

THE MAN WHO WENT DOWN

instead of up

By Shawna Richer

Rotman alumnus **Brian Clark** (MBA '71) lived to tell the story of the World Trade Center attacks, saving a life in the process. Following is an excerpt from his September 15th interview with *The Globe and Mail's* Shawna Richer.

For 27 years, Brian Clark traveled daily to his office at the World Trade Center. Never again. "It is going to be strange," said the 54-year-old Toronto native and executive vice-president of Euro Brokers, an international brokerage firm whose offices occupied the 84th floor of the South Tower. "I don't know what to expect." Fifty-nine of his 275 colleagues are missing.

Clark spoke from his home in Mahwah, N.J., where he has lived with his wife Dianne, his Thornhill, Ontario high-school sweetheart, since Euro Brokers relocated from Toronto in 1974. The couple have four children, two still at home.

When he arrived home after the attacks that left much of the financial district a smoldering ruins, he drove into the driveway honking the horn. Dianne and daughter Kristin and son Tim, neighbors and friends, raced across the lawn to welcome him. That's when he cried.

He had been at his desk about an hour when the first plane, American Airlines Flight 11, slammed into the neighboring North Tower. Some of his colleagues immediately left their desks and started down the stairs. But many did not, thinking it was a light aircraft accident.

"I called my wife to say a plane hit the World Trade Center, but not to worry because it was the other tower." Shortly after that, an announcement came over the public address system that the building was secure and for workers to return to their desks.

There were about 60 of Clark's co-workers on the floor when United Airlines Flight 175 slammed into their building, five to 10 floors below them.

"It was instant destruction. The building rocked and swayed. It might have only been a matter of feet, but it felt like yards. The ceilings collapsed. Floors popped up. We knew right away: terrorism.

"We took off down the hallway, to stairway A. But we'd only gone a few floors when we encountered two people coming up the stairs. We said we were going down. They said they'd just come from a floor in flames." They were on the 81st floor.

The group going down began to argue heatedly with the couple going up. "I said we had to get below the flames. The lady was arguing with me. In the back of my mind, I just had this instinct that down was better than up. Then I heard someone banging on the wall, crying, 'Help me, help me. I can't breathe. I can't get out.'"

As Clark moved toward the voice, the others decided to return to their office, above the fire, where they hoped helicopters would rescue them and sprinklers would douse the blaze. He never saw them again.

Clark discovered a hole in the wall and squeezed through to find the source of the voice: Stanley Praitnath, a Fuji Bank employee. "After I wrestled with what Stanley was buried under, he gave me this big hug. We started down the stairwell, and amazingly, there was no one there."

They continued to the 31st floor, where they found a conference room. "The phones were working. I called my wife and said we were close to getting out. We actually felt quite safe, with no concept that the building would collapse."

The pair continued their descent, quickly covering the last 30 floors and emerging inside the concourse at street level. "The plaza looked like a moonscape. Parts of the plane were there. We saw a policeman, who calmly told us to go out onto Liberty Street."

"As we headed down the street, we turned around, and Stan said he thought the tower might come down. I said, 'No way. It's a steel structure.' Just as I finished that sentence, the tower plummeted. Then the plume rose. The dust engulfed everything. Everybody ran. I ended up at the Fulton Ferry Terminal. I couldn't believe my luck. A fellow was announcing the next ferry was for Jersey City, and that's where I was

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Alumni on the move

BRIAN CLARK: A SURVIVOR MOVES ON, BUT WILL NEVER FORGET

By Karen Christensen

What do you do next after you've escaped from a burning skyscraper, stopping along the way to save a stranger's life? If you're **Brian Clark** (MBA '71), you pick yourself up, dust yourself off, and get back in the game.

Brian was one of the first employees hired at Euro Brokers' Toronto office back in January of 1973. After starting out as a trainee broker, he became a desk manager shortly after the company moved to New York City in 1974. In 1986, he and seven colleagues bought out the company and then, five years ago, sold a controlling interest to a public holding company where Brian now serves as an executive vice president. In addition to New York City, the company has offices in London, Tokyo, and Mexico City. At one point they had 825 employees, but after some downsizing a few years back, they took the number down to about 600 — before losing 61 employees on September 11th.

Amongst other things, Brian's work involves evaluating new business opportunities, some marketing, and heading up the 'Euro Brokers Relief Fund,' a non-profit entity created to direct funds to the families affected by September 11th. Lately, much of his energy has been focused on finding new office space for his company. One of the first things he will do when they move in is build a memorial gallery with photos of the employees Euro Brokers lost.

"These were all really great people," he says. "Unique individuals doing a wide variety of jobs: tech staff who were incredibly bright programmers; brokers who were smiling, high-fiving, back-slapping guys producing tremendous amounts of revenue; very quiet accountants; and facilities managers." Because this last group was busy doing their jobs as fire wardens, making sure everyone else got out, they were the last to leave the office. "We cannot forget any of these people, and we have affirmed publicly that we won't."

The toughest part about returning to 'business as usual' for Brian

has been getting through this period with the 61 families who lost loved ones. "Going to so many funerals and memorial services has been incredibly draining on everybody. We're living day to day," he says. "Just yesterday, I had a cry about one of the fellows on our desk. Suddenly, I just thought about him, and I broke down. It just sticks with you."

An eternal optimist, Brian believes that some good will come of this tragedy, whether it's a spiritual reawakening, or people valuing their relationships more and living more in the present, rather than dwelling on the past or worrying about the future.

"For me personally, the grass is definitely greener than it was before. All of my senses are heightened, and I'm really aware of what I'm saying in conversations. I'm a better listener, because it matters to listen, to ask questions, to show concern for people. When someone says, 'how are you doing today', the answer might be, 'not so well.' Since September 11th, people are being more honest with each other."

"I really feel like I've been given a second chance — though it's not entirely clear to me yet what it is I'm supposed to do with this added time." One thing is certain: Brian is initially committed to getting Euro Brokers back on its feet, in part, as a tribute to those who perished. "We're going to carve out certain parts of our revenue and help to make sure their families are looked after. The 'Euro Brokers Relief Fund' won't just disappear one day — "We're in it for the long haul," he says. "At the same time, for those who survived, we've got to get the business back on track so they can look after their families."

As for the life he saved on his way out of the tower, Brian isn't comfortable being called a hero. "I think of myself as one of the survivors, as a lucky individual. I'd like to think that anybody in my position would have done what I did. It was instinctive. I just wish it had turned out better for the dozens of my colleagues who didn't make it out." **RM**

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going. Not long after that, we were engulfed by another cloud of black dust when Tower One came down."

Clark boarded the ferry. It sailed around the southern end of Manhattan. Passengers were speechless, staring in shock at the changed landscape. The ferry docked and he called his wife, then walked the mile to the Hoboken train station. "There was a train waiting. And I went home." It wasn't until hours later that the magnitude of the trauma began to sink in. Praimnath, the man Clark had rescued on the 81st floor, phoned at midnight to say he had been at the hospital, pretty scraped up, but alive.

"He said, 'You saved my life.' But I think he may have saved mine. When I stopped to help him, the others went up, and I stayed. It was my instinct to go down, but . . . you never know. We will be lifelong friends, for sure."

"It's had an effect on me. I don't know what good will come of this. I'm aware of the ramifications of retribution. And that there is some evil that needs to be stopped. But vengeance is the Lord's work. Not mine."

*This article appeared in the September 15th edition of The Globe and Mail. Reprinted with permission from The Globe and Mail. **RM***