

Tuesday 22nd March 2016

What a horrific day yesterday. I am happy to say that we are all OK and that so far I have not heard of anyone we know being caught up in either of the two attacks. I was at home most of the day "in my office". Like everyone we think of how we are not caught in the atrocities and of those who were. We had been at the airport on Sunday and could have been there yesterday. Ariane who would often be passing through Maelbeek at about the time of the explosion was safely in France; she seems to have sensed the danger and decided to stay there this week as I was due to be away.

We were due to leave on Sunday but our flight was cancelled at the very last minute (we were waiting to walk to the aircraft) due to the air traffic strikes in France. I had vainly searched for other flights for Tuesday. I could have had one on Monday but the strike was due to continue. There were no seats left at a reasonable price so we abandoned our plans for a week away.

We learned about the first bombs just as we left the house at 8am for our normal morning walk (with the dog). At the newsagents where we pause each morning to chat with Alain, he had the radio on asking if we had heard. Whilst we sat in the cafe, I searched for news on my phone. Once home we switched on the television for more news to see the first pictures emerging of smoke coming from Maelbeek station on Rue de la Loi. More rumours were coming of other explosions – happily they were false.

We sat watching the news emerge; it was difficult to work. Messages started to arrive asking if we were OK. We talked about the attacks and the reason why Belgium seems to be implicated. We exchanged with friends and family anxious for news. We noted that just one week previously, the hunt for the terrorists had led to the stand-off and shootings just down the road from our house. We talked about the airport and metro which we know so well and pass through so often.

Then the first picture of the metro wagon were shown and this was the moment for me when the full horror became clear. Up to then we had seen people injured, being carried on stretchers, we had heard witnesses talk of their experience, but no real indications of the extent of the explosions. The damage to the train made it clear; torn apart by the blast it would have been full at that time

Does it change much? Of course. I fear for our freedom, for Europe and very much for Belgium. Will it change what we do? Not at all. No doubt we shall reflect on the attacks and the danger next time we take the metro or pass through the airport. But I think everyone who takes a plane regularly thinks of the possibilities whilst rationalising that the risks of "it" happening to us personally is very small; infinitesimally small. So life goes on – or at least for most of us – for our thoughts like everyone in Brussels at the moment go to the family, friends and networks of colleagues of those who were wounded or killed at 8h07 or 9h11 yesterday morning 22nd March 2016.