

On My Watch

Virginia Buckingham

Virginia was the head of Boston's Logan airport where two of the flights involved in 9/11 took off. She was forced to resign six weeks after 9/11

I have asked myself a number of times if this story is worth telling.

Life is fragile and we deny its fragility. Our society turns to blame to appease our fear and anger.

In writing this book, I have discovered an important difference between moving forward and moving on..

When I was interrogated by the lawyer after 9/11, he asked me a battery of questions to show that I was not competent to be Logan airport manager.

At 29, I was the press secretary to the Governor of Massachusetts. I developed strong strategic intent.

Four days after 9/11 we reopened Logan airport. Every flight that landed after that was a celebration, passengers were crying after landing, pilots celebrating

‘The search for a scapegoat is the easiest of all hunting expeditions’ Dwight Eisenhower

No one teaches you that a herd of photographers will move aside if you walk straight towards them, despite all instincts to stop and wait for a clear path.

'Do not cry, do not cry I admonished myself as
a I resigned in front of national TV.'

After I left my job, I started having nightmares about airplanes. Every time I saw a plane I was scared that it would explode.

I developed post traumatic stress disorder.
I introspected deeply if I was truly responsible
in any way.

On September 11, I lost myself.

In September 2002, I write an article for the Boston Globe narrating my story. They ran it on the cover. I got many nasty mails blaming me again.

'courage isn't having the strength to go on, its going on when you don't have the strength'

One letter said ‘ we forgive you, maybe you should forgive yourself”

I was appointed as the chief editorial writer for the Boston herald and the staff wrote a letter to the editor protesting the appointment.

As I enjoyed my work, I believed Judge Wolf's assessment – a complete comeback was possible.

Whenever I went to a party people would say
Ginny Buckingham – 9/11.

I used to get a call every week asking me to apologize for 9/11. It was always different people.

In 2004, after the full investigation they found nothing wrong with what had happened at Logan, i.e. the terrorists had not selected Logan because of any flaws in its security system. I was relieved

‘For people to follow, a leader needs to know where he wants to go’

Working at the Herald had given me more than a job when I needed it, it had helped me rebuild the person I had lost.

I moved to a government relations role at Pfizer.

Every time I flew into New York, I could see the space where the twin towers had been and I would feel my heart rate pick up.

Being in NY with colleagues who had their own 9/11 stories to tell made me stronger as a person.

I went for a final hearing against me for wrongful death in 2011 and then the case was dismissed.

'The ordeal is part over' said my lawyer. I wondered if he said that since other cases of 9/11 were still on. The phrase stood out for me.

The 'ordeal' would never be 'over' for me.

On the tenth anniversary of 9/11, the herald offered me the entire op-ed space to write an article.

Sometimes your truth is all that you hold onto.
And, you need to hold on to it with all your
strength.

‘Moving on’ presents a false sense of closure, the other way ‘moving forward’ is to rebuild a life of meaning, joy, cognizant of the foundation of loss.