

# Reflections on the Day the Earth Stood Still

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## Reflections on the Day the Earth Stood Still

**By Martiza Martinez**  
UCF Forum columnist

Wednesday, September 11, 2013

The day started just like any other day, with concerns over my commute to work and traffic jams, what attire I should wear for the day's meetings, should I take my lunch to work or eat out?

On this particular day, 12 years ago today – Sept. 11, 2001 – I chose to wear black dress pants and a purple blouse with matching accessories. I reported to my University of Central Florida office in downtown Orlando and went about my business.

Around 9 a.m., a colleague came to my office and reported that some kind of aircraft had crashed into one of the World Trade Center towers in New York City. Being a New Yorker by birth and having visited the majestic site a number of times, I assumed this aircraft was probably a careless news helicopter that had flown too close to the structure in the pursuit of a better camera shot and probably nicked one of the corners of the building.

I dismissed my colleague's report as inconsequential, given the size and height of the towers, although I did briefly imagine what the damages were and how startled the person who occupied that particular office was, given the statistical improbability of a helicopter hitting an office window.

This was my frame of mind until a few minutes later when the same colleague came back to my office with an update: The second tower had been struck by another aircraft. My reaction: That's impossible. Or could it be that a news helicopter pilot was flying a chopper under the influence of something? My colleague proceeded to share that the crashes involved planes, not helicopters, and that they did not appear to be accidents.

That's when I, and the rest of the world, turned to the Internet and news outlets to have our existence (our normalcy?) changed forever.

I remember accessing the *USA Today* website briefly after a number of tries; however, given the high volume of Internet searches, the website was, in essence, static and unreliable. Then my colleagues and I in numbness huddled around the one TV in our building to watch the developments.

All I kept repeating to myself was, "What is happening?"

Throughout the morning I kept in touch with my family in Kissimmee, briefly finding relief/solace every time the safety of a relative of ours in New York was confirmed.

An hour or so later, we received word from the main UCF campus that in view of the developments in New York and the Pentagon, the university would close at noon.

On my somber and still incredulous drive home, I remember thinking: "Wow, I could drive in reverse and no one would notice." Interstate 4 was desolate; all radio stations I tuned in to had suspended their regular programming to provide updates on the developing situation.

At this point, all I wanted to do was get to my grandparents' house in Kissimmee, to meet with my family that had gathered. After I arrived there, the mood was quiet, almost reverent – everyone, young and old, around the TV watching in disbelief with the towers in flames, and later in ruins.

It's interesting that we remember so many of our trivial personal details of this date, what we wore, where we were, our exact reaction to the news, etc. For my generation, Generation X, we previously did not have a reference point of this magnitude. This was our Pearl Harbor. At least for me, the words of President Roosevelt became real: "...a date which will live in infamy."

So many lives lost, so many lives changed.

Although Sept. 11 was a day the world stood still for all of us, it will always remind us – in the world's new normalcy of safety sensitivities – to be more compassionate, enjoy our time with family and friends, and to live our lives to be the best we can.

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