

Allison Pennisi ([00:08](#)):

Hello, everyone. Thank you for listening. I'm Allison Pennisi. And you are our listeners, and as always, we thank you for joining us. We want you to come back as often as you can. So feel free to listen to 'Prep Talk' on your favorite podcast provider. You can also follow us on social media, on Twitter at @nycemergencymgt, Facebook, Instagram, LinkedIn, and much more. This episode of 'Prep Talk' is dedicated to the 20th anniversary of the September 11th terrorist attacks. September 11th, 2001 was a tragic day that had a profound impact on all of us. Today, we share the stories of past and present New York City emergency management staff and first responders. Each bravely shares how this event changed the field as we know it. Here are a few stories from Andrew D'Amora, Janet Rivera, Tom Bartkowski and Kumarie Ramsaroop.

Andrew D'Amora ([01:01](#)):

Yeah, I was a lieutenant in the 120 Precinct. First of all, I can't even believe it's 20 years. So, it's just an amazing thing that time has passed on so quickly. So, I was with the department for 11 years when 9/11 happened. Like I said, I was a lieutenant in the 120 precinct and I'll just never forget that morning. It was a beautiful, beautiful day. It was my daughter, my oldest daughter's first day of kindergarten. So we got up early, we got her dressed, we were going to take pictures. And then, I didn't have a cell phone then, I just remember getting a call at home that a plane had hit the World Trade Center. When I found out the first plane hit, I got a phone call. We turned on the TV right away. And I said, wow, it looks like.. at the first onset, said, wow, the plane, there was an accident.

Andrew D'Amora ([02:00](#)):

It looks like a plane hit the Trade Center. And then it kicked into my head about the '93 bombing, because my father-in-law was in the Trade Center when the '93 bombing happened. And I'm saying, okay, that sounds a little... I mean it's too ironic. And then as I was preparing to get into work, the second plane hit. I said, oh, forget it. Everybody knew then it was definitely a terrorist attack. A lot of people were in the street. And it usually takes me about, I don't know, half hour to get to the precinct. And it took me almost double the time to get there. Traffic was just... The congestion was just crazy, people in the street, figuring out, hey, what's going on? And so by the time I got to the precinct, the tower already fell. And where the 120 precinct is, it's right at the foot of the ferry, Staten Island Ferry terminal.

Andrew D'Amora ([02:56](#)):

So you could see clearly what had happened. In fact, one of the planes had flew right over the precinct, the guys had told me. At a low altitude, so they knew what was going on. So we were waiting for... because the ferry was right there. So we did send some cops onto the other side. We were trying to figure out, hey, what are we going to do on the Staten Island side? Originally. Word was that we were going to start receiving injured and dead on the Staten Island Ferry, bring them back. There's a ball field right across from the precinct. Where there'd be triage or possibly even the morgue. But that obviously never materialized, because of when the second tower had collapsed it was very few injured or deceased that were found. But it was definitely a lot of confusion at first, I would think, until everybody got their... tried to get their arms around it, until matters as a department, working through operations.

Andrew D'Amora ([03:56](#)):

Because you don't want to have everybody, you would have all 76 precincts responding, right? So you have to have some sort of command and control of who's doing what. One of the biggest things I

remember that day is that as soon as that happened, I remember all the precincts, that the 120 got flooded with retired cops, retired firemen and just average people just want to help. What could I do? So that was just a big... Trying to manage that too. Hey, what could we do? Okay, we're going to see what's going on. I remember I grabbed one of my sergeants and we grabbed like five cops and we went into Manhattan. Primarily the cops that with me, their brothers were missing. So we spent in between just massive... The material and the smoke and everything else, trying to find relatives.

Andrew D'Amora ([04:51](#)):

That's what everybody was looking to do. So it was a very trying day. You get emotional about it because of the experience, but you try to lead the guys and try to help out the best way you can. As well, we were trying to search for these cops' missing brothers. I think a couple were firemen, some of them were business people that worked at Cantor Fitzgerald. So I remember, I said, oh, my cousin is a fireman in Engine 239. I said, I was thinking about him a lot. And so I remember that night we stayed probably, it felt like days, just at Ground Zero from September 11th on. But I remember seeing his engine outside a building, Engine 230, had to be like 3:00am on the 12th.

Andrew D'Amora ([05:49](#)):

I said, wow. I said, is Engine 230... I remember grabbing the fire... is engine 230... I remember running into the lobby of the building. And there was a whole bunch of firemen and they were just exhausted. They were just taking a break. They were all out cold, sleeping. And I found my cousin sleeping. I remember I woke him up. I said, Glenn, you're okay, right? Gave him a big hug. And I was just so happy to see him. And then I let him go back there. I remember him telling me afterwards, he goes, you left.

Andrew D'Amora ([06:16](#)):

And then he couldn't... he didn't know what happened afterwards, but I made contact with him. But so thank God he was okay. But unfortunately the guys I was with all their brothers had died in the Trade Center and it was very difficult. And then the days afterwards, just working on the pile and really just trying to... Going back and forth, I think I was one of the last cars that were allowed the Staten Island Ferry. We traveled back and forth on the ferry. And I just... It was supposed to be a morning of bringing my daughter to kindergarten, first day, taking pictures. It turned out to be the worst day in our lives, right?

Janet Rivera ([06:58](#)):

That was the worst day. It was so surreal. I thought I was in a movie. Everything just blew up. I could hear glass, debris is already coming down, but the glass, when they went, boom, boom, boom, boom. Almost like lit up and then chhhhh, hear the glass break. I had a little jean jacket on. I put that over my head and I found shelter in a garage. And that was scary until... And then I ran. I was like, once I heard everything subsiding, the glass, I just ran off to 16th Street where I used to live. And my aunt and my dad were still down there. So I ran, ran, ran and I had clogs on, I wanted take a taxi. I had clogs, by the time I got to my aunt's house on 16th Street, I had blisters on each foot.

Janet Rivera ([07:49](#)):

And I was like, I got to go pick up my kid. I went right up to a house. They're like, you want anything? Pills, gummies? I'm like, no. I need to be full alert. So we went up to the roof, my cousin and I, and we just looked, because she could see the World Trade Center. And it seemed like it was melting, moving. And then it just started collapsing and I was just torn apart. So my next thing was put on some socks and

let's go and get my kid. She went to school, Catholic school, in Chelsea. She was 10 years old. And I was just so glad to pick her up. I was hysterical and we just walked from 20th Street to 54th Street where I lived. And she had a friend at school in the same grade had lost her father, who was on the 100th floor or something.

Janet Rivera ([08:40](#)):

So, it was really traumatic. I thought I would never see her again. And that's all that I worried about was my kid at that last moment. My God, I'm going to die, this is it. I got to pray. But I'm thinking about Megan, who's going to take care of her? Well, it was just so many things that I just... My desperation was never to see her again, that feeling that heart was going down. I'm never going to hug her or kiss her or any of that. So those are the thoughts that came. It was just her. And I was just begged God, please for her, keep me here, keep me here. I'm begging you, I want to raise her, I want to just be with her. I don't want to leave her, you know. I was a single parent. So I know my parents would've done a wonderful job if I would've never made it, but it was just that desperation just to hold, take care of my kid. And it was just, that was my... Please God, just don't let me die. Let me live for her.

Tom Bartkowski ([09:39](#)):

I started working for OEM in 1996. And since '96 I did logistics in fleet for them, the agency, when they needed, when it was quiet. Again, this agency was just response. It was small. It was less than a hundred people in the agency. I was in Queens, in Corona, Queens. Right near where Citi Field is now, Shea Stadium was. And when the planes crashed, we saw it because we had a clear shot of the city. We're right by LaGuardia Airport. We saw it and immediately afterwards my commissioner called me and asked me to put together trucks to bring concrete barriers and supplies down to the Trade Center. Because we knew, I guess they figured that they would have to lock down the area and concrete barriers, sometimes referred to as Jersey barriers, would do that feat. So we loaded up trucks and we headed down to the city about 4:00pm.

Tom Bartkowski ([10:43](#)):

When we got there, we got down to Canal. Not Canal, West Street and Chambers. And that's where the trucks were staged, along West Street. And they had a frozen zone and you could see why, you could see the devastation. And then once I was on site, people from OEM were on site strongly, and we got to talking, all right, can you help us with this? Can you help us with that? And it ran just, okay, got involved with that, and somebody else took care of the barriers. I was now tasked with working with OEM. I can't remember to the day who asked, but Calvin was on site, Tim Brown there with some people. And we just got vehicles for them. We procured vehicles from other agencies because the agency lost probably a dozen vehicles that were parked at 7 World Trade.

Tom Bartkowski ([11:37](#)):

You had occasional... Pier 92 was the operation center that Commissioner Jackson set up in 36 hours. And you could never tell it was a shipping terminal after it was done. There was a day we also had to get the fire trucks. Going back to October, there were a lot of fire trucks that were crushed at the Trade Center. And they were stored on side streets, away from the actual work. But every time the firemen would come in to do their work, they would be passing by these crushed rigs, and it would be upsetting.

Tom Bartkowski ([12:14](#)):

So a plan came up to move them out to the Fresh Kills landfill, where they stayed for a long time. That's where all the remains were sent. We had a trail of them. Again, tasks were getting DOT involved to put them on trailers, get cranes, and we did that. And one of the first rigs that left the site, when it got up to West Street and Canal, where the public was 24/7, there was always people at Canal and West clapping for all the first responders going in and out. So here we are, where we're bringing these trucks up to the checkpoint and the people were hysterical. I mean, crying, crying, upset, fainting. At that point, with everybody being upset, the public, we backed the trucks down, back where they couldn't see them.

Tom Bartkowski ([13:25](#)):

And at night under the cover of darkness, we taught them, the loads and we knew what they were and maybe some of the people were, but you didn't see them, the damaged fire trucks. And the people, there was always people there, whether it was midnight, 2:00am. I had one day we had a fireman that missed their bus to go back to Midtown, wherever they were going. So they needed a ride and they jumped on a Gator we had. We had six firemen in this small Gator driving up West Street into Midtown. We did what we needed to do. So, there was so many different stories of people being unselfish and whatever they need to do, they did.

Kumarie Ramsaroop ([14:19](#)):

It was a nice brand new office. It was a nice area to be in, the World Trade Center. And the commute was nice. Same. But it was a really nice place to work in. I wish more people would have gotten to see what it was like. It's weird because that morning... I'm an early worker. So it just works schedule-wise with my children. I always worked early. I was an 8:00am-4:00pm person. And that morning when I'm leaving home, my daughter was four, it was her first day of kindergarten. And her and my son was seven and they kept coming out of the front door and they kept saying, bye mommy, bye mommy. I'm like, you guys go in, mommy's going to be late for work. And they kept coming out, but I wouldn't leave until they go back in the house.

Kumarie Ramsaroop ([15:07](#)):

And I think after the third time, I'm like, go back in guys, I'm going to really be late for work now. They went back in, I called my husband and I'm like, get them in. But now looking back at it, everything happens for a reason. So it was, I grab a cup of coffee. We had a cafeteria in the building. I went, I grab a cup of coffee and normally I would put my bag down and go talk to LJ because LJ, the way... I don't know if anyone have told you the way the building is, we had the whole floor. We were on the south side of the building and LJ sat on the north side of the building. You have to walk around the whole east side of the building to get to LJ, to get to that side.

Kumarie Ramsaroop ([15:51](#)):

So I always grab my coffee, go sit with her. We have coffee together. So it was a normal morning that we started to have coffee, talking about family, and over the weekend and you know, normal stuff. The building shook, but again, we didn't think anything of it because there was a heliport not far from 7 World Trade Center. So usually when it lands you just feel a little vibration. But then we were sitting there and the building literally shook. And then we start hearing sirens and I'm like, LJ, let me go just check it out to see what was going on. So when you're getting back to the south side of the building, you have to pass all the window on the east side of the building. So used to paper flying and stuff, but I still didn't think anything of it.

Kumarie Ramsaroop ([16:40](#)):

So I looked up, when I got to the windows, I looked up and I saw smoke. And you still see paper flying, but still it doesn't hit you, what was happening. And again, I thought maybe a helicopter slam into the building accidentally. And I'm standing, and I say, okay, I got to go call Steve. He has to pick up the kids today because we're going to activate. I'm going to be late for work. He has to leave work and go pick up our kids. That was my first thought was the kids. So I called him on the phone and I'm standing on the phone. I'm stretching the phone line because I didn't have a cell phone. I'm stretching one of the phones that was on next the desk on the window, and I'm talking to him and I'm like, you got to go work.

Kumarie Ramsaroop ([17:30](#)):

You got to go pick up the kids, leave and pick, and he was like, where are you? I'm like, I'm in the building. He was like, you have to leave. And I'm like, why? I can't, this is my job. He said, another plane just hit the building. I said, I'm looking at it, but I can't see anything. He said, well, I'm seeing it on TV. Then they were like, okay, you guys, some people said, we're staying here. And I'm like, no, I'm getting out of this building. So we ran and Barclay Street, right there by DC37, they were like, everybody stay here. But all you see was paper flying, people running, screaming, and then all of a sudden we're standing there. So our building say, if you move maybe about 10 feet over, you could see that side street, you could see straight up to the World Trade Center.

Kumarie Ramsaroop ([18:19](#)):

And I'm looking, we're looking to see what was happening. And all you see not realizing these were bodies coming down. I heard a cop coming, running on this street, coming up from the Trade Center. He was like, run. And we're looking. And then Nandy was like, okay, we got to run, and now. And before we turned around to start running south, all you see was a smoke, a ball of smoke just coming, that when the building, the first building was coming down. And me and Nandy looked at each other, I said, put your ID on. If we die at least we have that identification on us. Let's hold on each other and let's run. And she was like, okay. I said, put your ID on, come on. And she was like, she looked at me. I said, you have to, because look what's coming. I said, let's run.

Kumarie Ramsaroop ([19:15](#)):

Let's give it all effort. You couldn't see anything north or south of on Barclay Street because everything was covered in smoke and dust and paper. All I can picture is a lot of paper, office paper just all over the place. And the dust and screaming and fire trucks and police car, and all you see was dust. But later that day we actually walked home. Me and Nandy was crisscrossing Manhattan. Because every time we walked, we go east, you see... We didn't realize that the fighter jets was flying all over New York City, was protecting. But we didn't know that. So every time we go east, we see, we run back the west. So we were crisscrossing. We are trying to get on a bus to get home. So we walked until we got to 96th Street.

Kumarie Ramsaroop ([20:18](#)):

So my mom worked at Mount Sinai at the time. And right in front of Mount Sinai, we found the phone, a street phone, because like I said, I didn't have a cell phone. And we didn't have OEM phone then either. I found a street phone and I called my husband. And he thought we were dead. Because after I spoke to him early in the day about working late, we didn't speak back to him. I didn't speak back to him. So at that point he was... I called him and he picked up the phone and he was like... I said, hi, and he's like, you're alive? And I'm like, I'm talking to you. Yeah, I'm alive. And of course I started to cry and he was like, where are you? And then I told him where I was.

Kumarie Ramsaroop ([20:57](#)):

I'm like... But he was like, I can't come get you. They're not letting no one in Manhattan. So I said, how do I get home? He said, I want you to... He's telling me walk all the way to First Avenue, go over the Third Avenue Bridge... the Willis Avenue Bridge. There's a gas station at the corner. Just sit there and wait for me. I'm going to come get you guys. That's the closest I can come to you. And that's what we did. And my brother was there to pick us up because he couldn't leave the kids. After the fact I found out he was trying to tell them that your mama's not coming home. You know, at that point he was like, I have a four-year old and a seven-year old. How are you going to explain to them that I left them that morning and I'm not coming home to them?

Kumarie Ramsaroop ([21:43](#)):

But thank God that I made it home. And I made it home, and I got home I think like 4:00 that afternoon. And I sat on the couch, and I turned the TV on because I'm curious to see what was happening. And as I'm sitting, 7 World Trade Center just keep tumbling down. And you know, I'm being selfish, and I'm like, oh my God, what am I going to do now for a job? I'm thinking about, I have a family, I have a mortgage. And I'm like... Nothing that I'm safe, that I made it out, it's like, everything else came to mind. And then my husband looked at me and he's like, they'll be fine. You're home.

Allison Pennisi ([22:30](#)):

If you'd like to hear more of these stories, you can visit New York City Emergency Management's website and its YouTube channel. May we never forget the 2,977 victims, their families and their survivors. Thank you for listening.