SEPTEMBER 13, 2001

Excerpt

A fireball erupting in the World Trade Centre's South Tower

A day that will forever live in infamy

IN one day, three high-rise buildings had been obliterated from the skyline a mile from where I live.

Seven hours earlier, New York's landmark World Trade Center twin towers had collapsed under terrorist attacks, its two-foot-high rubble scattered for five blocks burying alive thousands of the city's financial workers, including some of the best financial brains in the world.

Not since Pearl Harbor has American sovereignty been so violated. The scale of the devastation is unprecedented. The three plane attacks were remarkably coordinated to target the two most powerful icons of US military and financial might – the Pentagon and the twin towers of the World Trade Center.

I had heard the first explosion at 8.45am and felt a tremor in my loft building – an old, solid-brick structure with high ceilings and tall windows. It's probably a burst pipeline, I told myself.

Or maybe it's Ben Stiller again. The Hollywood actor was filming across the road from my apartment building this time last year for the upcoming movie, Zoolander. I was working on my computer at the time when a loud explosion almost threw me off my chair. It was as if a bomb had just exploded outside my fire escape. I rushed out of the building, only to be told by the production crew that they had just filmed a scene where they blew up a car. And ha, ha, this was for a comedy.

So when the first loud boom shattered the neighbourhood on Tuesday morning, I was rather blase. This is New York City. New Yorkers have seen it all. Sticks and stones wouldn't break their bones.

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AUGUST 28, 2001

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Photo: Robert, Flickr BT Graphics: Andrea Lee & Dania Amiril