**Born Again American**

I woke up that morning in my Santa Monica apartment, and my wife told me a plane had crashed into the World Trade Center. We turned on the television just in time to see the second plane hit. Like everyone else, we sat there trying to process what we were watching, but it didn't take long to realize this wasn't an accident. This was an attack. Islamic terrorists. Al Qaeda. Everything seemed to come to a standstill as we stayed glued to the TV, watching it unfold in real time, watching America under assault.

In the days that followed, I watched a country come together in a way I had never seen before. I saw President Bush standing at Ground Zero in the rubble. I watched the event at Yankee Stadium—Mayor Giuliani, Lee Greenwood singing, Oprah speaking—and for a moment, it felt like the entire country was united. That wasn't something I was used to seeing, and it stayed with me.

In December, my wife and I went back to New York to be with family for Christmas. While we were there, we made our way down to the World Trade Center site. Smoke was still rising from the wreckage. There were flowers everywhere, pictures, handwritten notes—people standing quietly, reading names, remembering those who had been lost. It wasn't loud. No shouting, no chaos. Just silence.

We went into St. Paul's Chapel across from the site and spent over an hour walking through the memorials. Walls covered with photos, messages, pieces of people's lives left behind. I remembered stopping in front of one picture — a firefighter, smiling, his arm around his kid. Just a regular guy. Could have been someone I grew up with in the Bronx. I stood there longer than I expected to, just looking at it. Didn't say anything. Didn't need to.

I felt grief, of course, but what surprised me was the anger. I was angry that my city had been attacked, that New Yorkers had been killed by terrorists. And then I realized something else that caught me off guard—I felt just as strongly that America had been attacked. That was new for me. I hadn't thought that way before.

Something broke in me at that site, and something died, and something new was born.

Not long after, I started seeing reports about anti-war protests—people in New York demonstrating against America, some even defending the Islamic radicals and saying the problem was Islamophobia. I had friends on the Left who expressed these positions. That set me off. I went out and bought an American flag pin and started wearing it. Something I would never have expected of me.

I remembered calling a friend, someone I had shared those same left-wing views with for years, and telling him what I was doing. He said to me, "Why would you wear a Nazi flag?" I wanted to reach through the phone and smack him for saying something that stupid. But after the call, I sat there and thought about it. The truth was, not long before standing at Ground Zero, I had believed the same thing.

If anyone needed to be slapped in the head, it was me.

I started going back through my beliefs, one by one. Not in the abstract —personally. Things I had defended. Things I thought I understood. Communism — something I had once believed in —didn't hold up when I looked at it honestly. The same with the sympathy I had for radical Islam. I marched against the Shah in Wash, DC when Carter was President. I marched in Brooklyn for Arafat and the PLO. That didn't survive contact with reality either. And underneath all of it, if I was being honest, there had been something else too — resentment and jealousy toward the "rich" ruling class and hatred toward America that I had carried for years. I couldn't justify any of it anymore. I rejected those beliefs.

I didn't arrive at that all at once. But standing there, and in the weeks that followed, I knew I couldn't go back to the way I had been living or thinking. Whatever this was, it wasn't just a change of mind. It was going to require something from me. I didn't know exactly where that would lead yet… but I knew I was going to find out.

I thought about my father, an Irish immigrant who came to this country with nothing, volunteered, put on a uniform, and fought for it in WWII.

Looking back, I had to admit that to myself. My dad was the one who got it right.

That was the moment I became a Born Again American.