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## WITNESS TO TERROR

# Witness to terror: Sarasota fitness teacher survives bomb blasts at Brussels airport

**Mark Grevelding says the first airport blast knocked him down. Then a wall fell on him.**

By [Michael Scott Davidson](#)

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Mark Grevelding was walking toward passport clearance, tickets in hand, his lone suitcase already checked in, when the first explosion rocked the Brussels airport.

"It was a huge orange flash," the 53-year-old Sarasota resident recalled Thursday. "I could never explain in a million years to someone how loud that was. I could have sworn it was next to me it was so loud."

The ground shook Tuesday morning as ceiling tiles rained down. Grevelding was knocked off balance, injuring his leg, and collapsed.

Grevelding, an aquatics fitness instructor for the Sarasota YMCA, was leaving Belgium after attending the Aqua & Move International Convention in Gent. He expected a routine trip to Atlanta. Instead, he found himself amid the chaos of a trio of terrorist bombings that killed more than 30 people.

Grevelding got up, but a second blast knocked a wall on top of him. He was covered in debris from the wall, which, ironically, may have shielded him from a more serious shrapnel injury.

Except for a few small fires, the airport around him went dark. Grevelding's vision was obscured by smoke and dust. He could no longer see the airport's thick crowds, and the room was quiet.

"I felt like I was alone," he said.

Survival instinct took over when Grevelding saw the light of an open door. He limped on his injured leg, climbing over debris and slipping on blood that covered the area.

"I put tunnel vision in front of me, and searched for a way out," he said. "I don't think I ever looked back."

Grevelding exited the airport terminal. Caked in white dust and his shoes stained with blood, he joined a herd of shocked and confused people walking toward the nearest town: Zaventem, a little more than one mile away.

A Belgian physiotherapist of about Grevelding's age named Bart helped him along. They traveled to a nearby train station, which was shut down after a third bomb exploded in a subway station about seven miles away.

Outside the train station, the two men met an eye doctor who offered to drive them to her nearby office. Once there, Grevelding texted a local friend to pick him up.

“I am safe and well cared for,” Grevelding said. “I saw a doctor here, and I have a tear in either a tendon or muscle.”

Grevelding said he is flying home from Paris on Sunday. He will be traveling with friends.

A Sarasota resident for three years, Grevelding said he's been traveling for work for more than a decade.

This was his second trip to Belgium. He does not expect it to be his last.

“I will not let it deter me,” he said of the terrorist attacks. “I don't want to sound trite, but you can't let them win.”

He said when he thinks back to the event he will try to focus on the image of people caring for one another on the road to Zaventem.

“When you saw them helping each other, that's what triumphs,” he said. “That kind of hate is unimaginable, but that can't win.”

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