



Rob Rogers

Social Studies Teacher

**Interviewed by Steven Bean
April 10, 2015**

Rob Rogers was born in 1969 in California. He has been a Technology and Social Studies teacher at Staples High School for many years. On 9/11, he was teaching at Staples while his stepmother was on her way to New York City.

What were you doing during the attack?

It was my first or second year at Staples High School. I was teaching a computer class when the attack happened. I did not know something had happened until somebody came by the room to let me know it happened.

How did you inform the students or did you choose not to inform the students?

When a staff member came by they pulled me out of the room and told me a plane had crashed into the World Trade Center. They didn't have any information at the time and that they would try to let us know. So I went back into class and mentioned that "it looks like a plane has crashed into the World Trade Center." That's all we knew: a plane had crashed into the Trade Center. We didn't know it was a jumbo jet. We just knew a plane had crashed into it. It was "hey this has happened" but that all I knew.

In the coming days what was it like for you and the school?

For me or the school?

For you personally right now.

It was difficult at first because we didn't have a whole lot of information at school. My mother-in-law was traveling into the city that day and I don't remember if she had gone into the city or not. Once I got out of school I went over to where my wife and daughter were. They had been watching the news and had been for awhile. It was all new news to me so I was stunned by the attack on the Trade Center because I didn't really know the severity of it until after the fact.

How far after the fact did you realize the severity?

Once I got home we knew because the news was on but afterwards it was "wow this is really much more than... one thing." [We] started to understand the two planes and the

Pentagon part of it and the other plane and we were really putting it all together. It was very much a feel of “the world has definitely changed.”

Before the attacks, did you ever think of the threat of terror?

At that point, no. I never talked about terrorism with my classes. Up until that point it was something that happened not in the U.S. So it wasn't something we actively talked about as something that would happen here. It always seemed far away.

Did you try to contact anyone after the attacks?

No because the only person I knew was in the city at the time was my wife's mother and so once I knew that she hadn't even made it into the city and was OK, my part of the world was OK.

What did you learn from the attack?

There were two aspects of it. One is the academic thought that our place in the world has now considerably shifted. Now, the great United States is as vulnerable as anyone else, and we're not impervious. I guess I was a little shocked at the lack of concern from people I grew up with people who lived on the West Coast who didn't understand how significant it would be to us. Even though we lived an hour from New York, it still had a big impact on people who live here. It was shocking, distressing, and painful and they didn't really seem to clue in on that.

When you heard about it immediately in school, as you mentioned, what was your initial reaction?

A plane just crashed into a building. A passenger plane, a little Cessna, or some single engine airplane somehow crashed, and it was scary but we didn't know anything. And since we were in school, information didn't get to us easily. They shut down the internet and the TVs, so there was no way to get solid information. So all we knew was a plane crashed into the World Trade Center. Then an hour and a half later one of the buildings fell down. I thought, “What? How could a building fall down?” Because we didn't know [at that point]. I was at lunch and I had the radio on and the principal entered the room and pointed her finger at me and said “turn off the radio. You can't have that on right now” because they were trying to control the flow of information to all of us. So it was a little weird.

What happened when you got home?

It was interesting because everyone there had been watching it on the news for a while and they kept watching the news. They would show the planes hitting over and over and over and over again. I watched it maybe twice and then I couldn't watch it anymore. They had gone through it and seen it happen live, but for me it was too much so I thought

“you know what, I don’t need to watch this anymore.” It was interesting because my family continued watching the news into the night and I couldn’t do that.

Would you say there were any other impacts to your life?

It changed life here at school. From that point on the whole country was weary of more attacks so it wasn’t soon after that that we began coming up with plans of who would be willing to stay in school with the students if the students had to be kept at school for extended periods of time, even days. We began putting these plans into effect. They thought the nuclear power plant on Long Island would be a target so they distributed pills for radiation poisoning because the radioactive materials would naturally come in our direction. It felt like we were gearing up for war. What we thought would be ongoing conflict of some sort with terrorism in the United States.

Would your life be any different if the attacks hadn’t happened? How do you think things could have been very different? Do you think a similar attack would have occurred later?

Yes. Given the state of the world at that point an attack was inevitable in some way. Had it not happened possibly may never have gone into the Iraq war. That would have changed a whole lot of things had we not done that.

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

Not at the time but later I worked with a person who had.

How do you remember the government’s response to the attack and what was your reaction to it when you first heard it?

I was concerned because it wasn’t long after that the PATRIOT Act went into effect. Being a social studies teacher, I know the extent of the powers that Congress and the president were giving to the federal government to protect us. It was concerning because it was above and beyond the normal scope of what the government could do. Would we go to war? Who would go to war? Do we really want to do that? That was worrisome.

Do you fear that more liberties would be taken away?

Yes. The PATRIOT Act did take away liberties to some extent. At the time we understood what was happening and why they wanted to do it. I was hoping the time limit on it would keep it contained from becoming a large part of what the federal government did. In hindsight, we can see that the federal government has continued to do things. Whether it be NSA security and surveillance, it was a worry. And not over reacting and going to full scale war which is where we ended up going... that was tough.

How do you feel the international community responded to 9/11?

Positive. Most of our allies responded with caring for us in whatever way that they could. I think they quickly banded together to stop further attacks, even though further attacks did happen throughout the world.

Did the attacks change your views on terrorism and how we deal with terrorists?

I think at first the reaction I had was “let’s go get them, let’s go find them, let’s go take care of the situation.” I think was an OK initial reaction to have. I think as the war on terror went on and the reality of “We’re not finding any of the people responsible for it” set in. Then it became “What are we doing? Are we doing the right thing by keeping this crusade to find them?”

How has your opinion changed over time?

Looking back now, I would rather the U.S. limit our engagement in the Middle East and not go to full out war and conflict. I would rather the CIA and the NSA focus on finding the people responsible. They did in the end, but it was a long time before that occurred. I would rather have had us go that direction as opposed to full scale conflict because this conflict created much more animosity in the region toward the U.S.

Is there anything else you would like to add?

I still haven’t been down to Ground Zero. I didn’t go down there when they were cleaning it up. I didn’t go down and put up flowers. I haven’t been down there to see the memorial now. It’s something I’m still not comfortable doing and I’m not sure why. I think for me, the image of the man jumping from the tower had an impact on me knowing that he chose to jump out as opposed to staying where he was. It’s powerful and it’s hurtful, and I mourn for those people. I’d like to go down there one day but I still haven’t done it.