



Antonio Coccolli

Teacher

**Interviewed by Jackie Abrams and Gaby Mikael
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Tony Coccolli graduated from Sacred Heart University in 1989. Prior to teaching science at Staples High School, he owned a boat yard in Norwalk, Connecticut, and worked as a commercial lobster man. He started teaching in 1998 at Stamford High School and came to work at Staples High School in the fall of 1999.

What were you doing during the attack?

I was on duty in the Math and Science Learning Center in the old building, grading papers yet procrastinating. I logged onto Yahoo.com and there was a photograph of a plane about to fly into the first tower. I was like “Holy Cow.” I thought it was crazy and knew it was serious. The principal was concerned about students having family working in the towers, and was afraid of panic. She shut down the internet from that point on. In teachers’ mailboxes, we were given memos during third period to read aloud a “press release” to classes. It was written, in a simplified manner. I read it to my biology class and they started laughing because they thought it was a small Cessna. I had to let them know it was major, a jet liner, into a building that was assumed to be packed. They then realized it was serious. The main office was the only place with internet and I learned going into the Cafeteria before lunch from one of the AP’s that the first tower collapsed. I learned the second tower collapsed when I got into the car at the end of the school day and turned on the radio.

What was your immediate reaction?

Shock. It was not the first experience. The Oklahoma City bombing took place a few years before that. Everybody knew there was potential for terrorist attacks in America, someone attempted to destroy the towers before. It changed everything with regards to how we viewed terrorism. People realized guys with box cutters could cause such terror, and everybody assumed the loss of life would be much higher.

Would your life be any different today if the attacks didn’t happen?

Everybody’s life would. There was a sense of not innocence but freedom to move around and less concern when traveling around crowded areas. Backpacks used to be allowed in and now they are completely scrutinized. It’s not for the best or worst its just extremely different.

Do you remember the government’s response to the attacks?

President Bush was at ground zero within the next few days once there was more security. There was a lot of “rah- rah” patriotism. There was a large sense of patriotism similar to Pearl Harbor. Unlike Oklahoma City, this was a foreign entity that was unknown.

What did you think about terrorism before the attacks?

It existed. The first terrorist attack I remember was the 1972 Olympics in Munich attack on the Israeli wrestling team. Nobody thought personally something would happen to civilians. There was no concept of suicide bombers in the United States.

Is there anything you would like to add?

The most eerie thing was the silence outside when the government shut down all the air traffic and trains and cars.