



Richard Eichen
Anniversary Digital Learning Experience
Transcript

RICHARD EICHEN: It's a very special place. It's, it's amazing. And it's just what it was then. All the debris and how it is now.

In sum, I'm one of five people that got off the 90th floor of the North Tower. Played golf the day before, and life was good. And I lived in New Jersey at the time, and I commuted in like any other day, and it was a beautiful day. I worked on the 90th floor of the World Trade Center, number one, building number one, which we used to call at the time, the North Tower. I was with a company called Pass Consulting Group. I was consulting to them, got in, stopped off at World Coffee, bought as usual, got a bagel and a cup of coffee, badged in and got up to the floor, the 90th floor.

So I'm there, and I'm leaning, my briefcase is on the wall and up against the wall, along with a cup of coffee, and suddenly there was the loudest sound I've ever heard. And this one was a very metallic bang. But the word bang is like, think of it as times a million times. Parts of the ceiling came down, and then in front of me there was a wall on the other side of this T-intersection that I was near, and it looked like it came alive with bubbling fire. The entire wall just came towards me like it was going to consume me. And I remember thinking to myself, I have no idea what's going on. And I went like this just instinctively. And at that point, I could see that I was hurt.

And then I started looking around, and I saw that off in a far corner a office had its glass doors intact, and there was lights. And then I went in, and that's where I met the other four people who survived on that floor. And then there I met a woman that I went down with all the way by the name -- and got her out of the building -- by the name of Luz, but I knew her then by her Americanized name, Lucy.

Chris Egan was the office manager. Neither one of us knew what was going on, and he then picked up the phone to call down to the office, the building office, and they didn't work. So he used his cell phone and he goes, they want us to stay because they're going to bring someone up here to take-- to take us down. We're in the 90th floor, and we're looking out the window because it was in that corner and we could see large chunks of the building falling.

Lucy goes off into, I guess, their coffee area in the back, and she come-- after a while, and she comes back out and she's white as a sheet, and she goes like this. And we look up and we can see that the ceiling is starting to smolder. So we don't know-- We don't have a choice. We have to get out of there. We tried all leaving at the same time, and we got about three steps and the smoke and the flames beat us back. So we retreated back into the office, and she said, "I'm not going."

And I go, "Lucy, you don't have a choice. You have to go." I said, "Luz, If I'm going to die, I don't want to die alone. Can you come with me?" And she said "yes" because she's a decent human being. And I said, "Okay, put your hands on my shoulders." And she put her hands on my shoulders. And as soon as I did it, I grabbed her, and I wasn't going to let go. And I said, "All right, Luz, we're going down together."

So we went back out, went into the stairwell, and as soon as we got into the stairwell, we got back into civilization. I mean, there was air, lighting. Luz and I went down together. And what I did was I stayed about four steps below her and leaned forward. And basically I carried her weight on my back as I was going down. We finally made it out. At that point, I didn't know what happened, but I knew what happened was big and involved the entire building, not just our floor.

As we're walking, some-- several of the security guards wearing orange jackets, response jackets, and they're brave they could have left and they stayed there for us. I-- tremendous, tremendous respect for them. Yelled "Run! Run!" And at this point I've lost blood. I'm tired. And so I look up, and I can see the antenna on One World Trade start to wobble, and then I can see the whole top of the building start to wobble.

Someone yelled "Run!" Which I did, and we can hear-- And then the cloud hits. I then looked up like this, and I remember I couldn't see my fingertips. It was that dark. And I remember thinking to myself, okay, I'm not in pain. It's a little chilly, but it's also very quiet. If this is being dead, I'm okay with it. And then suddenly, you know, it started lightening up.

At that point, I said, okay, I need to get to a hospital. I remember there was a hospital downtown. I walked into the front door, and I immediately got triaged into the employee cafeteria. For whatever reason, I said, I just need to get out of here. So I put on my pants, grabbed a plastic bag with my gear, with my stuff in it, like my shirt and some other stuff that they had put in there, and put my shoes back on and walked out against medical advice. And that's where I met this woman by the name of Pansy, who was doing the same thing.

And I was about halfway through over the bridge when I pulled my mask down and it was warm and it was sunny, and I said, okay, adventure over. Let's-- let's keep on going. Life's going to go on.

So 9/11 really forced me to think about where I wanted my life to go, what I wanted to do with the rest of my life. I said, no, it's a new book. I'm going to really start thinking, what do I want the second volume to be like?

I also realized that life is very random and very fragile, and it affects to this day how I view a lot of things. It's not trepidation, it's just that I don't take any day or any event for granted.