

TCRG Survives World Trade Center Attack

In her own words; LuAnn O'Rourke describes
the events of September 11

I woke up Tuesday morning tired from the first class the previous night but glad to be back to my usual routine. I let my hair go with its natural curl that morning so I could sleep an extra half hour until 6:00. On to the 7:17 train with Steve and a kiss good-bye at Grand Central as I made my way through the normal crowd of the subway to the express train down to Fulton Street. I passed St. Paul's and the cemetery like I do every morning, stopped at Fine & Shapiro for my usual cup of coffee and made my way to my office at Empire BlueCross BlueShield on the 30th floor of World Trade One. Like clockwork I was at my desk by 8:10 and sifted through new e-mails and voicemails that came in since the day before. Suddenly I heard a boom and I was thrown from my chair and the building began to shake. I thought to myself "My God, it's an earthquake; I'm going to die here." I looked out the window of my office to see tons of papers flying in the air. Something hit the building or exploded, maybe a helicopter hit the building? I ran out of my office where everyone gathered and asked "What was that?" I must have grabbed my cell phone because I tried to call Steve, but to no avail. I remember someone saying to me "stop shaking," and then another voice said,

"Let's get out of here." Crazy as it now seems, I ran back to my office to get my bag. When I came back, everyone was gone. I ran toward my boss's office on the west side of the building and everybody had left.

I headed to the stairs to be greeted by a wall of smoke in the hallway. Worried that some others may still be on the floor and unable to find the stairs, I yelled for them "Is anyone there? The stairs are over here!" One coworker came out from the smoke, Shalom Benzaquen, and we entered the stairwell. I was never so happy to see him. Hundreds of people were making their way down the stairs in an orderly fashion. Still clasping my cell phone, it rang. It was my sister, Eileen. "Where are you? What's going on?" she asked with terror in her voice and I could hear she was crying. Not realizing the magnitude of what had happened, I reassured her that although some smoke had gotten in my eyes and I was breathing in some smoke, I was on my way down the stairs and would call her when I got out. On our way down some people started getting news of what happened over their pagers.

A plane had hit the tower, some kind of freak accident. The building had seemed to stabilize and I now had a sense that I was going to get out. I

passed a large man in a wheelchair on the 27th floor. There were others with him, but it ripped my heart out to pass him. I still feel guilty about it. I continued down the stairs, getting closer to the bottom. When we got to about the 4th floor water was pouring into the stairway and was ankle deep. I had worn three quarter length pants that day with high-heeled mules. I took off the shoes and walked through the water in my bare feet. Finally we made it to the mezzanine level and we were directed to run. As I made my way outside I looked into the courtyard of the World Trade Center for a brief second where just a couple of weeks earlier I had seen Cherish the Ladies and the Donny Golden dancers give a performance. It now looked like a scene from the movie Earthquake with fire and debris everywhere. Still barefoot, I then realized that I was running on shattered glass.

As I stopped to put on my shoes a stranger stopped to scoop me up and started running with me in his arms. "You can't stop", he said, "there's stuff falling from the sky." Once in a safe area he put me down and disappeared like an angel. I'll never know who he was, but he could very well have saved my life. At this point I was on the west side of the Trade Center and headed toward the pier. There

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LuAnn O'Rourke, TCRG is the director of the O'Rourke Academy of Irish Dance of White Plains, New York. She began dancing when at six and competed until the age of 21.

LuAnn had a successful competitive dance career and retired 4th in in Senior Ladies Eastern Regionals in 1990. In 1992 she graduated from the College of New Rochelle with a BS in Communications and received her T.C.R.G. in 1994. The O'Rourke Academy of Irish Dance was a part time venture in 1995 with 3 students and now have approximately 80 students ranging in ages from 5 - over 50.

Her full time career is with Empire BlueCross BlueShield as the Manager of Technology Training. Empire BlueCross BlueShield office was located at One World Trade Center on the 30th floor. ❁