

I walked in to a grocery store the morning of 9/11. Several people were watching a TV mounted on the wall. All I could think of was my son, who worked for IBM, had a meeting there that morning. He had flown in from Raleigh, N.C., where he lived, to attend a meeting.

I immediately tried to reach him on his cellphone and it continued to be busy. With a sick feeling in my stomach, I just knew he had been killed. I drove home terrified. My husband met me at the door and said, "Have you seen the news?" We kept trying to reach him by phone. About two hours later the phone rang and it was my son. I was crying and so was he. What we did not know was the meeting had been canceled and he flew to Los Angeles the night before.

The people he worked with were all killed. It was just not his time to die. I think how thankful his father and I were that he was spared but grieve for his co-workers and friends that did die. It is something you never forget.

— Carol Golladay, Salem

In the way that my parents' generation remembers where they were the day John F. Kennedy was shot, my generation remembers our experiences on Sept. 11. We all know what it was like to be a child and feel the terror of this news and wonder if they were going to come for you.

On the evening of Sept. 11, 2001, my mom told me that she needed to talk to me about something important. I don't recall what she said, exactly; I only remember staring at my brightly painted purple wall in disbelief. This didn't make sense. This couldn't be true. My world was supposed to be safe and friendly. I had no way to process this.

So I didn't. For a few weeks, I was in denial, refusing to talk about the tragedies of 9/11. Whenever it was reported on the news, I left the room. I wouldn't talk about it, think about it, listen to anything about it. It couldn't be real.

Even at that age, though, my Christian faith and the faith and encouragement of my family helped me deal with my fears.

As time went by, I accepted what had happened and was able to talk about it. But the scars remained. The sound of an airplane flying overhead terrified me for months afterward. The nighttime was the worst. Lying in bed, I would try to calculate the distance between Roanoke and Washington, D.C., wondering if I was safe here. I would hear a plane fly over and think, heart pounding, "What if they crash the plane into my house? What if they drop a bomb? What if ..."

Last year, as the tutor of a 9-year-old girl, I suddenly realized that she wasn't even born when 9/11 happened! The day after bin Laden was found, she asked me, wide-eyed, "Did you hear about the man who died in Pakistan?" When I told her that I had, she shuddered, scrunching up in her chair, and said, "I heard that some people might try to hurt us because of it." In her eyes, I saw myself all over again, 9 years old and afraid of the airplanes.

— Rachael Sloan, Bridgewater College and Roanoke