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Critic's Corner weekend

New on DVD: High stakes, high-fives and high notes

Within an hour New York City's nightmare had spread to Washington, D.C. The capital city was placed on emergency alert, and the business of government ground to a halt as uniformed pages and U.S. Senators alike poured out, bewildered, through the doors of the Capitol. In keeping with contingency plans that had never before been put into action, Congressional leaders, cabinet members and other high-ranking officials were whisked away to secret hideaways around the capital as national monuments, federal offices and the streets themselves were cleared of people. Heavily armed Secret Service agents guarded the White House. But it was only with the 9:45 a.m. attack on the Pentagon, once impregnable but now crippled and clouded with smoke from the crash of American Airlines Flight 77, that the true scope of the terrorists' mad ambitions was fully revealed.

Barbara Olson
45, lawyer, author and television commentator

"My plane has been hijacked!" frequent CNN legal analyst Barbara Olson told her stunned husband, U.S. Solicitor General Ted Olson. Calling from her cell phone aboard American Airlines Flight 77, she described how several men with knives and box cutters had hustled passengers to the rear of the Boeing 757 aircraft after it had departed from D.C.'s Dulles International Airport en route to Los Angeles.

Olson lost her connection, then called back, telling her husband—who was in his Washington office watching reports of the World Trade Center attack—that she loved him. Then "the phone went dead," says attorney Bob McConnell, a close friend. "When Ted heard the plane hit the Pentagon, he knew it was her."

The conservative author of *Hell to Pay*, a barbed critique of former First Lady Hillary Rodham Clinton, Olson was a regular on Larry King Live, where she recently was one of Congressman Gary Condit's harshest critics. She was also awaiting next month's publication of *The Final Days*, a book on Bill Clinton's last chapters as president. Once divorced, in 1996 she married the twice-divorced Olson, a father of two who last year argued George W. Bush's case before the Supreme Court in the Florida election recount crisis. "We have individual careers and come together at home," she said. Indeed, Olson had delayed her flight to L.A. by a day so she could have breakfast with her husband on Sept. 11, his 61st birthday, at their Great Falls, Va., home. "She wanted to be with him," says McConnell. "He is devastated."

Laura Bush
54, First Lady of the United States

Strong emotions flickered across Laura Bush's face as she stood before reporters in Washington, D.C., at 9:45 a.m. Had events gone as scheduled, Bush was to have spent the morning delivering testimony about the importance of early childhood education before the U.S. Senate health and education committee, her Capitol Hill debut. Instead, flanked by Senators Edward Kennedy (D-Mass.) and Judd Gregg (R-N.H.), she seemed tense but kept her composure. "Our hearts and prayers go out to the victims of this act of terrorism. All of our prayers are with everyone there," she told a handful of journalists. Asked how families should react to the disturbing news, the First Lady replied, "Parents need to reassure their children everywhere in our country they're safe."

With that, Bush and Kennedy were escorted by the Secret Service to a holding room, where she waited for a motorcade to take her to an undisclosed safe location (a secure phone was used to speak to her husband in Florida and check in on her twin daughters at their respective colleges) while the White House was evacuated. By 10:15 a.m. she was on her way—her day, like that of so many others, coldly transformed.

Tom Seibert
33, a network engineer, Department of Defense

"I happened to load my Web browser and saw the picture of the World Trade Center with a hole in it. I ran over to the closest television I could find. I thought, 'If that's a high profile target, then so are we.' Then I heard this sound like a missile and then a loud boom. The windows shook. Everyone hit the deck. We looked out the window, and there was a huge fireball shooting up in the air. We shut everything down, locked up and got out of there. We got into the Pentagon parking lot and turned around. We were stunned. A good friend of mine was helping with the wounded, helping carry the bodies out. He said there were body parts everywhere. He was using his suit coat to tend to people's wounds and his briefcase to carry medical supplies."

Alan Wallace
Ft. Myer, Va., firefighter

"I looked up and saw a white airplane that had blue paint on it, less than 50 ft. off the ground, coming right at us. It was no further than 250 yards away. I yelled to my partner, and we both started running. There was a fireball. He was knocked down, and I don't know if I was. There was a flash, a horrific crunch. There was a moment when I felt the fire. That's when I dove on the ground and slid underneath the van. I know the van was instrumental in keeping me from getting any more injured. I certainly do thank the Lord that we survived this. We both had second-degree burns on our arms. From that point on we began to try to make the damaged fire truck work. There was debris falling from everywhere. We tried to take charge of what was going on and did what we could do to help people who were trying to get out." Wallace worked for another 45 minutes before he was told to get treatment for his own wounds.

