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# THROUGH THE LOCAL EYE

## Insight into local's experiences with close-to-home terrorist attacks

Megan Troutman Sep 11, 2017

Mass confusion, panic, tears, blood — it can be physically and emotionally impossible for people to prepare for a terrorist attack. Especially an attack so close to home.

From the planes crashing into the twin towers on 9/11, to the Brussel bombings on March 22, 2016 and the recent Westminster attack March 22, acts of terrorism have not ceased to shatter communities and flood social media newsfeeds.

According to a research-based article from *The Telegraph* about mapping terrorism, there has been a 45 percent increase in terrorism-related deaths from 2013 to 2014. An increase of more than 14,000 deaths.

With these seemingly never-ending attacks come stories of personal experience. Everyone has a story, especially those who see attacks so close to home. Here's a look into three personal experiences from traumatic terrorist attacks.



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**9/11: Sept. 11, 2001**

**Anni-Ming Larson**

"I was 5 years old when it happened," said 20-year-old Larson. "I was at school, and I just remember the teachers saying we were all going to go home early."

Larson was raised in New York City, and she was present for the 9/11 Islamic terrorist attacks.

Although she was only 5 years old, Larson has a keen memory of the event — an image of the day in time that she may never forget.

“My mom was at work on 66th street, which was closer to the towers, and I was on 120th,” Larson said. “She couldn’t pick me up, so I just went home with my friend and we ate cookies and watched West Side Story until she came to get me.”

Larson recalls having to do a lot of walking that day because their building’s elevator was broken, and they lived on the 15th floor.

At the time the first plane crashed into the north tower, Larson was in school. Her teacher watched the horrific news broadcast, and then she jumped into action and started calling parents to come pick up their children.

Over the course of two traumatic hours, the second plane crashed into the south tower, another hit The Pentagon, and the fourth went down from passenger resistance to the hijackers.

Meanwhile, Larson could not figure out why she was allowed to go to her friend’s house and eat cookies.

“It was so random. No one could have predicted it,” Larson said, deep in thought. “I didn’t even know what was happening, and I was there.”

After the attacks, memorial services occur every Sept. 11 around New York City. In particular, a service is held at the Firemen’s Memorial, a monument in Manhattan in remembrance of fallen firefighters. Larson lives above the memorial, so she is reminded every September of the lives lost in the attacks.

“Our generation was mostly young, so they don’t really get it, especially people on the West Coast,” Larson said. “This recent year though, I felt it affect me more than it has in the past. I guess just from listening to people’s stories. It just hits me harder every year.”



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### **Brussels Bombings: March 22, 2016**

**Delphine Willaert**

More recent than 9/11 were the attacks in Brussels, Belgium, where three suicide bombings shook the nation.

"I guess I don't recall the first time I heard about the attacks," said 22-year-old Willaert. "We were at school, and I think someone saw it on Facebook, which was in a random way."

Willaert was 21 at the time of the attacks, and was studying pharmacy at the University of Ghent, a little more than an hour away from Brussels. She commuted to school five times a week from her hometown in the southern countryside, farther from the city.

"You could just feel it in the city, in Ghent," Willaert said. "There were military people walking around."

At 8 a.m., gunfire was heard in the Brussels airport as the first explosion occurred and panic ensued. Then the second explosion hit.

"As soon as I found out, I made sure friends were ok, then checked in to the Facebook reaction that I was safe," Willaert said. "It was really helpful to be able to see that Facebook feed to make sure everyone was ok."

A little more than an hour later, the blast was reported at the Maalbeek Metro station, and everything was shut down. Public transportation was put on hold, as citizens were urged to "stay where you are."

Willaert was watching the events unfold on the news, then left school for home, where the public transportation was still running because they were outside of the city.

"For a long time we felt uncomfortable riding the metro," Willaert said. "There were all these alerts everywhere telling us to watch for unattended bags, which I suppose is the same as it always is, but it was just more real."

Willaert recognized the sheer intensity of the situation, as it was discussed in the news for quite some time. But she added: "Their goal is to make us scared, so we can't give into that."



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### **Westminster Attack: March 22, 2017**

**Rachel Podmajersky**

Waking up to dozens of text messages and news alerts about a terrorist attack in your home can be difficult to process. Especially if you live five minutes from the attack site.

“When I first found out, I did a headcount of all my friends, but I didn’t process it right away,” said 21-year-old Podmajersky. “Then as I was leaving for class, I was just religiously checking the updates. And once I was actually in class, I couldn’t pay attention at all. I just got really sad.”

Podmajersky, an American student studying English in London, first heard about the attacks through a friend in the United States, who had received a *New York Times* text alert. The attack took place on the Westminster Bridge and the Palace of Westminster.

“A group of students I know have an architecture class and were on their way there to study, but they were running late,” Podmajersky said. “If they got there 10 minutes earlier, which is when they were supposed to be there, they would have been part of the attack.”

At 2:40 p.m., attacker Khalid Masood drove his vehicle on the pavement and running over civilians.

Thirty seconds later, Masood crashed into the perimeter fence of the palace, then ran into the yard with knives and stabbed a policeman. Masood was then shot.

The entirety of the attack lasted a total of 82 seconds.

“We were all sort of on edge during class and very aware of the reality of the situation, but not all the details were out yet,” Podmajersky said. “It was more of a somber-quiet.”

Podmajersky shared her thoughts of remorse for the families of the victims during this difficult time:

“I’m sorry that your day ended in a way I imagine you never thought it could. I’m sorry people think that violence and killing is the best way to be heard, and I’m sorry you have to go through this.”

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Although physically or emotionally preparing for terrorist attacks is impossible, the only way to move forward, as Willaert said, is to not give into the fear.

And that in itself is asking the impossible.