



David Scrofani

Physics Teacher

*Interviewed by Abby Lustig
April 10, 2015*

David Scrofani was born on July 4th, 1971, and grew up in Connecticut. As an undergraduate, he attended Wesleyan University, and then he continued to graduate school at Fairfield University. In 1995, he began working at Staples High School in the science department.

What were you doing during the attack?

I was teaching a physics lab, and the lab was in the old building because this was before they built Staples as you now know it. My department chairman came in the room, and I think there were about 10 or 15 minutes to go before the end of the period, and he pulled me aside and said... there's something you should know.

What other classes did you teach at the time?

I think at that time I was only teaching physics, so I probably had 2 sections of AP Physics C and 2 sections of first year physics.

How did you react when you were told about the attacks?

With disbelief... Things like that only happen in movies, or so you think, so that's sort of your first reaction to it. Then, I contemplated for a moment and was incredibly relieved that my wife had lost her job because she used to work at the [World] Trade Center. She was in a customer relationship marketing company... It was early June, and the company dissolved their marketing department, and my wife lost her job. At that point she took a job substitute teaching. My first reaction was, oh my gosh, I'm so glad that my wife is not working in Manhattan at the Trade Center...It's crazy. You shutter to think about that because I do know people who were there. I know one person who was not in the building, but who was close by.

Did this person tell you anything about their experience or what they saw, specifically?

She never really wanted to talk much about it... She did share with me that she had hid under a car for a large portion of the event. She was a lawyer...about 4-5 years younger than me, working in the city, and she left her job after that. It changed her lifestyle and career just because of what she witnessed. She didn't share a whole lot, not that I would need to hear it

Do you know what she went into after leaving?

She's living in Europe now, actually. She no longer practices law. To be honest, I think she took all the money that she had and traveled around for about 3 years. Now she's living in... I want to say Croatia.

Would your life be any different if the attacks hadn't happened? Have they affected your life in any way today?

Well, yeah, I mean, they affected everybody's life because we now think about things we never thought about before. I mean prior to that we never thought about terrorist attacks in America... One of the things that changed dramatically after that day was my attention to the news. I think September 11th was the first time that a lot of us started looking at online news regularly. I can still recall visiting the CNN website every 2 hours to see the updates and the pictures and what had gone on because, of course, in the first few minutes after it happened—actually the first several hours after it happened—nobody had any idea what had happened. There was no sense yet that it was terrorism—although people suspected that, certainly we didn't know for about a day or so. So we were constantly checking the news and that was really the first time. Remember, it was 2001, so schools were just getting things like dependable Wi-Fi access. In fact, I don't think we have Wi-Fi access, but we did at least have Internet. The Internet was still somewhat new, and so up until that point in time, I don't think I had actually regularly gone to any news sites. Certainly, after that, I started checking and reading more, and paying attention to world events much more than I had been doing previously. So, of course it changed my life. And it's awfully selfish of me to say, "Oh, it changed my life in that now I pay more attention to world events." I mean, certainly it changed the lives of people in far worse ways than that, but it made me more aware, and I guess more concerned about what's going on.

After you were told, did you tell any of your students? Or did any of them find out?

They found out slowly. We were actually asked not to tell anybody when it first happened—to finish teaching the period... The principal was actually out of the building at the time, so... I can't remember if somebody else made an announcement over the PA. I think at some point, I'm sure there must have been an announcement. But students started to find out about it pretty quickly in the passing time that occurred 10 minutes after I first heard about it. Back then, we had cellphones, of course, but we weren't welcome to use them in school, so this was the case where everyone had their cellphone, and they were frantically texting their parents. Students had parents that worked near the Trade Center, and, of course, some residents of Westport lost their lives in the event. Word got out pretty quickly. I didn't have to tell anybody.

Did you contact any family or friends after class?

I did. I called my wife right away. She was the first person I called. There was no one else that I really knew would be there at the time... I think we were really asked to not [run and call people]. Eventually the principal did return. She was out visiting another school, ironically, in New York, but it was, I think, in Upper Westchester County. I recall that somebody called her immediately and said you need to come back right now because something has happened. So she returned to the school, and I think at that point there were announcements being made.

We were told that the principal had all the news sites and Internet turned off. Do you remember anything about this?

I don't remember that at all. I distinctly remember checking the MSNBC or CNN websites and, like I said, that was really one of the first times that I started to concern myself with the immediacy of internet-based news...I don't recall it being shut off. I'm not sure IT back in the day would have had the ability to suddenly block some sites... if anything, maybe students weren't allowed to use computers. Actually, I seem to recall that... we were asked to have students not go on online. Now we have a whole population of students walking around with their MacBooks, but back then...to actually see news, you had to sit down at a wired desktop computer, so maybe the idea was not to have students do that. The TVs were shut off.

Do you agree with the decision to not let the students see?

Boy, there was an awful lot of stress about that. We had students that had relatives—parents—that were working in the city... Now, you could never do that, nor would you... nor should you. But did I agree with it then? I think so. I mean, it was 2001, and given what we had access to back then compared to what we have access to now, I think it was the only decision that could be made, given the circumstances, that seemed best for the school. Of course, you had students that were terrified because of the thought that they could have lost a parent or somebody in the event, and they quickly found out. Parents called the school, so there was communication back and forth. But I think the shutting down of the TVs and computers at the time kind of felt right, but, as I said, right now, if something were to happen like that, we could never do that.

Do you remember what the school's response to the attacks was in the days after?

I remember that Elliot Kraut was the chairperson of the History department, and he held a seminar after school for all faculty members in which he tried to explain the social-political side of what had just transpired, and why, perhaps, it had happened. Basically, what he was doing was teaching us about the Middle East and social, political, and economic situations there. I remember seeing 100% faculty attendance at that event. It was interesting—it was an educational...thing done for teachers by another teacher, and it was really cool that he did that. In terms of how the school responded, well, we came back to school, and we continued to teach. Certainly, there were moments of silence over the PA, and things like that, but I don't remember beyond that what we did.