

Martin Kelly just about survived September 11th

The Galway native recalls that horrific day.

Athenry native Martin Kelly emigrated to New York just weeks after Galway's 1964 All-Ireland football success. The New York State President of the Ancient Order of Hibernians is an avid Galway GAA supporter and was enthusiastically looking forward to last September's All-Ireland final against Meath when disaster struck: the World Trade Centre - where he was employed as a Manager with telephone company Verizon Corporation - was reduced to rubble. Hogan Stand was in the process of editing a feature in which the avid gael previewed the 2001 football final. We never heard from Martin for a week. We feared the worst. Then, from the deathly silence, emerged the following message in which the Athenry man relates his remarkable tale of survival from the wreckage of America's darkest day:

My experience of the events of 9-11-01

On 9/11/01 I went to my office - located on the 11th floor in 2 WTC - as I have for the past 21 years.

I am one of approximately 100 people who worked there for Verizon Communications. Most of them are technicians and, after they get their assignments from managers like myself, they go to various offices around the World Trade Centre.

On Tuesday 9/11, at about 8:45am, I heard a loud bang and the building shook. As I looked out the window, I could see papers flying all around. Being the floor warden, I shouted for everyone to leave the building. Everyone close to me jumped up and ran out while I searched the floor for anyone who hadn't heard the bang.

I found four technicians in an equipment room who said they thought it was just construction work going on upstairs. They were reluctant to leave but I forcefully told them "You've got to go, as it looks pretty bad." They wanted to know what happened - I told them I didn't know. All I knew was that there were papers flying all around outside. With that, we all left together and went down to the lobby.

As floor warden, I was allowed to remain in the lobby with a number of electricians and elevator mechanics who were hanging around waiting to see what was going on. The elevators were running and I hoped to come across my daughter Margaret and her husband Mike who worked for Morgan Stanley on the 56th floor and 45th floors respectively of the same building. I thought if I could meet Margaret and Mike in the lobby, then we could call home together and tell my wife Anna Marie we were all fine. That was not to happen so easily.

Just then, there was a huge bang. It's a good thing I was under the over hang where the flags were hanging, as glass and pieces of debris fell right in front of me. At that point all the people in the lobby started to run. I got pushed back and I was glad to get out of their way to avoid being knocked down. I got a kick in the leg as I moved back against the wall. I stopped to plan the best means of escaping from the building. I knew I could not go out the Liberty Street side, as there was glass and debris falling.

Then I thought about going into the subways but abandoned that idea as I thought it might fill with gas, causing an explosion. Then I contemplated Vesey Street, but remembered that was where the first explosion had happened, so I decided to go out under the concourse towards the Trinity Street side. As I jumped over the railing, there were Port Authority Police directing people out every exit in front of the buildings. Some of us helped to organize the move and shouted, "Move fast but don't push!"

People moved very fast and were very orderly. I came out of the building on Trinity Place and

saw people lying on the ground bleeding but was told to keep moving, as there were police and firemen attending them. The cops and firemen were great and were moving the people along as fast as they could. I looked back and saw droves of people coming out from the Trade Centre and was hoping Margaret and Mike were among them.

After I got about a block away to Broadway, I looked up to see fire and smoke coming from the top of the building I just had fled. I tried to figure out which floor contained the big hole with all the fire and smoke. I saw the top of the hole was just about at the top sky lobby, which is on the 78th floor, and

the hole went down about 10 stories. I was trying to figure out if it was above where Margaret and Mike worked. It gave me some relief to figure out that it was about twelve stories above where Margaret worked. I then figured out that if Margaret and Mike had left when the first bang hit, it would have given them about 15 minutes to be on the way down. I calculated that at maybe two floors a minute that would have them down most of the way. I was praying to God to help them get out safely.

I was so upset that I told God that I could not pray any more for now but to please save Margaret and Mike.

I then went further away from the building and tried to use my cell phone to contact home but it would not work. I was very upset thinking about Margaret and Mike still inside the burning building. A very nice gentleman saw me and asked if I had anyone inside the building. I said: "My daughter and her husband were on the 56th and 45th floors." He replied: "Take my cell phone and try and call them" and he held my hand and prayed for their safe evacuation but I still could not get through. I thanked him and began to walk away. I then remembered that the last time there was a bomb at the Trade

Centre in 1993, I went to 11 Broadway (about five blocks away) as Verizon had another office there for the Wholesale Dept. I went to 11 Broadway and everyone there was happy to see me, as they hadn't known whether I had gotten out safely. I called home and my wife - who had come home from the school where she works - was very glad to hear my voice. I asked her if she had heard from Margaret or Mike and she said "No". This was about 9:45am. I asked her to stay by the phone in case they called and to call me if she got any word from them.

I then called my daughter Bernadette, who worked at 55 Water St about eight blocks from the Trade Centre and told her I was OK. She had also been trying to get in touch with us on our cell phones but they were not working. I told her I would call her when I heard from Margaret and Mike. I then called my son Martin who is studying for his Masters' at Fairfield University in Conn. and my son Sean who is away at Manhattan College. I did not get them but left a message on the answering machines.

I called home again to see if there was any word about Margaret and Mike, but there was still no word.

Then I heard a rattle and the ground shook. As I looked out the window, I saw a huge cloud of smoke coming towards us at 11 Broadway. Someone shouted, "Close the windows and tape them!" I ran and shut the window behind me and one of the other managers put tape on it as everyone helped close the windows and tape them up. We all stood behind some columns since we did not know if there had been a bomb explosion and thought the windows might blow in on us. Thank God it was only debris and black dust! As it hit the windows, it became as dark as if it was night outside and this lasted about 20 minutes. This was rather creepy as it had been such a lovely sunny day outside. I began getting pains in my chest from worry, as I still had not heard from Margaret and Mike. Just then the second tower fell and we went through the same thing all over again. Now my heart was pounding. I was thinking: "Even if Margaret and Mike made it out just before the collapse of the towers they may have been hit by something falling" - since I did not know how the towers fell or if there were other buildings the towers may have fallen on.

I called home again and Anna Marie said she still had not heard from them. I tried to calm myself down by beeping the technicians who were at the Trade Centre that morning and verify that they

were OK. Slowly they called in as they found phones that worked and informed us they were ok. I called home again and was told by Anna Marie that she still had not heard from Margaret and Mike - this was about 12 noon.

I went into the supervisor's office of that location and listened to the radio to hear what was happening and then found out that a plane also hit the Pentagon, and another had crashed in PA. The pain in my chest was getting worse and it started to worry me, so I tried to calm myself down. I was about to go to the bathroom to wash my face and relax, as I was now beginning to worry that I would have a heart attack, when one of my co-workers shouted out "Martin! Your wife is on the phone!" I rushed to the phone and I knew by how excited she sounded that she must have heard from Margaret and Mike.

She told me Margaret and Mike were safe and on their way home. I felt as if a ton weight had been lifted off my chest and jumped up and shouted to all that my daughter and her husband were OK!! I stayed there at 11 Broadway until about 4:30. As I was about to leave, Kenny, the manager for 11 Broadway, said One World Trade Centre was about to fall. I said to him: "If that building falls, there is a power plant under it and power will be lost". As I said that, the lights went out.

We had to evacuate 11 Broadway, as nobody was allowed to stay. I had to walk up to East Broadway to catch a train to Brooklyn. As I walked, there was a heavy fog in the air and I used a towel to cover my mouth and nose. My eyes started to burn and I went past a firehouse and one of the firemen told me to wash my eyes in the men's room, which I did.

When I got home two hours later, Anna Marie and I went over to see Margaret and Mike so we could hug and celebrate. I was so happy to see them!!! As we hugged and told our stories about the day, I asked Margaret to tell me how she got out. She told me her story: she was on a conference call on the 56th floor when the first plane hit. Her boss shouted for everyone to get out -- he was not taking any chances since he was in the building when the bomb went off in 1993. She said she was about ten flights down when a message came over the PA system for people to go back to their desks as the building was secure. I asked her if she considered going back, and she said she had for maybe a half second. She told me she was down about 30 flights when the second plane hit and it shook the building in a manner that seemed to be like an earthquake. In hindsight, she is glad she did not know at the time what was happening. She came out of the building on Trinity Place also, and ran across the street. She tried to call Mike and myself on her cell phone but could not get through. Exasperated, she looked up and who was standing right there - but her husband Mike! He said that he wasn't about to leave the area without finding her first. Now wasn't that God's hand guiding them to each other?

Mike told me how he got out: He was at the elevators when he realized he did not have his cell phone with him so he ran back for it, as it was important since both Margaret and he had a plan if anything ever happened. They both bought cell phones on the same day after Mike started working in the Trade Centre and they had established a plan that if anything happened they were to call each other on their cell phones and meet at a garage on Greenwich Street.

I thank God they met, as they were company and solace for each other on the way home. They explained that the reason it took so long to call home was that the networks were down but they knew that they had to keep on moving. After trying to decide what to do, they reasoned that although they hated the idea of walking across a bridge, it was the only way home. So they walked across the Manhattan Bridge (the Brooklyn Bridge seemed to be more of a target for any other terrorist attack), and stood in terror as they watched One World Trade tower collapse. After crossing the bridge, they walked down Flatbush Avenue until they were able to catch a bus, after

which they finally were able to use their cell phones to call home. They were never happier to be on Brooklyn soil and that much closer to home.