



Rita Appel

Speech Therapist

Interviewed by Julia Turner

Rita Appel was raised in Brooklyn, New York, and holds undergraduate and graduate degrees in speech/language pathology from Brooklyn College of the City University of New York. She has worked at Staples High School since 2000. She has served on the Board of Trustees at Temple Israel in Westport and was recently elected to the Board of Directors of Neighborhood Studios of Fairfield County, a non-profit that provides art education to children at risk in Bridgeport.

How did you learn of the attack?

Actually, I was standing outside of the guidance office because I had just spoken with a counselor about a student. As I was walking to my next period class, I saw a group of teachers with their heads together speaking about what had just happened. When I asked what was wrong, they told me that the World Trade Center had been hit by an airplane.

How did you react immediately?

I envisioned that a small single-engine plane had hit the building. However, once I heard and saw on the television how devastating it was, I felt fear and sorrow for all the people who had lost their lives and for the families who had lost friends and relatives..

Did you have a cell phone?

I did have a cell phone and used it to call my husband when I heard that the Towers had collapsed.

How did the attack impact your life?

I was fortunate enough that I did not know anyone personally who lost their life, but it did affect the Westport community and the entire country. In Westport, for several days after the attacks people feared that there would be another attack. The government right after shut the airports and enacted many laws to increase security.

Would your life be any different today if the attacks hadn't happened?

I think that things would be different in terms of security, but I think that we would still have strong laws to prevent terrorist attacks in the United States.

Do you know anyone who was directly affected by the attacks?

I know that there were some families in Westport who had friends and family members who died during or after the attacks. And, I have come to know several who were in or near the buildings and survived. But I was lucky that nobody personally close to me had been at the World Trade Center on that day.

What did you think about terrorism before the attacks? Did the attacks change your view on terrorism? If so, how? Do you feel the same way today?

Before September 11th, I didn't give much thought about terrorism to be honest. It wasn't until after the attacks that it changed not only the way I felt but how the country felt about terrorism. The country fell into a state of fear for months after the attacks – worried that everything around us was going to fall apart. Now, there is more security than ever, especially on public transportation.