

Terror, Odyssey, Acts of Kindness

As fate would have it, the trio from Charnley & Røstvold – Jackie, Ryan and Christine - had a 9:00 a.m. appointment with Deutsche Bank on Tuesday, September 11, 2001. The meeting was originally scheduled for the following day, but another client needed to schedule a conference call then, so we moved the meeting up a day. Deutsche was located at 130 Liberty Street – also known as Two World Trade Center. Jackie's bad feet may have saved the trio that day.

Jackie and I left the OMNI Berkshire Hotel at 7:30 a.m. to walk to Jennison. We saw Adam Susser, a Jennison employee, on the corner of 52nd and Madison, and walked over together. It was a bright, warm, sunny day. Ryan took a cab with two boxes of materials for our afternoon meeting with Jennison and met us there. Just before 8:00 a.m., we left Jennison for our meeting. Although we had planned to take a subway, it was hot and Jackie said her feet couldn't take 30 minutes of standing on the subway, so she suggested we take a taxi from Jennison to Deutsche, then take a subway back. We all agreed it was a sound plan.

Thanks to the nice weather, taxis were plentiful and traffic was light. We arrived at Two World Trade Center at 8:30 a.m. Had we taken the subway as planned, we would have been walking into the building at about 8:45 a.m. We entered the building and signed in with Security at the reception desk in the main lobby. Our client had not notified Security that we were coming, so there were no name badges that would permit us to proceed up the elevators to Deutsche's offices. Security called Rose Turiello, who had coordinated our meeting, and left a voicemail that we had arrived. As we waited for Rose to call down, Jackie, Ryan and I kidded about running past the two security guards guarding the escalators to the elevator lobby. Jackie said she'd probably trip, and Ryan surmised that he'd probably get arrested when he stopped to help her.

After waiting about ten minutes, we asked Security to try the other two individuals who would be attending our meeting, as Jackie's feet were beginning to hurt from standing too long. Security left voicemails for the other two. Moments later, at 8:48 a.m., One World Trade Center was hit by, what we discovered later, a 757 Jet. First we heard two loud explosions, followed by a series of loud tapping noises and saw people running in the street. We thought bombs were exploding and that someone was shooting. It was cement and debris hitting the street. More building debris and fire began to rain down into the street, followed by a shower of white paper between the two buildings. Reacting to growing up in earthquake land, I yelled to Jackie and Ryan to get under a door archway adjacent to the Security desk. Ryan ran closer to the glass front of the building. Jackie remained by the Security desk watching the chaos unfold. Ryan saw an injured woman outside and wanted to go help her. Another gentleman had already run to her aid and had her sitting in a UR Plumbing van. I urged Ryan to stay inside, as it was too dangerous. The street had been transformed into a war zone – littered with chunks of cement, paper, debris, bodies and fires burning everywhere.

A voice came over the PA system in Two World Trade Center that there had been a tragic accident across the street and that everyone should stay on their floors and remain

in the building. A man ran into the lobby announcing that an airplane had hit One World Trade Center. Ryan said it was no accident; it had to be bombs. Jackie and I were shaking like leaves.

Before we could decide what to do next, our building was rocked by a tremendous explosion, which we thought was a bomb. It was 9:05 a.m. More debris, fire and paper were raining down in the street in front of the building. Jackie turned to Ryan and me and said, "I love you guys." It was a terrifying moment, and we all wondered if we would get out alive.

Through the door archway where we were standing, there was a stairway down to the basement of the building. I considered it, but remembered the 1993 bombing in the basement of the World Trade Center, and decided against it. A woman came in from the street bleeding but not badly hurt, and we directed her to the restrooms. Security came to accompany her. The next voice that came over the PA system was that of the Building Bomb Security. He urged everyone to move to the north side of the building. We moved in that direction with a mass of other terrified people, but immediately discovered we were surrounded by glass and marble. We saw a backside door, looked at each other and with the same thought Ryan said, "let's go." Ryan offered to carry Jackie, who replied, "this is life and death, I can run." And run we did. When we got out the door, we saw a lot of people running west away from the burning buildings and raining hell, so we followed suit. There parked next to the curb, was the same UR Plumbing van that had been parked in front of the building 20 minutes earlier. We knew it was the same van because it was covered with debris much more so than the other cars parked nearby. The back of the van was open and four men wearing all black were around the van. As we ran by, two of the men threw something in the back of the van that made a loud clunk. Then another man threw a bicycle in the van. Jackie commented that it was the same van and seemed odd, but we decided to keep running.

As we ran, Ryan and I were madly dialing our cell phones trying to get through to anyone to connect and share that we were okay. We knew our families on the West Coast were rising with the early morning news. We ran about four blocks and stopped to decide where to go. As we ran away from the mayhem, firemen and police were running into it to see what they could do to save lives. We looked back at the twin towering infernos and saw for the first time what the rest of the world was seeing on national TV. It was a horrifying sight. Jackie noted there was some huge slab of metal sticking out of the right side of Tower Two. We would later realize it was the nose of the plane.

Jackie wanted to head east and then uptown. Fearing more explosions, I wanted to keep heading west away from buildings and toward the water. I thought we would be able to make our way up the West Highway toward midtown. We waited at a big intersection, where police were directing traffic, moving private cars out of and emergency vehicles into the area as fast as possible. We looked back at the WTC and saw flames and black smoke pouring from both towers. We also saw people falling and jumping from the upper floors. Across the intersection, we stopped at Battery Park and prayed for those less fortunate souls who had not escaped the infernos.

I finally got through to Dennis at about 9:20 a.m. (6:20 a.m. California time). He had been awakened by a call from my brother Roger 20 minutes earlier. Dennis was watching the horror on TV and told me that American and United Airlines jets filled with passengers had hit both towers, as well as the Pentagon, and that another had gone down in Pennsylvania. We were at war. I asked Dennis to call Ryan's parents, Pat and Charles (with whom Jackie's son Jordan was staying), my Mom and Dad, and our C&R team and let them know we were out of the building and okay. He asked me where we were and I counted about four buildings over. Then we lost our connection.

Jackie, Ryan and I realized that our only chance of getting back to midtown would be on foot, so we started walking north on the promenade along the water. Jackie said she could make it out of the area if we stopped and rested periodically. Ryan hesitated as our route was taking us closer to the twin towers. We agreed that if we stayed close to the water, we could jump in and swim if need be. Ryan suggested that in case something should happen, we should put our id somewhere it would stay with us. I tucked my driver's license, insurance card, two credit cards and some cash into my bra.

Suddenly we heard a rumble, and people started running south. We ran with them. We thought another bomb had exploded. In fact, the south tower was coming down. The implosion created an avalanche cloud of dust, ash and debris, which rapidly descended upon us from both the left and right. As the cloud swallowed us and pitched us into total darkness, someone yelled to cover our mouths and noses with a piece of cloth and to breathe slowly through the cloth. Jackie and I were both wearing scarves, which we wrapped around our heads and faces, as we kept walking south. Jackie yelled at Ryan to use his tie. Our fear was renewed by the sudden sound of jets overhead and what sounded like swarms of helicopters. We wondered if more bombs were coming and whether we would survive. We learned later that what we heard were fighter jets, which had converged on the area to prevent further attacks. Eventually a breeze began to clear the cloud. Our first view across the water was of the Statue of Liberty – still standing intact and proud. It was a comforting sight. We looked back at the towers and Two World Trade Center was gone. We couldn't believe what we were seeing – or not seeing. We were covered with ash and debris.

Jackie and I had stayed close together, but we had lost sight of Ryan, which caused another rise of panic. We both yelled his name several times, and finally found him. Ryan's hair, like my black suit jacket, was completely gray. Jackie's black scarf and white jacket were gray.

Throughout this entire ordeal, the crowd of people of which we were a part stayed relatively calm overall. Before the dust cloud had completely cleared, we saw a Japanese tourist asking a policeman for directions to the Empire State Building. Unbelievable! One mother with a baby in a stroller became hysterical, and several people tried to calm her. We saw many abandoned baby strollers where people had opted to hold their babies close and flee for their lives. Jackie noticed a young man with cell phone in hand, wearing nothing but his boxers – not even any shoes.

At some point, someone handed me an extra medical mask. I saw an older woman struggling to push a baby in a stroller with one hand and pull a rolling piece of luggage with another. Her face wasn't covered. Ryan and I ran over to her, and I handed her the mask and told her to put it on. She put it on upside down and with the elastic string just hanging on the back of her neck. I took it off and put it on the right way and hooked the elastic band over her ears and told her to pinch the metal strip over her nose. We asked if we could help her and she said she was heading to her daughter's home just a block or two away and thought she could make it. Not wanting to separate, we let her go. The guilt of letting her struggle on alone still haunts me.

At that point the police and emergency workers began to direct people to stay calm, keep their faces covered and keep moving south. A few minutes later, we all heard another terrible rumble. The north tower was coming down. We didn't realize that at the time. Just then my cell phone rang. It was Sally. She had heard from Linda that we were out of the building and asked if they could do anything for us. I said not at the moment, but to tell Dennis I love him. Sally said you're going to come out of this alive so don't worry. I wasn't so sure. The police were ordering everyone to get on the ground with their backs to the towers, cover their heads and to stop talking. We were directly in front of a tall skyscraper and wanted to keep moving, but the police ordered us to stay down where we were. Jackie didn't want to lie down and only did so after she saw Ryan and me following the police orders. I told Sally I had to hang up. She said, "Don't hang up, keep talking to me." A policeman ordered us again to stop talking, so I said I had to go and closed the phone. Jackie reached out to a young man on one side of us and a terrified woman kneeling next to her and said, "we're going to be okay." Before long, we were swallowed by another cloud of ash and soot. Another woman kneeling close by said she was a nurse and to breathe slowly through our noses with a single layer of cloth covering our faces. We realized we had been breathing through our mouths and tried to breathe as instructed. Jackie learned that the young man, in his early 20s, had just moved to Newark from Chicago and started working at his new job in the World Trade Center two weeks earlier. She told him his parents would be worried and probably would want him to move home. She was trying to distract him from the horror around us.

When the second cloud cleared, the north tower had vanished. Only billows of smoke were visible rising from the ruins of the twin towers. The sky overhead was bright blue and Ryan let us know that the jets were ours.

I asked the woman next to Jackie her name. When she said Alicia, I knew we were meant to stay together – Ellen's middle name was Alicia. Jackie, Ryan, Alicia and I moved to the grass nearby and sat facing the water, leaning against a low cement wall. Everyone around us was covered with soot and ash. Emergency workers were wheeling injured people by on gurneys. People were yelling to boats that were passing by for help. At about 10:30 a.m. a boat, the first of many to come, pulled up to the rail of the promenade to rescue the first of the injured, the elderly, and the babies and children. We still thought once the dust settled, we would be able to start working our way north to midtown.

More boats began to line up at the rail. Men in pairs were lifting people over the rail and down onto the boats. The police ordered everyone to evacuate. Someone told us that if we got on a boat, we'd end up in Staten Island or New Jersey and would never get back to midtown Manhattan. We hesitated and were told, you can stay here where who knows what will happen next, or you can get on the boat and be safe. We headed for the nearest boat. We crowded on with others, sitting by the rail in case another horrible event happened. We still had confidence in our swimming abilities to help us survive. By 11:30 a.m., we were on our way to New Jersey. The sight of the Twin Towers gone was horrifying and sad. The Statue of Liberty gleamed in the sunlight.

We disembarked in New Jersey and another whole odyssey was about to begin. There was no one giving directions on where we should go. We spied a construction latrine and with great gratitude walked past quiet construction workers to use their facilities. An American flag hung half-mast on the shell of a building, totally quiet as workers stopped all work in grief and disbelief. We followed the crowd to the Harborside, New Jersey train station. Train service had been suspended. Neither Ryan nor I could get through to anyone on our cell phones. We found a pay phone and waited in line to make our calls. All circuits were busy, so our attempts from the landline were fruitless as well. Ryan's cell phone rang and it was his hysterical Mom. The connection was broken within a minute, but he managed to let her know that we were alive and in New Jersey and to give her several more numbers to call.

We asked policemen how we could get back to Manhattan. We were told all routes into the city had been closed. Uh, oh.

Alicia thought there was a Marriott Hotel up the road, which by that point was closed to all but emergency vehicles. We started to walk, thinking we'd book a room for the night. We didn't get far before Jackie started to wince with every step. Her poor feet had reached their limit. I spied two abandoned shopping carts – one orange plastic and one silver metal. I asked Jackie if she preferred plastic or metal; she replied plastic. I rolled the cart over and said hop in. She resisted at first, saying, I'm not getting in that thing. We convinced her otherwise, and in she went. She was totally humiliated, but Alicia reassured her that desperate times require desperate measures. Ryan assured Jackie that no one would notice her anyway because they would all be staring at the smoking skyline of lower Manhattan behind her. Ryan pushed, Alicia and I followed. Along the way, we passed a woman who was offering shelter, water and coffee in the community room of her apartment complex. We thanked her and said if we didn't find a hotel room, we would be back. We also passed an entrepreneurial young fellow who was selling ice-cold bottled water for \$1 a bottle. I bought four bottles and passed them out. Water never tasted so good!

We kept walking and eventually reached the Marriott. Ryan went in to use the phone; I went to the reception desk. The hotel was booked and the lobby was filled with people hoping for a cancellation. I asked the woman at the counter if she could help us find a room at another hotel and she said everything within 50 miles was sold out.

I went outside to give Jackie and Alicia the news. Jackie had disembarked from her cart, and both were sitting on the curb. We kidded about sleeping in the grass with our cart. Jackie was completely attached to the cart. I got through to our client John Hobbs, CEO of Jennison Associates (with whom we had been scheduled to meet that afternoon) on my cell phone. He was in the boardroom with his senior management team. I told him where we were and our predicament. Jennison is owned by Prudential, which is headquartered in Newark. John said he would contact Pru and see if they could find a place for us. Meanwhile, he would have a representative from Deloitte, Jennison's disaster recovery consultant try to pick us up. I said that might be difficult, because no private cars were being allowed in or out of the area. Ambulances and police cars were racing back and forth down the roads in front of us. He took my cell phone number and said he would have an associate call.

While I was on the phone with John, Ryan emerged from the hotel and said he had connected with his roommate from California, Adam, who happened to be in Whippany, New Jersey on business and had a room at the Marriott Residence Inn. He said if we could get there, we could all stay in his room for the night. I shared the news with John, and he agreed that sounded like our best option. I asked John if they could direct us to Whippany. He asked his group if anyone knew; no one had heard of Whippany. They looked it up and said it was miles away from our current location. I told John we would try to find our way there, and would let him know if we got stranded.

We asked a policeman standing nearby how we could get to Whippany. He wasn't sure, but said our best bet was to walk to the Hoboken train station (several miles away) and take a train from there. Before setting out, I attempted to use the restroom in the Marriott, but was stopped at the front door and told by the doorman that only registered guests were being permitted in the hotel. The lobby was filled with refugees and they had reached their capacity limit. Unbelievable! We also could not believe we were walking to Hoboken!

We set out once again with Jackie in the cart. Along the way, we made use of an outhouse at another construction site. We came to an A&P Market in Newport Plaza, which had been converted to a command post for the police. Having skipped breakfast that morning, we were starving. We left Jackie and Alicia at the sidewalk, and Ryan and I approached the store. We asked the police if we could go inside and buy some food. They said sure. We bought sandwiches, bananas, apples, carrots and more bottled water. By the time we loaded up the shopping cart with our bags and Jackie using the cart as a walker, we knew we looked like a group of dirty homeless people. We certainly attracted attention from those we passed on the street. I didn't think to buy a disposable camera in the market.

Alicia who was in a sleeveless shift was beginning to burn and itch on her exposed skin. My eyes were bothering me and we all had slight coughs. Jackie and I had the beginnings of sunburn.

We continued our trek in the heat of the day with throbbing feet and sagging spirits. We must have walked 10 miles that day. Alicia used my cell phone to leave a voicemail for her husband. She had given her cell phone to a man who had escaped from the 64th floor of the north tower and was desperate to reach his wife who worked on the 87th floor. When the south tower came down, Alicia lost the man and her phone in the dust cloud that ensued.

Finally, we reached the Hoboken train station and started asking men in orange vests (station employees) if there was a train to Whippany. About the third or fourth person we asked said we could take a train to the Newark Broad Station, a shuttle from there to the Newark Penn Station, and probably a bus from there to Whippany. He said we'd have to leave the shopping cart behind though and chuckled. Jackie sadly left it on the platform. We boarded a standing-room-only train for Newark Broad Station. As the train took us further away from New York, we began to feel safer. Once at Newark Broad Station, we followed a mass of people down the stairs where they had a line of buses that would take us to Newark Penn. Finally, we got to sit down.

Alicia had been extremely quiet throughout our journey. We were impressed with her calm. We later discovered she was actually in shock. At the time of the attack, she was on the 13th floor of a building close by, and heard the whoosh of the second plane as it flew by and crashed into Two WTC. Because of her sleeveless shift, Alicia's arms, legs and face had been unprotected from the ash and debris cloud. Chalky gray soot still clung to her hair and eyelashes. Sitting together on the shuttle, she mentioned that her arms were burning. I searched my purse and came up with a bottle of mouthwash. We thought the alcohol might help to clean off the residue, so she rubbed it all over her arms. I don't think it helped much.

Once we reached Newark Penn Station, we were told to take bus number 73 in Lane 4A. When the bus arrived, we told the driver where we wanted to go, and were told that the last bus to Whippany had left at 3:15 p.m. She said her bus was going part way there, so we hopped on board. All transportation, including the shopping cart, had been free up to that point. We all started feeding dollars into the bus fare box. The driver informed us that the normal fare was \$1.90, but she'd let us ride for \$1.

We made our way to the back of the bus and sat down. We were the only white people on the bus. A gentleman sitting near the back on the left side of the bus had overheard us talking to the bus driver. He informed us that the end of the line was a highway with two gas stations and several miles from Whippany. He said we'd have a tough time getting a taxi to come get us there. He offered to take us to his home, get his car and drive us the rest of the way. Jackie and I could have kissed him - Ryan probably a hug!

Our savior's name was Edward Ntim-Addae. We got off the bus in West Orange, New Jersey and crossed a busy highway. There were two girls waiting on the corner and he yelled at them - "didn't I tell you to stay in the house? Get back in the house." They ran ahead into the house. I asked if they were his girls and he said, "No, they're my wife's sister's kids." Edward's wife met us at the door and he introduced us all. Edward

offered us some refreshments and asked us to sit in the living room, which was bare except for a couch, chair and table. He, his wife and the rest of the family ran up the stairs for a short family meeting. Clearly, his anxious family did not want him to leave and drive a group of strangers to Whippany.

Edward came back down and said, “okay let’s go; I’m told the car needs gas.” We said we’d gladly buy the gas. After Ryan filled the tank, we were on our way to Whippany – Jackie, Alicia and I sitting in the back, and Ryan up front with Edward. Ryan asked Edward what he did, and Edward said it depends on the day. During the week, he’s a CPA for Bear Sterns. On Sundays, he’s a Pentecostal minister. He also teaches accounting. From his pedal-to-the-metal driving, I would have sworn he’s a racecar driver on Saturdays. Clearly, Edward was anxious to return to his family. Sitting in the middle of the back seat with no seat belt, all I could think was that God wouldn’t let me survive the attack on the WTC only to let me die in an auto accident. Jackie had her arm out across my body to hold me in place as the car flew down the highway and around curves.

Whippany was a good half hour drive from West Orange. We finally arrived at the Marriott Residence Inn, where Adam was waiting out front for us. After effusive thank yous to Edward (and his refusal to accept payment), he was on his way. Ryan went off to room 252 with Adam, and Jackie, Alicia and I went inside to inquire about another room. They too were sold out. How could that be we wondered – Whippany was out in the middle of nowhere! Apparently families fleeing New York had sold out the hotel.

The reception staff at this Marriott, staring at our disarray with wide eyes, was quite helpful and started calling around. They found us a room at an Embassy Suites in Parsippany, the town next door, at a price of \$350 a night. We said we’d take it! They gave us each a “starter kit,” which contained a comb, toothbrush, toothpaste and deodorant. They also volunteered their driver Charles to shuttle us over. We arrived at the Embassy Suites at 5:30 p.m. What a day!

We checked into our room and called our loved ones to let them know where we were. Alicia finally connected with her husband, who had been frantic with worry. He hadn’t gotten her voicemail due to an AT&T malfunction. He said he would drive to Whippany and rescue her that night.

We inquired with the hotel staff if there was a place where we could buy some new clothes. We limped about ½ mile to a strip shopping center with a Marshall’s. A sign on the door informed us that they had closed early (at 3:00 p.m.) due to the tragedy. I had noticed t-shirts and socks in the hotel gift shop, so we hurried back to buy t-shirts to sleep in. We asked at the front desk for a restaurant nearby where we could get some dinner. A gentleman standing there suggested an Italian restaurant down the road, Eccola. We called Ryan and invited him and Adam to join us. Adam had a business meeting, so Ryan said he’d meet us there.

Alicia left a note and directions to the restaurant at the hotel reception desk for her husband. After driving 15 miles past Whippany and two calls to my cell phone, Alicia's husband, Maik, finally found us at the restaurant during our first course. Their happy reunion was so touching. After dinner, we returned to our hotels. Maik insisted on driving back to their apartment in Manhattan that night, so Alicia gathered her things and we hugged goodbye. Jackie and I took showers then watched the news until about 1:30 a.m. We saw the tapes of the jet hitting our building and the devastation that followed. We knew then how truly lucky we all were to be alive and uninjured. Our guardian angels had done their work.

In the morning, after numerous calls, we learned one train was running back into New York. The tunnels, ferries and bridges remained closed. We put our sooty clothes (which I had shaken out as best I could) back on, had breakfast at the hotel and waited for Ryan's arrival via taxi. Our trip back to Manhattan that day was as easy as the previous day's trek had been difficult. We took the hotel shuttle to the Morris Plains train station. Within five minutes, we boarded a New Jersey Transit PATH train that took us all the way to New York Penn station on 34th Street. Before we entered the tunnel that took us under the river and back into Manhattan, we saw lower Manhattan and the smoke that continued to pour from the hole where the twin towers had once stood. From New York Penn Station, we took a cab back to our hotel. At 2:00 p.m., we were back in our rooms at the OMNI Berkshire.

The next day, we were able to connect with Alicia and Maik. We learned that all routes back into the city remained closed the night of the attack. Rather than drive 1 1/2 hours back to our hotel, they opted to sleep in the car for a few hours. In the morning, Maik took Alicia to the hospital. Her skin and eyes continued to burn, and she had inhaled a lot of smoke and soot. They were quarantined as a potential biohazard for about six hours, but the hospital did let Alicia take a shower. Maik said they finally got home about 3:00 p.m. on Wednesday, and were so exhausted; they collapsed in bed and slept.

It was an anxious five days after the attack before we were able to get a flight home. We considered the Amtrak and even rented a car. Ryan said his knees couldn't take a four hard-day road trip, so we opted to stay and wait for a flight. Fighter jets continued to circle Manhattan, and any loud noises made us jumpy. We went back to Jennison's office on Thursday and tried to do some work, but found it very difficult to concentrate. Within an hour, we were evacuated due to a bomb threat at Grand Central Station next door. Ted Voss, our friend and a consultant who works with us at Jennison, was an angel. He made dinner arrangements every night and introduced us to New Yorkers who wanted to hear our story. He knew it would be healthy for us to tell it. He shepherded our mental health all week and for that we are eternally grateful. That week, restaurants were deserted and our hotel, normally oversold in the fall months, was nearly empty. The devastating economic impact of the attack was rapidly apparent. Jackie and I went to our favorite Italian restaurant Saturday night, and we were the only people, besides the waiters, in the restaurant. We have become friendly with many of these people over the years, and have seen them endure recessions and booms. Suddenly, they are seeing the

worst business impact ever, and are worrying about how they will pay their bills. We left a \$100+ tip to show our support.

Sunday, September 16, we finally had a flight due to go home. We arrived at JFK at 8:30 a.m. for our 12-noon flight to LA. At the ticket counter, the agent informed us that our flight was cancelled. The best he could do was split us up and send us to San Francisco – Jackie on an 11:15 a.m. flight, and Ryan and me at 3:45 p.m. We were upset at the prospect of splitting up, Jackie in tears, but the agent had already booked us, and at least we'd be on the West Coast. We knew we could drive home from there if we couldn't get connecting flights.

We went upstairs to the Admirals Club, and Jackie and Ryan noted on the departure board that the noon flight to LA was in fact going and on time. An angel at the desk in the Admirals Club, Felicia, thankfully found that our reservations on the noon flight were still intact, issued our boarding passes, cancelled the San Francisco flights, and spent the next hour tracking down our checked luggage and rerouting it to the LAX flight. We were overjoyed. Felicia, we all thank you so much!

The flight home was quiet and tense. The pilot and flight attendants made no reference to the prior week's tragedies and did their best to act cheerful and normal. When we touched down in LA, everyone on the plane applauded. If anything, security was even tighter in LAX than at JFK. There were police everywhere, and no personal cars were allowed curbside. We had never seen LAX so empty. Our bags were on the carousel by the time we reached baggage claim. Our car service was waiting and whisked us out of the heavily guarded airport. There were no cars parked in the parking structure in the center of the airport or the short-term lot. LAX was taking no chances. We were home!

Homecoming was bittersweet. Though overjoyed to be home with our families and friends, we definitely left a piece of our hearts behind. We missed Ted and felt guilty leaving him. We thought of Alicia afterward. Our bonds with New York and our friends there were strengthened by the tragedies and the aftermath that have altered all our lives. The outpourings of love and support on our behalf, and unity and spirit on behalf of our great nation have been heartening and healing.