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THE 9/11 HEARINGS

## Harry Waizer

### "I am one of the lucky ones"

On the first day of its hearings, March 31, 2003, the 9/11 Commission heard from survivors and family members of the victims of September 11. The first to speak was Harry Waizer, who worked for Cantor Fitzgerald as vice president and tax counsel in charge of national and international tax matters in Tower 1 of the World Trade Center. Waizer nearly died from the burns he received on September 11, but he told the commission he is not angry, and he does not want to blame anyone for failing to foresee the attacks. "If there were mistakes," he said, "they were the mistakes of complacency, a complacency in which we all shared."

#### [Listen](#)

On September 11th, at approximately 8:46 in the morning, I was in an elevator, somewhere between the 78th and 101st floor, in Tower 1 of the World Trade Center and I was on my way to my offices on the 104th floor where I was employed as vice president and tax counsel for Cantor Fitzgerald.

The elevator was ascending when, suddenly, I felt it rocked by an explosion, and then felt it plummeting. Orange, streaming sparks were apparent through the gaps in the doors at the sides of the elevator as the elevator scraped the walls of the shaft. The elevator burst into flame. I began to beat at the flames, burning my hands, arms and legs in the process. The flames went out, but I was hit in the face and neck by a separate fireball that came through the gap in the side of the elevator doors. The elevator came to a stop on the 78th floor, the doors opened, and I jumped out.

I began the long walk down 78 flights in the fire stairwell. I walked, focused on my single mission: to get to the streets and find an ambulance. I knew I was seriously hurt. I was shouting out to people in the stairwell, telling them I was burned, asking them to step aside so that I could get down more quickly. Faces turned towards me, sometimes with apparent annoyance at this intrusion on the orderly evacuation process. I saw the look on many of those faces turn to sympathy or horror as they saw me. At one point I noticed a large flap of skin hanging on my arm. I did not look any further.

I was triaged at the hospital, where they took my clothes, wallet, watch and glasses, none of which I ever saw again. They began to cut off my wedding band from my badly burned fingers, but a sympathetic nurse used an entire jar of lubricant to remove it intact and saved it for my wife. Karen has worn that ring on a chain around her neck since then, saving it for the day when I can wear it on my finger again.

After five months of hospitalization, multiple surgeries, a year and a half, and counting, of painful, sometimes grueling, therapy, I am here today to bear witness. My injuries have left me with lung damage, chronic pain in my right elbow, my left knee, my back, damage to my vocal cords and the prognosis for the nerve and tendon damage in my hands is still uncertain. But I can enjoy various activities, play with my children, and enjoy my time spent with my wife, with my friends and family.

I am one of the handful of lucky ones. Just blocks away from here lay the unrecovered remains of many friends and colleagues, some dear friends. They can no longer speak for themselves and I am left with the unchosen, unhappy task of trying to speak for them.

I have no rage about what happened on 9/11, only a deep sadness for the many innocent, worthy lives lost and the loved ones who lost so much that day.

The dead will remain dead despite this Commission's best efforts and intentions. But it is my hope that this Commission can learn and teach us from its scrutiny of the past, and if the findings of this Commission can prevent even one future 9/11, if they can forestall even one plan of Osama bin Laden, prevent even one more act of madness and horror, I and the rest of this nation will owe the Commission our gratitude.

## David Lim

### "I thought I had died"

When the second tower of the World Trade Center fell, eight people miraculously survived in a stairwell as tons of steel collapsed around them. One of them was David Lim, a Port Authority police officer. At the time of his testimony before the 9-11 Commission, on March 31, 2003, Lim had been with the Port Authority Police for 23 years. He worked in Tower 2 with a bomb-sniffing dog named Sirius.

#### [Listen](#)

I was working on 9/11, like I do every day, with my partner, Sirius, my explosive-detector canine, checking trucks coming into the World Trade Center. This was considered vital, considering what happened in '93.

I had just finished up searching a multitude of trucks with my partner and I had retired to my office to do my paperwork and have a little breakfast.

8:45 a.m. all that changed. I was in the basement of Number 2 World Trade Center, yet I felt the shock of the first plane hitting Tower 1. I secured my partner in his kennel, told him that I had to go help the people - he was a bomb dog, not a search-and-rescue dog -- and I figured he'd be safe there while I went to assist. Unfortunately, that was the last time I saw him.

I was assisting people out of the A staircase as they were coming out of the building. At this point the debris was already falling onto the plaza. Somebody screamed that a body was outside on the plaza. I went over to investigate. And I went to call it in on the radio.

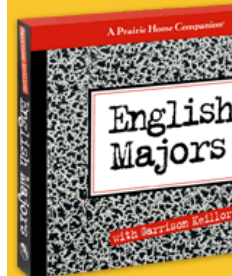
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And just as I did that, another body fell about 10 feet away from that one.

I took it upon myself at that point to start heading up into the building to assist before people would start jumping out of the building.

I kept on going up, telling people to keep going down, down is good. I remember running into people similar to Mr. Waizer that were burned, asking for help. What I did was I assigned those people to people that were healthy to help get them down. I felt the greater good was for me to get to a higher point to try to assist those people upstairs.

And sure enough, just as I was starting to get the people down, I felt another collision on the left side. Looking out the window I saw this rain of fire coming down and it blew out the windows on the 44th floor. Fortunately, I was right in the middle, I was not burned, but I was knocked to the ground by the concussion.

The building now was starting to shake. As we were going down, I was clearing the floors, getting people that were left behind that were waiting. Most of them were either handicapped, elderly, had someone coming with disabilities, but at this point there was no more waiting. We had to go.

We got to about the 35th floor, in that general area. I don't remember specifically when I felt the building shaking. I thought for sure that my building was collapsing. It shook and it stopped.

Then I heard on the radio something I will never forget, "Tower 2 is down, all units evacuate Tower 1."

As we were going down, and now we were starting to lose power in the building, the lights were going on and off.

I got down to the fifth floor and I saw, that is where I met Josephine Harris and Ladder Company 6. Josephine Harris, who is a Port Authority employee, had walked down 72 flights, and she had a bad leg problem and she could go no further.

I grabbed Josephine by one arm, Firefighter Tommy Falco grabbed the other arm, with Billy Butler right behind us, we started going down.

Well, one more flight down was as far as we got and the building started coming down. I knew that was it because the other building was already gone. I knew it was coming down.

All I could think of is, well, if I could protect Josephine from the debris. So me and Tommy were covering her and it started coming. And you could feel the wind of pushing down as they were compressing through the building, you could hear the sound. It was like an on-rushing locomotive or an avalanche. You could almost feel the sound of the floors pancaking on top of each other as they were collapsing. As we all know, they collapsed straight down.

And they just kept coming and coming. And I guess my final thoughts were about my family. I thought about my wife, my kids. Excuse me. I hoped they would think well of me for what I did. When the debris stopped falling first I thought I had died. But then I heard a voice.

We couldn't see each other. It was totally black. We couldn't breathe. We had to try to breathe through our shirts, but we were fairly, in fairly good shape. We were alive.

We saw a light over the sixth-floor staircase and our first thought was that the floor had power in it and it was virtually, or at least partially, intact, we could make our stand there.

As it turns out, as that light got brighter, it turned out to be the sun. We were virtually standing on top of what was left of the World Trade Center. When I say that, you have to picture a straw in a pancake. We were in that straw.

By all the engineers and everybody else that tried to figure out, there's no reason why I should be sitting here talking to you right now. It was just a small sliver of staircase from the sixth floor down to the first floor, damaged, though still enough to keep us alive, that preserved our lives.

I just again want to thank you for allowing me to speak here. And I know, I know it's obviously not quite as important as all the people that we lost. I grieve for all those that I knew that day, I grieve for those that I will never know, but I also grieve for the best partner I ever had. Thank you very much.

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