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## Reflections: September 11, 2001

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It is appropriate that this issue of the *International Tinnitus Journal* (volume 7, number 2) start by recognizing September 11, 2001, for its significance in all aspects of all our lives.

It started like any other day. Barbara Goldstein and I were at the American Academy of Otolaryngology—Head and Neck Surgery (AAOHNS) annual meeting in Denver, Colorado. I awakened at 5:45 AM in preparation for a meeting of the Geriatric Committee of the AAOHNS scheduled for 6:30 AM. I looked forward to attending this meeting and to other activities scheduled for that day—meetings with colleagues, scientific sessions, and final preparations for presentations by Barbara Goldstein and me for our tinnitus course. We would also be preparing a special presentation—namely, the plenary session presentation of a significant advance for tinnitus treatment for a predominantly central-type tinnitus directed to the GABA-A receptor (i.e., a receptor-targeted therapy). The geriatric committee meeting was constructive and positive, attended by professionals dedicated to improving the quality of life of the elderly by focusing on otolaryngological complaints in the elderly population. The group attempts to develop programs of education for themselves and for others, both professionals and the lay public. The meeting was special; it had to be, for it started at 6:30 AM Denver time. Some of us were talking, others finishing up some tea and coffee when, around 7 AM, Steve Parnes entered the room and breathlessly told us that a plane had hit the World Trade Center and that maybe this was a terrorist act. The room fell quiet. We looked at each other, then the conversation quickly resumed. To me, it seemed as if time stood still. As I both reflected and watched my colleagues in their conversation, I realized how far away was the event. One may think one understands, experiences, and empathizes for a given situation, yet unless one is directly involved, the reality of the situation is not truly experienced.

When the meeting ended, viewing the television monitors in the hotel lobby quickly established the reality of the moment. Learning of the attack at the Pentagon and of yet a fourth plane being hijacked and crashing near Pittsburgh introduced a sense of uncertainty into a day that started with a given plan of action and a goal for achievement.

It was like Pearl Harbor all over again!! Except this time, the act of terror was at my home—New York City—and Washington, DC, and near Pittsburgh. This was at my home, and I was not there with my family. Over the next few days, the immensity of the terrorist act and the inflicted catastrophe highlighted by a loss of more than 3,000 lives increased the reality. While I watched the television monitor and the cloud of smoke covering one of my most favorite places in New York City—the World Trade Center—I experienced a sense of insecurity, helplessness, and anger that I have never before experienced.

Flights from Denver to New York City were canceled, necessitating formulating alternate plans of travel by bus or train. Barbara Goldstein was able to arrange for both of us to travel by Greyhound bus from Denver to Newark. We left Denver Wednesday evening at 7:30 PM on September 12 and arrived in Newark at 5 PM on Friday, September 14. Reality was traveling cross-country and seeing the landscape of our wonderful country with no aircraft flying in the sky as far as one could see. Reality was reinforced again by traveling from Newark to home in Queens and seeing the skyline of New York City against a backdrop of a beautiful sunset—all marred and overcast by a shifting cloud of black smoke through which one tried to see the Twin Towers, knowing all the time that they were gone forever.

My friends and colleagues, reality is returning to the tasks of resuming and reasserting one's responsibilities, both new and old, which makes this life worth living. For me, that is family and friends and medicine.

Our leaders, President George W. Bush and Mayor Rudy Gulianni, have said it well: We will not be intimidated; we will be alert. Americans, together with our allies, will protect and go forth to fight to preserve the Judeo-Christian teachings that we in America consider to be our lives' foundation. As Americans we stand for respect and love for our fellow citizens. We repudiate terrorism and will not be intimidated. God Bless America.

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