



An Eyewitness to Terror

*Neil Anand, MD '01
Recalls the Day
America Was
Attacked*

Tuesday September 11, 2001 started out just like any other day for first year resident, Neil Anand, who had walked a few short blocks from his sixth floor apartment on Fulton Street to begin his day as an internal medicine resident at NYU Downtown Hospital. The hospital, which is affiliated with Mount Sinai NYU Health, lies in the shadow of the financial center of New York just four blocks from The World Trade Center. Neil arrived to work at 7:00 AM and the routine of the morning was beginning. At 8:30 AM Neil was attending a grand rounds lecture when he and the other doctors were startled at a huge explosive sound whose sonic shock wave vibrated throughout the hospital, driving Neil and the rest of the staff to the window. "I was shocked to see what appeared to be a large black hole in the North tower of the trade center."

"A helicopter must have hit the building," remarked one of the chief residents. Immediately a code yellow was called, putting all the hospital staff on alert for the highest disaster. "All the attending physicians became concerned that our hospital would be deluged with injured patients due to our close proximity to the World Trade Center and so I was dispatched to the ICU to clear out all but the most critical of patients and arrange for

their transfers to other metropolitan hospitals." The beds would be needed for the disaster which had not yet been identified. After arranging the transfers, Neil looked at the smoke billowing from the first tower when he witnessed a sight that he still finds incredulous, a second plane hitting the South Tower.

"It happened so fast, the explosion was one of the most horrible things that I have ever witnessed with my own two eyes."

After the second plane hit, Neil was summoned to the Emergency Room as the first patients came in. Twenty or thirty came in initially with incredible injuries. A triage was set up with Dr. Anand and four other doctors directing the flow of patients to the appropriate location. As patients rushed into the ER, the scene became immediately chaotic; some patients were brought in on stretchers with major trauma while others walked in with blood soaked faces, and covered in debris. One of the first patients seen by Dr. Anand was a woman with a degloving injury who had no skin from her buttocks to her ankles. Other patients had burns so severe that they looked "charred without any skin visible." A critically injured man whose head trauma resulted in his brain being exposed behind the shattered skull was brought to the triage area as was a man whose face was half gone and where his eyeball had been; now an empty space.

The only thought that the medical teams had was to care for the injured, they did not know what was happening outside.

The noble towers that once were the hallmarks of the World Trade Center had crumbled. "I didn't hear anything, I didn't hear the buildings collapse, I didn't even know that they did until a fireman told me", recalled Neil. A huge smoke cloud came down and invaded the sterile confines of the hospital. "It became real scary to work in the hospital because it was so difficult to breathe and I couldn't stop coughing. So much smoke filled the ER that it became difficult to see what was in front of me."

Eventually, Neil went outside to meet the injured who were coming in increasing numbers. "There were screams of, 'Oh my God, the whole city is being bombed!' and I turned to see the Brooklyn Bridge crowded with thousands of screaming people running from the disaster, running from the debris, running to safety. I really have to commend all the medical staff who stayed calm throughout the crisis and acted as true heroes should by continuing to treat patients."

Throughout the day the injured came, about 400 in all. Dr. Anand and his colleagues stayed for twenty four hours, seeing injuries that were unimaginable. Dr. Anand was once again called to the ICU where a ten minute power outage forced the medical staff to bag ventilator patients by hand.

One of the most heart wrenching events for Dr. Anand was seeing a family who was called to the hospital because a young man being cared for was in the most critical condition and death was imminent. The family tried desperately to reach their twenty-nine year old loved one but arrived at the hospital half an hour after the man had died because they were detoured and detained by security. Upon hearing the news, the mother and sister fainted, the cries of other family members

filled the room. They viewed the body in disbelief, it couldn't be the son, brother, and cousin they loved so much! "That's not what he looked like, it just can't be."

The following day Dr. Anand volunteered to help treat any survivors that would be found at ground zero. "I was totally shocked at what I saw. I had attended a concert with my mother in the plaza below the towers a few days before. It was so sad to see the rubble at ground zero. It looked more like Beirut than the greatest city of America." Dr. Anand tried to return to his apartment three days after the attack. He gained admittance only because of his identification as a doctor. There was debris covering everything and there was no electricity or water. His few material possessions were destroyed. But as he reflected, "I only lost a computer and some electronic equipment, nothing really." He and the other residents of the apartment had to make other arrangements, they could not live at home. So the hospital became home for 4 days, his bed was a cot in the corner and the restricted use of water for all but emergency use insured that a shower was the least of his priorities during those difficult days.

A fateful last minute decision directed Neil Anand to New York City rather than San Francisco where he was offered a residency. How does one so inexperienced ever prepare for a day like September 11th? Dr. Anand credits the teachers and skills he acquired at Albany Medical College. "I had great teachers at Albany Med and that enabled me to treat 8 victims with little supervision and many others with the help of other medical staff," said Dr. Anand.

Dr. Anand did not have a day off for two weeks following that fateful day allowing him the opportunity to grieve, to mourn the dead and reflect fully on the events of that September day. Finally, a scheduled vacation came and sitting in the comfortable suburban home of his parents, Dr. Anand spoke of the "heroes" – the doctors, nurses, technicians and support staff of the hospital who stayed and continued to focus on their mission to heal. He spoke of his life and how it has changed. He hasn't been sleeping well and there is dread when he speaks of returning to his apartment whose view no longer contains the sight of the majestic towers that graced the New York skyline.

Editor's note: I want to thank Dr. Anand for sharing his photos and recollections with readers of the Bulletin. Many other alumni were involved in caring for the disaster victims, we thank you all.