

London, 10 July 2005

Hi Kath

Thanks for your message. We're all fine, and your Mom rang on Saturday, but it's been a strange and horrifying few days – and it isn't over, as one of the bombed trains is very difficult to reach.

The New Jersey cousins emailed on Friday, having gotten the news a little ahead of you, I guess because of the time difference. What follows is a lift of most of my reply, omitting things you already know as we're much more frequently in touch. I should have sent it all to you at the same time, but I think I was getting tired and anxious as Friday rolled on – a very different Friday from what I had expected. I'm glad my job interview has been postponed (though not, obviously, at the reason why), as it gives me time to prepare better, and to get done a freelance report whose deadline approaches.

On Wednesday, there was amazing excitement as London won the bid for the Olympics in 2012. This has involved so many people, and there was an atmosphere of great enthusiasm and working together, which does not happen often in London. This had followed the Live Aid concerts last weekend. The Olympics promised – and still do – to bring regeneration to a run-down part of the metropolis, to bring an underused river and parkland into good use, and be a much-wanted source of enthusiasm for sport and physical activity, and of pride at London's international, multi-racial character. It felt like a good place to live.

Then yesterday, the atmosphere could not be more difficult and sombre. These events have swung the mood dramatically. People are upset and concerned, not yet angry, but realising once again that no-one can be entirely safe from mad people who do mad things.

Yesterday [Thursday], I was expecting to drive out to the West of London to meet the Member of Parliament for the local area around the Airport, the last of several interviews for a report due in Monday. This was not convenient timing, but unavoidable with the MP's busy diary. For today [Friday], I had a major job interview scheduled - for an interesting job that would take me out of consulting and back into salaried work. None of this has happened.

I had just filled up with gas when Carol rang me at about 9.30 on the cellphone saying there was some serious problem at Liverpool Street station (one of London's nine main rail stations – this one where trains go out to the East) and parts of the transport system were closing down. She thought it might affect my journey; she was right, even though it was nowhere near my route. Liverpool Street was actually on my former commute route to work, and very familiar to me. Turning on the radio, the events began to unfold horrifically. The Liverpool Street event was on an underground train and was initially reported as a power surge having caused an explosion. Then there was another train explosion at another station at the western edge of the central district. Then an explosion reported on a tourist bus. Now at the office, I turned on the computer. For the second time in two days, the BBC website was down. (This is perhaps the most powerful and reliable news website in the world. It has, to my knowledge, never gone down before. It

had been down at the moment the Olympics were announced, and was now down again.) Turn on the TV. Now another incident at King's Cross, the largest of all the train stations, both with a main rail station for trains to the North and a large Underground complex – where there had been a major fire on a moving stairway 20 years ago, the only other significant life-threatening event on the Underground system in recent memory. Explosions were reported at other stations near Liverpool Street, and at Russell Square, the next station South of Kings Cross. The entire Underground system was closed down, for the first time ever. Roads were being closed. Then all buses taken off the roads - the red buses, one of the symbols of London.

I started to be mighty glad that this was a weekday, so Jim would not have been doing what he often does at weekends – go into Central London on a train or bus, just to hang out and enjoy the streets.

I realised that I could not get out to the Airport area. Though the roads to the West were still open, they are always busy at the best of times and would now be clogged. It also had to be likely that the Airport would be closed and the neighbouring district impossible to reach. With difficulty, I managed to get through to the MP's office and it was agreed we would speak on the phone at 3pm instead of meeting face to face. As it turned out, we both had other things on our minds.

With mounting horror, I realised that the bus explosion was in the very street where my old employer had moved last year, away from the close-to-Liverpool Street place, but near to King's Cross. The street is a short one, and some pictures coming through on the TV made it very close indeed to the new workplace. The exploded bus was not a tourist bus, bad as that would be, but a regular London bus, which some of my former workmates could conceivably be on or near. Several of them will certainly have had routes to work which will have taken them through either of the stations with bombs. Their direct-dial phones were not answering. The cellphone networks were down. Another set of pictures was coming through from an Underground station at Aldgate near Liverpool Street. My former manager from my job before last now runs a new organisation based 50 yards from there; it's their local station and travel-to-work route, and he had given me some consulting work last year, so I know the place very well. I didn't want to bother them at a very difficult time, but were they all right?

In the evening I managed to reach everyone I had thought of, but with these horrors it's always possible that someone you now will be caught up in some way. Terry was saying that with the Bali bomb, so many people from Sweden go there for their holidays, and the Estonia ferry, that in a small country everyone knows someone. Two of his son Philip's schoolmates lost family members. (Sweden and London have about the same population.) My former assistant was quite shaken up. She had had to walk the last part of her journey into work, without knowing why the transportation system had stopped, then found that because of the exploding bus she could only get into the rear of the office building. She had to walk halfway home. I reached my successor at the old job too. They had been due to have a Board meeting, and various members were on their way in.

Today [Friday] life is returning to normal, but the news is still unfolding. It seems there were only four bombs. *Only!* There was confusion because the various stations are

linked with passageways and people had emerged at different points. The most serious one was on the Underground train between Kings Cross and Russell Square, which is very deep underground. They still can't get all the people out, and the tunnel has been damaged. Most of the system has reopened today, and the buses are running again. Many central roads are still closed. The Olympic team is returning home in shock rather than celebration. Bizarrely, the Mayor of London was in Singapore, while Rudi Giuliani was in London, with kind words much appreciated.

I've just heard my job interview is next Friday instead, but it seems trivial now.

Love

Nigel