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Yes, President Bush was at Emma E. Booker when it happened. A bittersweet day we will never forget. We were so excited (of course) that the President of the United States was actually coming to our school as the centerpiece of his education platform. What an honor! We had to go through metal detectors that day, the secret service were on every corner (they bugged the school the week before), the Press was all over the place. The entire staff was to shake his hand. What are the odds that the school at where you teach gets a visit from the President of the United States?

And then... what are the odds that the day the President visits your school is a day that goes down in infamy? He was with one of our 2nd gr. teachers, listening to her kids doing a reading lesson, when his chief of staff came in the classroom to lean over and whisper in his ear. "The other World Trade Center Tower has been slammed into by a second jet. We are under attack." The rest of us were all lined up to stand behind the President for his education speech while this was going on. Some of us had been grouped there for as much as an hour beforehand, soaking up the excitement with one another, taking photos, laughing. Many of us had gotten up at 5:30 or earlier that morning, to be sure we made it to school at 7:30 to be checked through the metal detectors and receive our "Stage Party" pass to allow us to meet the president. Four 5th grade classes were sitting quietly in front rows; 3rd and 4th grade students were grouped together outside to catch whatever quick glimpse they could as he passed from the 2nd grade classroom into the media center.

Then, it started happening. "He's en route to the school now. There was a slight delay. It shouldn't be much longer." We stretched our legs and chatted. "There's been a delay. He's busy doing what Presidents do. He'll be here shortly." We stretched our legs some more and continued to wait. Finally, "There's been a delay. He has to make some phone calls. He's still coming, though." Just "doing what Presidents do" while they "make some phone calls" turned out to be the phone calls made in a nearby room to the director of the FBI, the Vice-President, and the Mayor of New York as the first contacts over what happened.

When they came in to take the Reading chart away, saying "It's not needed anymore", I wondered why they would suddenly decide they didn't want to show our school's progress as he made his education speech. If it was important then, why wasn't it important now? We were soon to find out why progress in reading was no longer the most important issue in America's eyes that day. Where I was, standing directly behind the podium, no-one had told us yet what had happened. We were still under the impression that his speech would continue as normal, once he finally arrived in the media center. I remember my mind wandering, thinking, "What if this isn't just some red-tape kind of delay? Wouldn't that be ironic if we were standing because something significant has happened? Some historic event?" Never could I have imagined how right I was. Ironic it wasn't. Horrific it was.

Finally, someone told the group of us standing in our area behind the podium that two planes had hit the World Trade Center. We murmured shocked exchanges, imagining two, probably small, planes accidentally hitting into each other and the buildings. Then someone said it had to have been on purpose. We wondered some more. Someone offhandedly remarked, "I guess this replaces us as the front page news". Having no TV footage in front of us to see what was happening, we couldn't know the catastrophic magnitude of what had taken place, and was continuing to take place, as we stood there... still waiting for the President. As we all know, Bush did make his quick appearance and 1 minute speech to the Nation (the first time he addressed the nation about the terrorist attacks). He turned immediately, gave a sad smile to the staff with a small wave of his hand, and left. Ron Paige, Secretary of Education, finished the speech that Bush was supposed to give. We had to give President Bush credit for staying long enough to even finish the reading lesson with the kids, and coming in to where we were all standing- he quite appropriately could have left immediately to go back to the limo & Airforce

One. Needless to say, it was quite a shock and crash for us, sort of like air being let out of a balloon.

It wasn't until later that I realized the full tragedy we had unwittingly had had a small part in. When I returned to my room, I immediately called my husband and turned the TV on, seeing for the first time what had taken place. After some discussion with him, he remarked, "I was so glad to see Airforce One take off from Sarasota". Not having known the scale of the attack, which I had just learned also included the pentagon, the thought had never occurred to me that Emma E. Booker could have been a target as well due to the President's presence. We, as a staff, were exhausted by the end of the day, emotionally and physically. I watched myself on TV that evening as they replayed the timeline of the day's events over and over again. Emma E. Booker now plays a small role in a tragic day of our nation's history, and when people ask, "Where were you when the Twin Towers & the Pentagon were attacked?", we will say, "We were with the President when he found out". The photo that was shot when his chief of staff leaned down to whisper in Bush's ear will go down in history. It's a funny feeling to be part of history like that. It's a sadder feeling to know why.