**Marseille, France**

September 11 affects different people in different ways. Since the terrorist attacks in 2001, questions about how safe we really are and what should be done about it have been debated by politicians and ordinary citizens alike. September 11 always brings me back to a time when I experienced terrorism first hand. This “adventure” was something I never wanted to experience; thirty years later, I can remember the smells, sounds and sights like it was yesterday.

Arriving at the train station in Marseille, France, Pam and I looked around in horror. We had just spent the winter holiday in Italy. We had toured the Vatican, eaten pasta in Milan, had ice cream at night on the Ponte Vecchio, and sailed the canals of Venice. We met really great people—Americans as well as people from all over Europe. Our time overseas was ending, and our trip to Italy was our last hurrah.

“What on earth happened??” Pam asked incredulously.

The train station was a disaster. There were holes in the walls, pools of blood on the floor, and people screaming in different languages everywhere. A French policeman ran up to us, a gun in his hand.

“Hands out of your pockets! Your passports please! Now” he shouted in French.

“What happened?” I asked.

“Carlos happened,” he shouted at us. “Leave the area immediately. Where are you coming from? Where are you going?”

“We are coming from Italy and going to Aix,” Pam answered him, her voice shaking as she looked at a man lying on the ground. “Who is Carlos?”

The policeman stared at us in disbelief. “Dumb Americans,” he shouted in disbelief. “Here are your passports. You will need to vacate the area and wait for your train.”

Pam and I looked at each other. Here we were, in France, in a train station that had just been attacked by Carlos. We found a sign that directed us to the waiting room and started walking.

“Do you know who Carlos is?” Pam asked me.

“I’ve heard of him, but I don’t know why, “ I replied, looking around.

“Keep walking!” a policeman shouted at me. “Don’t look! Just keep walking. You shouldn’t be here anyway! Move!”

Not knowing what to say or do, Pam and I kept walking. A few steps later, we were stopped by a policeman with a German shepherd and a submachine gun which was loaded and ready to fire.

“Stop right there! Don’t move! Where are your passports? Where are you going?”

I turned to take my passport out of my bag, and the dog growled at me menacingly. The policeman raised his gun and Pam and I put our hands in the air. The policeman grabbed my passport, asking again for our reasons to be in Marseille.

“We’re heading back to the University in Aix,” I responded in French. Classes start there in a few days. We spent the Winter Holiday in Italy.”

“Keep moving,” he ordered, and Pam and I walked quickly to the waiting area. We still had three hours to wait for the train to Aix, and we were exhausted.

“No one is going to believe this,” Pam whispered to me, finding a chair to use while we waited for the next train.

A man sitting next to us nodded. “There’s no way I expected to be caught up in a terrorist attack,” he said to us in a British accent.

“Who is the Carlos guy?” asked Pam. “Do you know?”

“You are obviously American,” said the man. “My name is William. I live in London. Carlos has been terrorizing southern France for years. He believes he’s a freedom fighter, but he’s really a killer from a group who wants to liberate Palestine. He’s been blowing up train stations and other transportation buildings for years now. He’s supposed to be living between Spain and France, but no one knows for sure.”

“You’ve got to be kidding me,” Pam said. “We were almost blown up by a terrorist??”

“If you would have arrived 15 minutes earlier, you wouldn’t be here now,” William said.

Pam and I stared at each other in disbelief. We looked out the waiting room door at the devastation and blood that was on the floor and walls.

“Unbelievable,” Pam said. “I think it’s time to go home now.”

I nodded in agreement. At that point, the United States certainly seemed a whole lot safer than southern France.

When I think of my experiences 30 years ago, I realize how fleeting the feeling of security really is. The bombing of the Marseille train station that day killed 2 and injured over thirty people. That same day, Carlos also blew up a train that left Marseille and was on the way to Paris. Since the incident in Marseille, traveling outside of the United States is difficult for me. September 11 reiterates these feelings. Now, instead of anticipation, traveling makes my nerves shake and my stomach anxious. I can’t take the safety of travel for granted anymore. While I do not want to give up traveling to distant lands, I am never certain that I will come back alive—or at least in the same condition as I was in when I left. This invisible scar definitely is still present in my life and will continue to be for years to come.