I worked three blocks away from what we now call "Ground Zero", and have several health issues working against me, including congestive heart failure and atrial fibrillation.

Luckily, on that fateful Tuesday morning in September, I was semi prepared. I was (and still am) in the habit of ALWAYS carrying an HT with me, and that HT helped bail me out.

I was out on the street before the second plane hit and like many around me, thought that we had a commuter airline accident and that everything would soon be under control. I went back to my office and got to work.

As we learned what was going on (which happened in small doses), we decided to ride it out to avoid a panic situation. With my health issues, panic scenes are best avoided, plus the idea of a tower falling was unthinkable.

When the first tower fell, fire alarms in our building went off and we were directed to evacuate. We went down the stairwell from the ninth floor to the lobby. Looking out, the street looked like midnight with smoke and ash hiding the sun. Visibility was measured in feet.

I told my building's security people that if I went outside with that air quality, it would probably kill me, so they allowed me to stay in the lobby. Using a wet washcloth to breath through, I waited as the security people made sure that our building was not burning. After a little less than an hour we knew that our building was OK, so I went back upstairs via the freight elevator because the air quality was better up there.

Back up on nine, we still had lights, a men's room, and things did look better. Thinking that the phones would be out, I tried anyway, and was amazed at being able to place a long distance call to my family at home in New Jersey.

They had been watching on TV and were very concerned.

I spoke to my oldest daughter, and knowing that we would probably lose the phone, gave her a quick course on using an HT, as I had a second one at home.

Our timing was perfect, as we neared the end, the phone did fail but we were able to finish our talk using the radios and a repeater.

Manhattan was basically sealed at this juncture.
There was virtually no public transportation.
The island was cut-off.
I was trapped.

My family found a way for me to get out of Manhattan using a ferry that was running from the foot of Wall Street to the New Jersey Highlands. They called me on the radio and we organized a plan.

I left my office just after noon for the walk down to Wall Street. The ash on the sidewalk was over an inch and a half thick and there were very few people on the street. Visibility had improved though, and

you could see about two blocks or so. The quiet and stillness felt very strange in what was usually a very dynamic, noisy area, as I fought to breath through my wet washcloth as I walked.

Walking on William Street, the five or six people I did see were all heading north as I trudged south. A police officer spotted me and asked what I was doing. I told him about the ferry on Wall Street, which he didn't know about, and showed him my radio. He suggested that I walk down to Water Street which was cleaner and wished me well.

I was able to get to the ferry, and with the help of another member of New York's finest, get on board.

As the ferry left the dock starting our journey, I used my HT and contacted my daughter arranging for her and her husband to pick me up when the ferry arrived in NJ. At this point in time most of the cell phones were pretty useless, so I ended up running traffic for other passengers with some of my friends on two different repeaters. I became quite popular on that boat.

When the ferry docked at the Highlands, my family and I were able to find each other and I made it home without further incident.

And so I got through the nightmare of 9/11.

My experience, while serious from my point of view, was quite insignificant compared with what many other people went through.

I had been very lucky, and I knew it.

I still worked in the same area, and still have medical problems, so the name of the game for me is "OPTIONS". A daypack was clearly needed and it should contain essential survival items, and be a reasonable carry.

Actually it should be a convenient carry, because it can't be effective if you don't have it with you, and if there are any carry problems you will be tempted to leave it home. It is far better to have it and not need it, than to need it and not have it.

This is where we differ from the "grab and go" setups that you may have been reading about.
This is not "grab and go", this is “constant companion”.

The first task is to determine what we really need.

A linear amp for an HT, a dual band mag-mount antenna, and batteries is a big temptation, but it is bulky and heavy and would require the use of a backpack. So although it would be nice to have, it is not really worth the extra carry effort, so we stick with basics.

After much thought and experimentation, I came up with the following, using a Blackhack EMT Utility belt pack to transport most of the gear, with the attitude "Less is More".

The first item is pretty obvious, the radio. BUT... we have added a little wrinkle here. I made a counterpoise for the antenna, using a

battery alligator clip with a nineteen-inch length of wire attached to it. This type of device has been around for years. Some people refer to it as a "Tiger Tail".

The counterpoise just clips on to the groundside of the BNC antenna connector and more than doubles the ERP (effective radiated power) of the HT. It even lowers the SWR. If you can't get a contact on the BNC, or your radio uses an SNA fitting, you can try using the belt clip or find another ground source on the radio.

You have many choices regarding how to make and use the counterpoise, I took the path of "If it's worth doing, it's worth doing right" and tried to make it look as good as it works.

I cut three strands of #22 hookup wire into 20-inch lengths, and then soldered them to the alligator clip. Then, after making sure that they were all nice and straight, slowly twisted them together into a fairly tight braid. I covered the braided wire with neoprene tubing to preserve and protect it. The results have stood up to the test of time by aging gracefully.

This has become standard configuration on my carry radio.

Taking this a little farther, I purchased a telescoping scanner antenna, which I can adjust for both the two-meter, and the 70CM bands. Poof - using the counterpoise, with the scanner antenna properly adjusted, we now have a full size half wave vertical dipole.
This makes for a serious signal improvement if I have to "kick it up a notch". This antenna is held in reserve for use if and when needed. For the sake of "ease of carry", I usually use the standard "rubber duck" antenna that came with the radio. The standard antenna is a nice compromise regarding size and efficiency, at least when used with the counterpoise, but I do have to admit that the radio "hears better" using the scanner antenna.

I use a cane for walking, one of those newer adjustable metal ones, because it really helps, especially on stairs. I have found another neat little feature with this type of cane. You can actually fit one of those gain type aftermarket rubber duck antennas inside the cane. This beats carrying the antenna in your pocket and listening to people telling you that you are going to poke your eye out. So we have added another little option, the extra antenna is there if we need it.

Other items include a Leatherman type utility tool, a mini-maglight (AA cell), a tin whistle (like referees use), matches, two days supply of medication, and extra charged batteries in an accessory battery pack.

My medication regimen includes some capsules which can be fragile. I devised a secure carry method using some plastic tubing I found at a hardware store. The tubing is fairly rigid, and has an inside diameter of one half of one inch. I bought some, as well as a half inch dowel. You can do some amazing things using plastic electrical tape with pieces of tubing and pieces of dowel. A thought though, to keep in mind regarding medications. You want to make sure that you "cycle" them. Don't let it just sit in the case for a couple of months. Use, and then refill, so that you will always have reasonably fresh doses.

I discovered a pill carrier recently while refilling my prescriptions, intended for attachment to your key ring. It was made out of steel, it was small, and it is waterproof. This is now my pill carrier.

A little caution regarding the Leatherman tool. It would definitely be classified as a weapon by most security check points so think about where you are going.

Carrying a small typed frequency list in your wallet with listings of police, fire, EMT services, repeaters that you don't keep in memory, and maybe even FRS/GMRS channels is not a bad idea either. If you have any significant health issues, think about keeping a small write-up in your wallet too. Items listed should include names and phone numbers of your doctor(s), and a list of your daily medications with dosages. To prove the worth of this just ask any E.M.T. It is the first thing that they look for.

Smokers are usually quite popular in disaster situations because they always have light and a way to create fire. A mini disposable lighter does not take up much room.

I use accessory AA battery packs on my radios loaded with NMh batteries, and have learned to love Nickel Metal Hydride batteries. I actually have two accessory battery packs for each radio.

The radio that I normally carry is an Icom T7H. It fits my pocket nicely, and the standard Icom accessory battery pack holds four AA cells, which give about 2 watts output when set on high power. I recently added a new battery pack that holds six AA cells which brings the power up to 3.9 watts.

My other radio is an Icom 24AT using a six cell accessory pack and is in the same power and charge life ballpark. I use the 24AT as my "at home" radio and seldom carry it to work because of its size.

With moderate use, I was getting very close to a full week on a charge using Radio Shack 1600MA NMh cells. I recently upgraded to 2350MA cells and now get more than a week. Using the newer high capacity batteries, we are at a point where battery charge life is no longer an issue.

I do not carry the standard 9.6V 650MA NiCad battery that came with the T7H. I don't feel comfortable with the length of operating time per charge in an emergency situation. When you think it through, you see that while it has twice the voltage, it has less than half the current capacity of the accessory packs the way I am using them. This translates to less than twenty five percent of the accessory pack's operating time. I have verified this by testing.

A four-cell set of Lithium-ion AA cells for "just in case" is also tucked in the case. The Lithium-ion cells have slightly higher voltage, and while they are not cheap, they have a shelf life of close to ten years, and don't take up much room.

Of course a few alkaline batteries for the flashlight, an extra bulb, and a few folded breathing filters, add to my peace of mind. Please note that I use the AA cell mini-maglite and not the AAA version. The AA size is bigger, but the fact that it uses the same battery size as

the radio plus the fact that the AA cells have much greater "staying power" make it an obvious choice.

The Blackhawk EMT pack is quite convenient to wear on your belt, and at about twenty dollars or so is not a major investment. It has a pouch on the back which I use for batteries and other small items. The dual pocket on the front is covered by a single flap where I keep my Leatherman tool and flashlight. There are also loops on each side that I use for the counterpoise.

This setup, with the belt pack on my hip, and the radio in my pocket, is an easy carry, and one that I can and do live with.

In actual practice, I have been using it for over three years now and have made no changes, it is with me every day.

Each morning, as I arrive in the financial district in lower Manhattan, I chat with some of my friends on my club's repeater. This tells me that my radio is working, the repeater (where I have autopatch privileges) is working, and that my batteries are in reasonable to good shape. This is a bit of a distance from the repeater, about 20-25 miles, so we always include a signal quality report in our QSO's. That little antenna counterpoise does make a difference. You will also learn that the counterpoise is somewhat directional and just changing its angle regarding the repeater that you are using can make a real difference.

I feel that it is important knowing what you can hit and how well you can hit it from the various places where you spend any time. Being familiar with your radio under varying conditions can only work for you, and locations can get kind of tricky in an urban environment such as New York City. We have seen instances where just moving two feet can make a noticeable difference in signal strength. You may also see situations where you seem to be able "make" a repeater but have such poor copy quality that a QSO is next to impossible.

Another subtle point for position consideration is where do I stand when it is raining or snowing?

The best time to acquire this kind of information is now, not when you may be in danger. Assessing your options when you are not under stress helps you to actually learn about more options that you didn't even know you had. Examples that come to mind include alternate escape routes, escape methods, places of refuge like hospitals, as well as emergency sources for supplies.

This works for me, and is intended as a starting point for you as you examine your situation, your wants, and your needs. Your requirements probably differ from mine as I use public transportation, work in what many consider a target area, and have medical problems. Choose and use what you will, and with luck we won't have to use it.

It came in handy during the blackout of August 2003. I was on the train going home, and we stopped in an unusual spot and just sat there. I turned the radio on and became quite popular as I heard the New York City Fire Department involved in quite a few elevator rescues. Also listening in on the State Police Emergency Network (SPEN) as they

talked about sites dropping power, we quickly learned what was going on while our cell phones went into "No Service" mode.

The train’s crew told us that Amtrak was having signal problems because the crew didn't know yet that we were in a blackout. We did eventually make it home as NJ Transit's main NE corridor line had power.

Once again I was lucky, and the radio sure didn't hurt.

Of course when you feel a little paranoia creeping in....
Where is that brick, the dual-band mag-mount, and the heavy-duty battery pack?