
PERSONAL PROJECT REPORT

The Fall of the Twin Towers

3,424 words

Introduction

I remember, about three years ago, anytime someone mentioned the Personal Project, I would have this mini heart attack and start internally panicking about what I was going to do. I couldn't really figure out a way to form my interests into a project with which I could end my MYP studies.

When the time finally came and I was supposed to choose what to do, most of my ideas were completely off-point and dismissible but because writing has always been something that I rather enjoyed, there was one idea that appealed to me: translating a book. It was actually the idea that I contemplated the longest and almost decided on but in the end, I was a little uncomfortable with rewriting someone else's thoughts.

Having studied in MYP, a large part of my assessment had always depended on writing – writing essays for history, labs for physics and chemistry, reports and references for English, and many other assignments. Therefore, I had some knowledge of how to create a dynamic and structured text – knowledge I wanted to apply in my Personal Project. As I wasn't about to let go the option of writing so quickly, I tried to come up with something that could be a slight change – and thus a challenge – from the typical schoolwork.

That was how I finally came to my final decision: writing my own book. When I was young, I remember making many attempts at writing one but I never really got

far – the problem was probably that I had no motivation to continue. With the Personal Project, I saw a chance to finally create (and complete) a book of my own – deadlines have always given me lots of motivation.

In addition, I would have a chance to improve some of the skills that weren't my strong points: creativity, reflection, and of course expressing my own ideas. That was why I chose the most obvious Global Context to go with my goal: Personal & Cultural Expression.

The aim of the Global Context is to “explore the ways in which we discover and express ideas, feelings, nature, culture, beliefs and values; the ways in which we reflect on, extend and enjoy our creativity; our appreciation of the aesthetic” (MYP Personal Project Book, 2015) - by choosing it, I hoped it to achieve exactly that: to be able to convey my ideas into a creative yet simple message so that my readers could understand what I wanted to say with ease.

Then, came the most important decision – choosing the topic for my book. All my life, I've been a very busy reader, reading almost anything that came into my hands. But recently, I discovered that the books I enjoyed the most, were ones based on true historical events, ones that were very close to the truth of what really happens in this world.

And so I decided that I wanted to write a sort of historical novel. It was to be based on true events but the characters featuring in it would be of my own making. What I still didn't have figured out was the actual event I would be describing. I remember speculating about some events in the Middle Ages but then heard mention of a more recent event – a catastrophe, actually: the fateful day of 9/11.

Almost immediately, I liked the idea. I decided it would be even better to write about a more recent event – one that still maybe haunted some people – and make an effort to try and explain the horror of it to others. Even though I thought of other topics afterwards, I think my heart was set to this one all along. It seemed a great idea to try to make myself and others understand what the people must have felt then and there.

Of course, after I finally settled my mind on this choice, I had to specify my goal (see Appendix n.1). I borrowed a book on creative writing and tried to find out what I needed to prepare. It said that to be able to write a novel, I needed to think about “how complicated and extended the plot will be, how many and which characters will attend it, where the plot will take place, in which times will it take place, and what the main plot twist will be.” (Musilová, 2008).

I knew that I wouldn't be able to write a whole novel – not even a short one – and so I decided on a short story. Therefore, after consulting my supervisor and some

of my classmates, I decided to set myself a minimum of five chapters, each with at least five pages. I wasn't sure if it would suffice to express all my ideas but even this amount of text was at least 4 times more than I had ever written on one topic.

As per the characters, I went for two main ones so that I could explain both the happenings in the building and on the plane. They would all have some people around them but not too many to make it too confusing. For the rest, about the plot, that was pretty clear as the book was to be based on real events. The only thing I would have to think about was the background of the characters: their families, jobs, personalities...

I also specified some other practicalities. For example, the genre I was aiming for was thriller – keeping up suspense and trying to get the reader to feel the 'thrill' of the characters. I also decided to write the book from third-person view but describe only what the main characters were seeing and feeling. Then, to make it look like a professional book, I gave myself a goal to have it printed at a printing company, bound like a normal paperback.

Research and Planning

Knowing I would spend more of my summer holidays away, I knew I had to plan out my time with the knowledge that I would start doing some actual work only after the beginning of the school year. I gave myself the first three months for research and planning – for there were normal school duties to deal with – and I intended to start writing in December, around the start of the Christmas holidays. I planned to spend the whole January on just writing and then use February for some final changes and corrections.

And so, I began my investigation by visiting the public library and searching for some sources I could base my book on. I was slightly concerned after finding that most of the books were, in fact, published before 2001 and I wasn't able to find a single one about the fall of the World Trade Center even after asking the staff to help me (see Appendix n.2).

Not allowing myself to believe that I have chosen a bad topic, I went to the University Library and searched for sources there. The results were slightly more pleasing: I found a short account of the tragedy in a book about US history and found out that there even was a tape about the WTC, though I didn't go back to watch it (see Appendix n.3).

I consulted my supervisor about the sources I found and he advised me that the most important thing now was to find a source which stated all the facts – what actually happened, things that really occurred – not the conspiracies that lead to the

event or the theories that appeared after it. Those wouldn't be needed if I simply wanted to describe what happened, what the people there felt.

Because I knew that the time before the Christmas holidays would be busy, I decided to first think of the background stories of my characters before actually writing anything about the actual happenings of the event. The writing of exact facts wasn't something I could do while riding the bus from school but perfecting my ideas of the characters and thinking over all the details certainly was.

I had several ideas for both but from the start I thought of them both as men. I don't even remember consciously making the decision – it just seemed like a sort of natural thing. Because my book was based on the event of a tragedy, I knew I could make it seem more so if both of them had a family waiting for them at home. I wasn't sure if I would let one of them live but at that point I wasn't sure about many things (see Appendix n.4).

One of the hardest parts about creating the characters was one I expected to be quite easy: picking out the names. I read on a writer's site that "choosing a character name for your novel is as pressure-filled as picking a name for a baby. It has to suit the character's personality, make sense for the era, and 'fit' the character" (Simms, 2012) – I can certainly relate to that. It took a long time to find names that suited the characters and sounded 'right'. But, to say the truth, it was one of the things I enjoyed on my project – it gave me a great sense of satisfaction when I finally found the perfect name.

When I had thoroughly thought through the basic background for the characters – their names, their jobs, their family connections, parts of their pasts – I began the process of writing.

Writing

The first thing I had to search, as soon as I created the new document, was what the normal format of novels usually is. A writer on the Book Design website noted that "novels appear in lots of different sizes but for a shorter book I prefer smaller sizes that seem to be more intimate a reading experience" (Friedlander, 2010) – an observation I couldn't agree more with. It feels a lot more comfortable and cosy when the book has a smaller format: therefore I chose one a bit smaller than an A5.

Then, I started writing.

I began with the man in the building – Rowan Ward, as I named him (see Appendix n.6) – whose background story consists of a once hard life which has now settled into happy one with a new family of his own and a stable job. I figured that making the character be scared of losing his security again would make the readers understand just how much it actually affected him when it happened.

I didn't really have many problems with writing this part of the story – explaining Rowan's life, describing the environment of the South Tower – it was probably the simplest one, which was good for I got the chance to determine the way I wanted to write this story. Being used to mainly writing essays, I had to adjust to using a different type of vocabulary and also inventing dialogues – a thing that proved to be a challenge in the second chapter.

When, in the second chapter, I began writing about Paul Judge (see Appendix n.7,8) – the man in the airplane – I realized that dialogues are probably the most complicated thing about writing. They have to have a sort of dynamic, synchronized flow, while the people in it need to have their own opinion of things. By trying to explain some of Paul's views and parts of his personality through a conversation he had with a fellow passenger, I hoped to also show that there were more people on the plane, each with their own stories, and each with something of their own to lose. All in all, it took a lot of effort and tries to find the words I needed to make it sound realistic.

While writing this chapter, I finally decided on the chronology of my book. I had to synchronize the happenings on the airplane and in the building as best as possible – the time of the crash had to be divided between the two and therefore I would have to go slightly back in time once. I think that I achieved the best form of chapter contents possible (see Appendix n.5). Another thing I decided on was writing an epilogue – it was at the point where I decided I would let one of my characters live. This way there could be someone who could reflect back on the catastrophe with some time gone by.

When I began writing my third chapter – the one where the terrorists were supposed to hijack the train – I came up against my largest problem. I didn't know how I could possibly describe the terrorists, how I could show their actions in just the way they were because there exists no exact account of what happened. This was the only time I remember, when I truly didn't know what to write next (see Appendix n.9).

Deciding to leave it alone for a while, I started writing the fourth and fifth chapters – the ones following Rowan's escape from the building – because in those I knew almost exactly what I wanted to happen. They were based on a true story of two workers who actually managed to escape and talked about it in an interview later. I made Rowan help his fellow colleague get out of the burning building – a colleague who was introduced earlier on as a fairly vile person – to show how such tragedies can bring the most unlikely people together.

Meanwhile, I consulted my mother about the displaying of the terrorist and she suggested trying to write to a Slovak political scientist and ask for his advice. I didn't

really believe he would answer but I figured it wouldn't hurt to at least give it a try. It turns out, I was only half wrong: he did answer, but what he basically said was that he didn't have time for a school project and that he believed I could manage on my own.

In the end, my friend who visited New York was entrusted with the task of visiting the 9/11 memorial ("Ground Zero") and trying to find some useful information for me. When he came back, he recommended using the 9/11 Commission Report – the best source I had. It is the official document for this fateful day and it contained detailed information about the actual happenings of the event. Thanks to it, I was able to finish the third chapter with as much accurate details as possible by minimalizing the contact of Paul with the terrorists.

The part I like the most though, is the epilogue. It wasn't a planned part but I believe that every good book should have an afterthought. It was meant to let people know that the people managed to get over the tragedy and build a new life. I couldn't resist a bit of a "mastermind" turn-around and decided to make the surviving colleague end up with Paul's girlfriend – to show people that some good things can come out of everything bad and that it is always easier to get through something with someone who understands by your side.

When I finished writing the whole book – after having made many changes in the plot and even the phrasing of the sentences – I sent it to some of my friends and classmates for feedback as they are the main age group my book was meant for.

Finalizing

Most of the feedback I got was positive – they all liked the style of writing, they seemed to be satisfied with the suspense in the book – but there was one thing they all agreed on that they thought should be changed: the ending (see Appendix n.10).

I had originally ended the book with Rowan exiting the building and returning peacefully home. What everyone criticized was that it was a too unreal. They didn't think that anyone could just go home after escaping a burning building that collapsed two minutes after he came out of it.

Therefore, this was the one part of my story that I changed completely – deleting it and starting over. I ended the chapter with the scene of the South Tower falling and with the slightly dramatic sentence of '*Nothing is indestructible*' being said with a dark sort of humor – because Rowan had just seen the indestructible being destroyed. In this way, I tried to explain that we should never take anything for granted and value what we have in life because it can be taken from us at any moment.

When I finished, I was satisfied with what I had created.

Because, as I mentioned earlier, I wanted the book to look professional, I had it printed in a printing company – now it is bound in normal paperback and looks almost like a real book (except that it is a lot thinner than most novels). They did actually print it wrong, with a blank page inserted at the beginning, making the whole book shifted and not having the design that was intended for it but I still had a sense of accomplishment when I held it in my hands.

Reflection

If I am to ask myself whether I completed the task the way I planned it to be, I believe my answer would probably be yes. I managed to fulfil all of my own expectations – I completed all my goals, managed to put in something new and better, and actually finished writing a book. I wrote more than I set my minimum to – not by much but I didn't struggle to create new ideas. I believe I managed to explain all of these ideas even if not in the way I first intended – but that is all part of the process: you get better ideas of how to do things along the way.

What I created is a short thriller written from third-person view, following the experience of two characters living the 9/11 catastrophe. One of the characters is living through the hijacking of the plane while the other is experiencing an escape from one of the two Twin Towers. The book has five chapters – each at least five pages long – with an epilogue that wasn't planned (though I believe that it is one of the better ideas I thought of 'on the way') and is now printed in professional paperback, therefore satisfying all of my self-chosen criteria.

Even though we've been writing essays on most subject for the past few years and I knew the basics of keeping a steady rhythm of speech, it was a challenge to apply it to a storyline. You have to fit your ideas into the context of the plot and give them a connection to all the characters. I believe that thanks to this project I managed to expand my knowledge on writing as well as my vocabulary and style of verbalization.

Through my Global Context, I was able to learn how to accept a wider range of ideas and opinions and try to interpret and express them in my own way. I learned how to create the most "aesthetic" characters – it isn't easy to be able to match some traits and opinions in one person. Certainly, I was impressed with myself for being creative enough to invent all the background stories of my characters and the environment in which they lived – this particular trait has never been one of my strong sides and I am glad that this project helped me develop it to a usable level.

As per the IB learner profile, I think I have managed to improve in most of them, most of all being a *communicator* – I was able to express my ideas in my work and learn new ways of trying to bring them out. I *inquired* a lot about what actually happened that day and gained *knowledge* not only of the event but also of the skills I needed to

complete my project. I had to be *open-minded* and *principled* to be able to give my characters the right traits and beliefs. I tried to make my readers more *caring* – making them feel Rowan’s love for his family and Paul’s love of life and thus had to be caring myself. I pressured the *risk-taker* in me by deciding to do something I never really managed to complete before and that made me become a *thinker* – I had to find new ways to achieve what I wanted. I have always considered myself a quite *balanced* person and this was my chance to develop that profile by trying to apply the trait to my characters.

What I think I have strained the most though, is being *reflective*. I truth, that has never been one of my strong suits but now, with this project, I was forced to rethink what I made and evaluate in it really was the thing I wanted, thus making the product of my work all the better.

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Appendix

(A)

1.

Ideas

- diving encyclopedia
- writing a script
- producing and directing a movie
- ~~learn how to write with my left hand~~
- writing a book
 - ↳ writing a short story

↓

short story about historical event
(fall of the twins - 2001)

global context: orientation in space and time

goals: - at least 5 chapters
↳ 5 A5 pages per chapter
($5 \times 5 = 25 = 12.5 \text{ A4}$)

- genre: thriller - completely realistic
- format: A5
(paperback)

strategies: - research (interview someone from New York?)
↳ about the terrorists (the motives)
↳ research about the actual event
(time of catastrophe, survivors, ...)

- reading thrillers for inspiration
- exploring the english (vocab, grammar, phrases)

2.

22.11.2015
Mestská knihovna (city library)
↳ renewed my membership and went to search for some book sources & most of the books were published before 2001 so I found nothing about the event of the fall of the World Trade Center

- tried looking up something about muslim religion to find some sort of motivation but all the books were on irrelevant topics

3.

22. I. 2015

↳ Univerzitní knižnice (university library)

- didn't have much time to check everything out
but I found a short text about the Towers in
a "Tejiny USA" book

+ video tape about the World Trade Center

- the library has a magazine/newspaper section

(It is highly possible I will find something there)

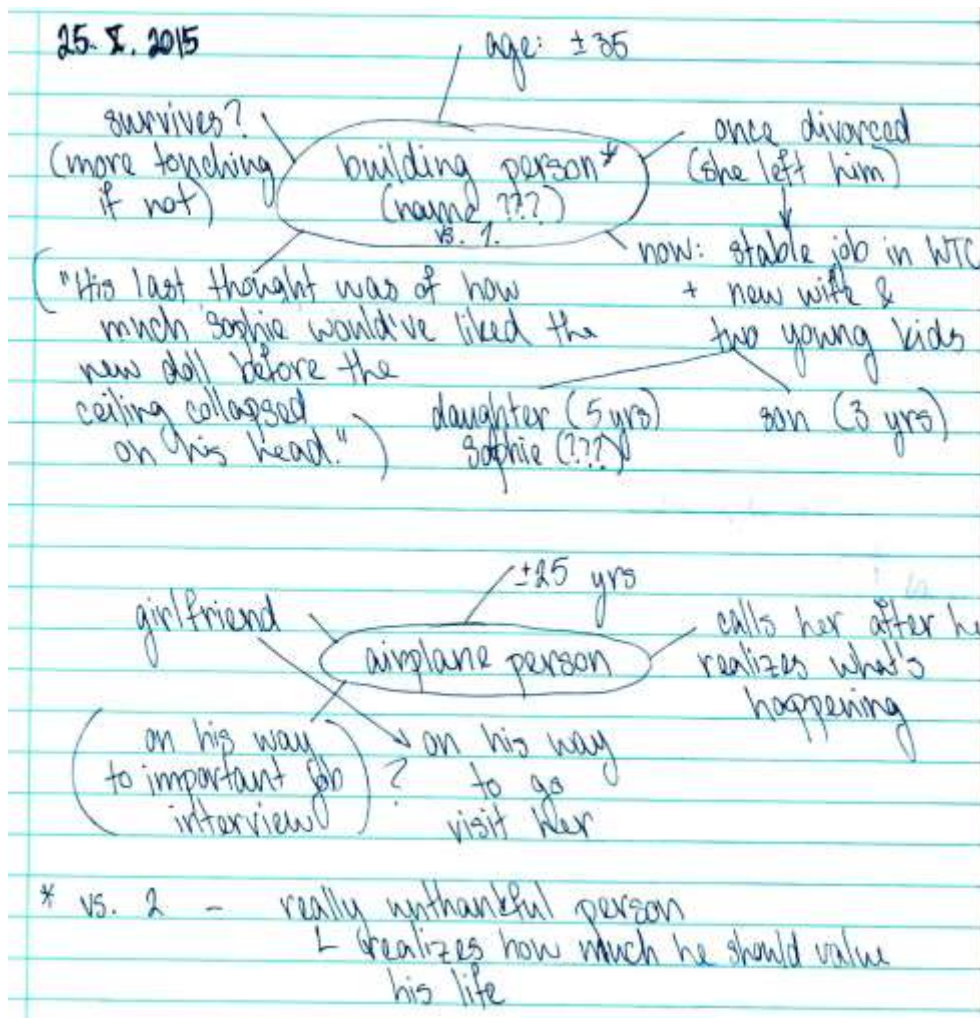
↳ the lady at the information desk suggested
going there

- different books about the composition of english
words (?) - I already have the czech book
on writing (Eva Musilová)

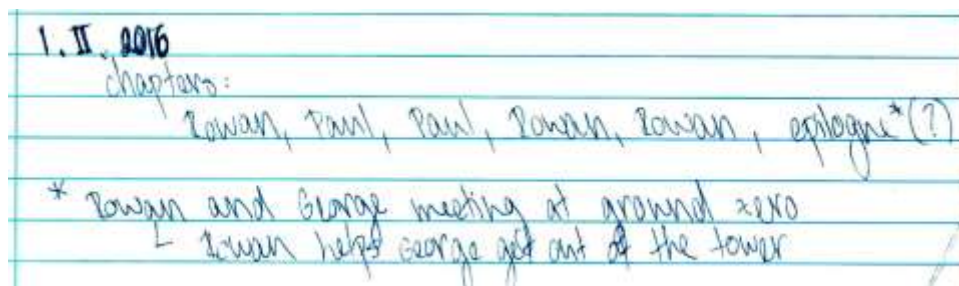
↗ - R. Herbst; BAE, ME - Mysteries of the Twin
Towers - A Survey of Available Evidence On
the Collapse of the World Trade Center Towers
(62 page paper - rev. 12.0 February 2009)

(B)

4.



5.



(C)

6.

10. I. 2016

best book links: Casasmond, Palantino
(thebookdesigner.com) size 11

- history.com - escaping the south tower video
- two men escaped the south tower only to watch it fall down

Rowan Ward (surname?)

- works in a bank on the 6th floor of WTC South tower

Rowan's boss: Jaime Hall

- pleasant, organized man

man in airplane:

Paul Judge (?)

7.

12. I. 2016

- Paul's side of story
- | university professor
- | going home from successful presentation
- | girlfriend Christina

8.

27. I. 2016

- continuing Paul's story

- chapters:

1 - Rowan - Intro to his life

2 - Paul - intro + realizes sth is happening

3 - Rowan - sees north tower, crash happens

4 - Paul - calls Christina

5 - Rowan - gets out of building with George

epilogue - Rowan - visits ground zero

28. I. 2016

Paul - gave lecture at Harvard this

- met new guy on airplane

↓

Matthew Davitt - going to visit his brother
(helpant with something)

(D)

9.

1. II. 2016
chapters:
Rowan, Paul, Paul, Rowan, Rowan, epilogue* (?)

* Rowan and George meeting at ground zero
↳ Rowan helps George get out of the tower

- Paul coming in contact with terrorists
↳ how harsh?
- hard to find a way to not make it unfair
(how was it really?)

↓
I'll write this chapter last - first I'll finish Rowan's side of the story

10.

10. II. 2016

- read the whole book
↳ didn't make any large changes

↓
grammar corrections,
change in phrases,
different styling of a few sentences

- I guess I just chose two characters
and described what was happening to
them - not really getting the big
picture

- need to change the ending