When I look back first-hand, where does patriotism begin? It began in the black-and-white photo of my mother's parents on their wedding day, my grandfather in his dress blue navy uniform. It began with a story my father told me of his father almost falling off a medical chopper after he was wounded in Korea. It began when we watched that same man laid to rest with military honors after cancer got the best of him. It began with stories of my great-uncle's actions as a soldier, though by the time I met him as a child, I first remembered him for his pool table den and the laughter he filled it with. It began at baseball games when we would sing the national anthem and I could never get through the entire thing without shedding at least a hidden tear. It began with the pitcher of beer that my life-long friends and I shared with the Blue Angels at the Miramar Air Show where we accompanied my best friend's father's T-6, a World War II trainer that gave me chills to even look upon, let alone sit in. Knowing that there is a T-6 out there right now with a wing tip that I helped rivet on always fills me with such pride. It began with that same best friend's father's collection of artifacts from World War II, US issue worn by our soldiers, and German and Japanese-issue collected as our boys pushed forward to victory. It began at the Vietnam Memorial during our trip to Washington, D.C. in eighth grade. It began at Arlington Cemetery where we saw the graves of great, courageous Americans. That all leads me to where this should begin.

August 1999, we stood quietly together, looking down at the U.S.S. Arizona. I had long wondered growing up what it would feel like to be there. Once you are there, you know it is impossible to describe how it feels to stand on the memorial, reading the names, looking down at the hull, looking over the harbor, looking up to the sky and towards the sea where the attack was launched. That trip to Hawaii for my 25th birthday definitely gave the roots of patriotism a growth-spurt.

Over the previous years, there was so much to be emotional about. I was on a whale-watching trip in sixth grade the day the Space Shuttle Challenger met its fate. Two years later, I visited the memorial to the astronauts at Arlington. Three years after that, I came home from high school and watched 24-hour coverage of the Gulf War. We all watched Panama, Somalia, Bosnia, Albania, and saw bombings in Oklahoma and New York Cities. We shook inside at the Embassy Bombings and said a silent prayer for the men and women of the U.S.S. Cole. We feared and speculated over Flight 800, and watched mad-men crash planes into the ocean in Africa and even right off the Atlantic Coast. We smiled when we saw Ford, we felt humbled when we buried Nixon, we watched Carter work for peace, we thanked Reagan for working to end the cold war, remembering what it was like to watch the wall come down, all the while, our hearts breaking as we learned from Nancy of the one battle in his life he was losing. We backed George Senior in the war, and hoped with everyone for prosperity when Clinton took office. Some loved and some hated the man through the eight years, while far too many came to not even care at all.



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We marveled, however, whenever anything went wrong, whenever there was a job to be done, despite personal feelings, the country stood behind him. Though they lost the elections, we admired Bob Dole and wondered what President Ross Perot would have been like.

So came 2000 and we went to work on the campaign. We chose our sides and drew the lines, but didn't know that Florida was coming. Here in California, we spoke out on the issues, we let our patriotism guide us. This campaign, we even ended up at a rally in Costa Mesa, where we saw our long-time congressman and friend Dana Rohrabacher run across the stage with a "Bush 2000" surfboard, waiting for Dick Cheney and Colin Powell to speak on their vision of tomorrow's America. Little did we all know on that day what those two men would be doing a year later. We heard out our friends who were backing Gore, but still made it to the Republican victory party where we learned that we would have to wait some time to see who won. We laughed when we were called a "Fat Cat Nation" by our rivals and enjoyed the taunt so much, though we never used the term before, "Fat Cat" is often used by us all now. No matter what we said and no matter how we felt, it was a marvel to watch the machine of democracy, as imperfect as it is admirable, play out over the coming months.

Also in 2000, I sat in a darkened movie theater, the same one we visit at least once a week to relax and spend time together, whether it's a love story with my girlfriend, a horror movie with my brother, an epic with my parents, or a comedy with my friends. It was there for the very first time, we saw a preview for Pearl Harbor. Sure, it was going to be Hollywood, but what it stood for, the tale that it was going to tell, never allowed me, even on a single occasion to watch that damned preview without tears swelling up in my eyes. I remembered being there just a year earlier, the unbelievable silence of it all, while I sat in that theater, noticing how little everyone around me even gave a damn about what story it would tell, talking and laughing, ignoring it all. Was it because it was 60 years ago, or was it just complacency?

I remember the pride I felt, when in early 2001, I saw so many of us, despite how we felt, looking forward not as Democrats or Republicans, but really trying to just be Americans. I remember the shame and disgust I felt when ballots and votes were being scrutinized so closely that a single vote was making such a huge difference amidst reports of the record-breaking amount of the thousands upon thousands of Americans who had chosen to not even vote. When they saw Ben Affleck, when they saw Tom Hanks, when they saw Mel Gibson, they realized not, that though they were actors, they were trying to portray a million Americans who had come and gone, fallen and sacrificed so very much so that we all could live the life that we live.

In February, I lost an uncle and my aunt lost a life-long love. I helped to carry his body in the chilling cold, but once we had said good-bye, I walked my girlfriend and brother over to the Veteran's Memorial at the cemetery, where holding back tears, I led them in saying, "Thank you." It was there that it truly hit me. It was there and then that I began to truly fear what might be coming. After watching the preview for Pearl Harbor, no matter who I was with, the conversation would immediately commence about how ironic I felt it was that the movie was coming out at a time such as it was. As I stood there in the cold wind, I remembered talking to everyone close to me about how I worried about the similarities of these days to those.

In 1941, we had our heads in the sand. We knew there was trouble abroad, but we were doing all that we could to stay out of it. We went here and there and made deals here and there. The enemies of freedom chipped away little by little, but though we shouted at them, in the end, they got to do as they pleased. The average American was much more concerned about their life as a whole and figured that the safety of the nation as a whole was not their responsibility or concern. Though we were still Americans, we grew complacent. Though it can be argued that hind-sight is 20/20, deep in my heart of hearts, the heart that had experienced all of these emotions about our nation, I grew worried that the foresight I was experiencing in 2001 was just as clear.

So, for the remainder of roughly the first three-quarters of 2001, when the conversation turned to politics



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or the state of the nation as it always tends to do, I voiced my concern that we were ripe for attack. You would hear me say with sarcasm, “It’s 2001 and we rule the world. No one can seriously harm us because we are so big and powerful. We’ve hit a few speed bumps, but it’s OK to ignore the warning signs because nothing is going to happen. We can afford to ignore those empty threats and we can afford to let those who have threatened us go un-checked. Just like we felt we could afford to appease Japan and Germany, we do not go after Bin Laden because it will be too hard to get to him. We ignored the blimps on our radar screen on the morning of December 7th just like we wonder if Clinton fired on the pharmaceutical company to draw attention away from what he did in the Oval Office, or if truly, he thought he was going to get Bin Laden...it didn’t really matter, because after all, what could he really do? Hitler was Europe’s problem, and damn it if Bin Laden shouldn’t be someone else’s, too. Yeah, I think they’re lying to us about peace, but we just better wait and see, because you never know, that guy with no flight experience who all of the sudden wants to learn how to fly a jumbo jet as soon as possible may just be doing so on a whim, even though he doesn’t really want to be taught how to take off or land.”

It was this complacency in America that led me to get involved in the 2000 campaign. It was all the heads in the sand that made me want to do something before it was too late. Perhaps I just knew it was time...For twenty-seven years, I lived in the “system” and I was its beneficiary. It was time, I felt, for me to step up and do what I could to do my part.

Well, the election went how it went and I settled in for four years of the administration that I believed in and voted for. As the days of 2001 passed, life continued as normal. My father earned his living by spending his time split between California, New York, Mexico, Pennsylvania, and even sometimes other places as well. Sometimes I find it ironic that I earn my living right here in my very home while he spends so much time away from it. With his travels to New York, my father has made friends there. He lived there for five years some time ago, and I think deep down, has been happy to be back and I am happy that my family has made these new friends. In early September, my father, brother, and mother made a trip to New York together, a trip they make a few times a year now. They came back with the usual stories of good times and travel nightmares, telling me of their friends and friends of friends that they would love for me to someday meet. On this particular trip, my family had dinner with Joe Allen, a close family friend of my dad’s good friend Joey. Upon their return my parents commented on how much Joe, Joey and I had in common, Joe and I because he worked in finance and Joey and I because he loved cars, and in particular, a certain German flavor.

So, this leads us now, to another beginning. On the night of September 10th, I sat down at my desk and read the latest newsletter from “the congressman,” as we’ve come to call him now. I remembered the rally and him running across the stage, having a good time, as I sat and read of the serious business he was working on at hand. Ironic it seems, that as feverishly as I threw myself into the issues, I cannot even remember what the issues in that newsletter were. I had planned on sending an email to the congressman, giving him my views and thanking him again, but I grew kind of tired from having worked most of the night. It was nearing 3:00 in the morning, so I decided to write to the congressman tomorrow. I still have not written that email.

My grandmother has always been an early riser. For as long as I can remember, she woke early, got my grandfather on his way to work, then turned on the news or an exercise program until it was time for her to start her day. I hadn’t been asleep for more than a few hours, when the knock on the door woke me. I opened it to find no one there, but then heard my mother calling from the kitchen. I wonder how long I’ll remember it this vividly. When I walked towards the kitchen, she said, “Grandma just called. A plane hit one of the towers.” Though we don’t live in New York, there’s enough time spent over there that it could have only meant the World Trade Center.

My grandmother’s reaction was the same as mine and that was why she had called. My first thought was



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of my dad and where he was in the world that morning. My grandmother called to make sure he wasn't in New York, but luckily, he had flown out of New York City for Mexico City, then on to Honduras the morning of the 10th. Of course, the "What if's" immediately come to mind. What if he'd been coming home on the morning of the 11th and what if they'd chosen his flight? When my mom first told me, I figured it was a small private plane or something of the sorts that had been in an accident, but once I saw the damage that strike had made, I knew there was no way that was a small plane. That in itself gave me some relief since all of my friends who are pilots still fly nothing larger than a private corporate jet.

Once I knew my dad and my friends were safe, it began to really sink in what had happened. A plane had hit one of the towers. Even after all of the dooms-day worry I had done in the past year, it still didn't click. I moved to our living room, turned on the big TV and watched, waiting to hear how an accident like this could have happened. As I sat there in the first few minutes, my mom came in and asked me if I remembered them talking about Joe Allen. I told her that I did and she then told me that he works in one of the towers, but she wasn't sure which one. I commented that it looked like the plane had hit pretty high and I was sure that people were able to get down out of the building, despite the strike. Maybe Joe didn't work in that tower. Maybe he hadn't gotten to work yet this morning.

As soon as we finished our conversation, I remembered that when I got home from high school on the day the Gulf War began, I recorded the news footage so that I could one day show my little brother who was five at the time, the coverage of the Gulf War. This time, I didn't think about the VCR, but instead hurried down the hall to wake my brother up so he could see such a newsworthy event as an accident of this magnitude. Vinny was slow waking up, but finally made his way to the living room where watched for what seemed some time. We took in the speculation from the newscasters, making a few speculations ourselves. It was then, for the first time that we began to wonder. An inexperienced pilot in a small plane ending up in a once-in-a-lifetime accident of this magnitude was one thing, but a commercial pilot, even a small commercial plane pilot, hitting that building on accident on a clear morning began to seem nearly impossible.

Speculation ran wild from the newscasters and they tried to report every little detail that they could get their hands on. I don't remember what a lot of it was, looking back, but I do remember one thing. There were two reports. One from someone watching radar via the internet, and another from a person on the ground that there was a plane heading north almost literally up the Hudson River, right that second, as we were watching. I remember the thought crossing my mind how odd that seemed, but of course, it had to be regular traffic and people were just noticing it today because of the accident.

The next thing I remember was when my mom called out from the kitchen, "Oh my God, did you see that?!" At first we thought it was an explosion, maybe the fuel in the crashed plane igniting finally from the heat, but as the newscast instant replay would show, that was the second plane hitting the other tower. Though we had speculated it, this was when it hit home. We were under attack. It wasn't an army marching up the beach, or paratroopers launched from off-shore. They weren't blazing across the border like we were used to. My Lord, they were actually flying planes into buildings. I thought of the old plane lots in the desert out here, and even the used jumbo jet dealership in Las Vegas at the airport. Though it truly did not matter to the people who I knew had just lost their lives in that tower, I hoped that those were stolen planes and not hijacked ones. Vinny and I talked on it as we watched the replay over and over. Together we hoped that the buildings were mostly empty. That people had slept in because it was Tuesday and not Monday, that they didn't need to get an early start on their work. Sadly, though, we knew, it was the finance district, the World Trade Center, and it was more than likely that so many people were already working when those planes hit the towers. I thought of my old job that I started each morning at 7:30. I would have been sitting at my desk. We didn't want to believe it, but they were sitting at their



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desks. It was then that I called Teresa. She had been at the gym early in the morning and had seen the newscast, but without sound, was unsure of what was going on. I found myself in disbelief in telling her that we were under attack. I told her to make sure she stayed out of populated areas and to stay close to home in case I needed to come get her. It was then that I began to call all of people I could think of that I knew that would probably not have put a TV or a radio on this early in the morning to tell them the same.

By now, my mom had spoken to my dad. He was on a plane from Honduras to Mexico City when the first plane hit, but we breathed another sigh of relief as he was safe on the ground, and being in Mexico, we figured, even safer than we were now. My dad was calling New York to check on everyone and my mom was calling him to learn of the news. While this was going on, Vinny and I had slowed our conversation a bit. There wasn't really much else to say at this point. The images of the towers in flame were intense, and we hoped that the worst was over. It was then that we learned that there were planes unaccounted for and that all traffic was being told to land. I remember the sheer fright of learning that though most of them were confirmed as OK, the FAA was reporting nearly a thousand planes in the air. How many of them were there? What's around us? Is there anything here in Huntington Beach that would be worth hitting? We immediately came up with contingency plans. Where we would go and what we would do. We figured if the nuclear plant at San Onofre were hit, we'd have enough time to get in the car and drive north before the radiation reached us. Though we griped and moaned when they closed the Air Base at El Toro and the Navy Yard in Long Beach, I think at that moment, I was secretly glad that they were not operating anymore because they were two less targets. I was reminded at that time of the fear I had as a little kid, of course, only when I thought of it, that my grandmother's house where I spent so much time was only a couple miles from the Naval Weapons Station in Huntington Harbor that of course buzz had labeled as a primary target during the cold war that was on at the time.

As we were contemplating this all, I'll never forget how unbelievable it was to hear the street-cleaner going by outside. It was Tuesday morning as always, but I could not fathom that here we sat watching God-knows how many people die, watching in my lifetime, this nation come under attack on its own soil, all the while thinking, when was the last time...1812?...Did the battles of the civil war count?...Hawaii wasn't a state in 1941, so they don't count that, do they?...What in the hell does this count as? For some reason, while all of this is going through my head, I come to realize that my mom's car is still in front of the house. Looking back, it seems so very weird that while watching this horror unfold, thinking of all of the possibilities of what could be next, that my instinct at the time was to run outside and move the car before we got a measly parking ticket.

So, my mom beats me out the door. While I pondered how amazing it was that we both still prioritized moving the car before getting a ticket above all else at the time, my mom ran to the car and started it. It was then that I noticed a good deal of our neighbors were also standing outside, literally in disbelief as well at what was going on. Between the guy in the street cleaner and the three parking control officers that followed him in their trucks, had they gotten to work so early that morning that they did not know? Had they not had a radio station tuned in, or even been told by dispatch what was going on? I do not know if they gave out tickets that morning because it appeared that everyone on my block had gotten out there the same time that we did and moved their cars. Either way, I made it a point before going back in to the house to yell at each passing parking control officer, "Don't you know that the country is under attack?! And you are out here writing people tickets for not moving their cars?!" By the dumfounded look I got, I truly believe they had no clue what was going on.

Once back in the house, I settled on the floor in front of the TV, my nerves still shuddering from all that was going on this morning. As my mom walked down the hall to her room, calling my dad, Vinny and I took a close look at the towers. Vinny then told me that he remembered Joe saying that he worked on the 107th floor. As we studied the scene before us, it became apparent. No matter which tower Joe had worked in, if he had been



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in the office when either of the planes hit either of the buildings, he would be above the collision point. Though we knew, watching helplessly, there were so many people in those buildings that were not going to ever find a way down through the fires, we hoped. We threw out scenarios... Maybe the fire crews could eventually get up there with water and put the fires out. There had to have been places in the buildings that were not engulfed in flames. Places where people could have crouched, maybe near a broken window so they could breathe. Maybe they could bring in water-dropping planes and helicopters. Maybe if they got the fires under control, they could land helicopters on the roof and start pulling people off.

That was when it happened. We were talking out scenarios, studying as detailed as we could the image of the burning buildings on the screen when it looked like one of the towers had disappeared in a cloud of smoke. The camera angle that was being shown just showed the top portion of the buildings. I said to Vinny, "Is it gone?" Vinny and I both looked at the screen as closely as we could. There was a lot of smoke there, but it really looked like it had vanished. After we had spent about thirty seconds going back and forth, the newscaster noticed the same thing. He asked that they run the tape back because it looked like something else had happened. Sure enough, when they showed the playback in slow motion from the same angle, you could see the entire building fall. As soon as we made the realization, Vinny went running to the back of the house to tell my mom to come and see. By now, they had a few different angles that were confirming that it looked like the entire building, not just the top portion, had fallen.

I honestly do not remember when I first saw the Pentagon. I do not recall if it was before or after the first tower collapsed. I know now the order in which the events happened, but I cannot recall exactly when we learned of them that morning. To the best of recollection, it was after the first tower fell that the newscasters broke into their own commentary of the towers to report that they were receiving word of a large, billowing smoke cloud in Washington, D.C. Again, we hoped for the best. We hoped that it was a brush fire, or maybe an accidental building fire, or something, but as you know, we were proven wrong again. A few minutes later, the newscasters were reporting that it was the Pentagon. There wasn't a close enough image to show the damage to the Pentagon yet, just a long-shot from somewhere in the city of the smoke cloud. We then figured the worst...that like the tower, the entire building was gone.

So, this was it. At this point, we figured it was an all-out attack. The FAA was reporting that there were still some one hundred planes in the air, some of which were still not confirmed as in the hands of their pilots. The FAA was grounding everything they could land and not letting anything else take off, but there were still one-hundred flying bombs in the air, each loaded with passengers. Then, there were the international flights. If they had gotten passenger planes here in the U.S., which still hadn't been confirmed yet, then why wouldn't it be conceivable that there were planes from Canada, Mexico, Europe, Japan?

If I recall correctly, it was about the same time that the newscasters were reporting a small plane crash in Pennsylvania that they announced that they were getting word that American Airlines had confirmed that two of their flights were missing. It wasn't set in stone, but we knew it. As soon as that report came in, it was enough for us to know that there were at least four planes...the two in New York, the one in Washington and the one in Pennsylvania. If they had gotten two passenger jets, then they had gotten four, and if they had gotten four, Lord knows how many of them they had.

It seemed that about every few minutes, the newscasters were reporting how many planes were still left in the air. They had concluded the same. We knew of four, but how many of them were there? It was then that I noticed that my mom had walked back to her room and had been in there for some time. Vinny and I had been trying to keep her informed while she was getting ready for work, but had not seen her for a while. When I called back to her, she emerged from her room, on the phone, holding her hand up to quiet me. I don't think I'll ever



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forget how she told me, and I definitely know that I will never forget the incident itself. My mom just said, “Oh my God,” over and over again into the phone as she started to tear up. We knew at that minute that it was news about Joe.

My mom got off the phone and walked down the hall to tell us. She said that Joey had just gotten a call from Joe’s fiancée’s work and that Joey’s cousin who was also Joe’s fiancée, was hysterical with grief and that they needed him to come to her. Joe had, in fact, been at work when the plane hit his building. He had tried to get out, but when he realized that he was not going to be able to get down, he took out his cell phone and called his fiancée to tell her good-bye. He told her that he loved her, asked her to please tell his family that he loved them, that he didn’t think he was going to make it, and then, the phone went dead. As far as we know today, that was the last that anyone heard from Joe. I don’t recall exactly at what point I called my girlfriend Teresa to tell her what I learned of Joe and his fiancée, but I do definitely recall that I was so choked up that I could barely tell her. Just the thought of what it was like for Joe, the thought of what it would have been like to get that last phone call from him.

With Joe’s fate still fresh in our minds, we watched in inevitable disbelief, yet at the same time, a with frightening expectation, as the second tower came down. There were still planes in the air, but for New York, it was done. They were “marching” on Washington, D.C.. We figured that the plane that crashed was on its way there as well. It was a westward movement that appeared to be timed very precisely. With planes in the air, our thoughts were turned to a fear that one-by-one, the planes in their control were going to make their way westward to the major cities. Were there planes in their control that were going to circle and wait for the time they were supposed to hit? Were there planes over the Pacific that were heading for our populous areas in California? Were they done with Washington, D.C.? Was the attack sophisticated enough to divert another plane to Washington in place of the one that had crashed?

As it grew time for Vinny to go to school, I reasoned that we did not even know if it was over. It had appeared it was over after the two planes, but then Washington was hit, so who was to say that it was done, especially with planes still in the air. How many of the planes already on the ground had hijackers on them still? My business for the morning was a haircut appointment at South Coast Plaza, our local mall which was in fact quite a tourist attraction. I wondered if such a high-profile civilian target was on this list and called to cancel my appointment. I figured it would be best for us to stay close to home today.

As the morning wore on, it became apparent that there were no other planes in the air. There were reports already of suspicious-acting people on some of the flights that were on the ground. Reports of fighter jets over New York and Washington were coming in. The newscasts began to show the footage obtained from near the World Trade Center. New footage of the first plane hitting, new footage of the second plane hitting, footage from right near the towers when the first tower came down. It was like watching a scene out of a movie. It was so far away, yet so close to home. News reports throughout the day would show more and more footage - different angles, different views, different areas of what they were starting to call “Ground Zero.” Reports of the buildings around the towers beginning to collapse. Estimates of over 6,000 dead were flashing across the screens by the end of the night.

By the early morning hours of September 12th, the entire world had seen it and would come to share in the experiences that we all will mutually share and remember for the rest of our lives, but these, the minutes of early morning on September 11th, will be the bitter-sweet property of myself and my family for the rest of our lives. These are the minutes that I am honored and feel compelled to share to serve as a record for those who will come after us, for those who will wonder what it was like for most of us on that morning. We will each have our own memory, and this is my memory of that morning and the events in my life before that morning that shaped how I felt and still feel today.