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I remember a time when I was no more than six years old when I fell out of a tree house. It was the only time in my life when time seemed to be suspended. Instead of mere seconds, for that brief experience, my world registered only milliseconds. I've read that traumatic experiences seem to take place in slow-motion. I never would have imagined that an entire day could take place in that fashion. September 11, 2001. The staff and students had been preparing for days. Men in dark suits scurrying around and through our campus, commandeering rooms, erecting funny antennas, conducting briefs and meetings, and tapping our phones. The excitement and anticipation of meeting the President of the United States was indescribable. The honor could have been bestowed on any of our fine Sarasota County schools. September 11, 2001 was going to be our lucky day. The day started out as any other normal day, except for the fact that many of us were awaking as early as 5:30 a.m. because we were meeting the President of the United States. After briefings, metal detectors, and receiving our "Stage Party" passes, we waited for President Bush to arrive at Emma E. Booker. The excitement was contagious. The long wait for the President passed swiftly as I took pictures with staff, students, and parents. Shortly before the President arrived in our media center, we were hearing strange announcements. President Bush was on campus, we were told, but he had Presidential duties to attend to and would speak with us shortly. When the announcement was made that two planes had crashed into the World Trade Center Towers, my perception of time became distorted. I was now in a slow-motion picture featuring the darkest day in contemporary history, with Emma E. Booker as the setting. Tick, tick, tick, everything seemed to be suspended in time.

I remember hearing a cheer outside the media center. Our primary students were greeting the President as he entered the media center. President Bush entered through a curtain at the entrance to our media center. I don't know if it was visible because I was so close to the President or if it was because I was registering events millisecond by millisecond, but it was clear that President Bush was shaken by the events that transpired while he was visiting our campus. I remember feeling even more dread and anxiety as I witnessed first-hand the mixture of emotions radiating from President Bush. Some say they could see his eyes watering as he left us with a sad smile and a wave of his hand. It's a humbling experience to see the most powerful person in the world so visibly shaken. Shortly after President Bush addressed the nation for the first time from our campus and after we prayed together for a moment, many staff members checked in at the office as the World Trade Center Towers began to fall. The entire day crawled by, millisecond by millisecond. Parents were in fear for their children's safety and students were checked out all day long. I was left with less than a dozen students that I had to explain as best as I could, the events that were occurring and why, even though I was barely grasping the reality of the situation myself. One of my thoughts shifted to the fact that Emma E. Booker is located only a few miles from the Sarasota/Bradenton International Airport and we could have very easily been a target as well.

The pictures, stories, and personal accounts relayed by the media only heightened my feeling of dread and loss of senses. Every day, several times a day, I wonder what will become of my students. Who will they become and what kind of world will they live in? I have just brought a baby girl into this world and entertain the same thoughts regarding her future. September 11, 2001 was a day I saw our leader visibly shaken, two American icons of freedom, power, and prosperity toppled, frightened parents rushing around our campus trying to locate their children, and weary, uncertain faces everywhere I went the rest of the day. It was a day that will forever change the lives of Americans everywhere. All seemed surreal and all seemed to take place millisecond by millisecond. I only hope that one day the dreams and aspirations that I have for my students and my little girl will one day have some of the innocence that was lost on that dreadful September day.