

PARADE

PRESENTS

9/11 Lessons and Legacies, Freedom and Forgiveness

People reacted in a variety of ways after the attacks on American soil on September 11, 2001. Some responded with anger; some chose fear; some chose compassion, others chose worry. Many people experienced a blend of emotions.

In October 2001, Noble Prize winner Elie Wiesel wrote an essay about the reactions for PARADE titled, "We Choose Honor."

Wiesel described the attacks as "a human earthquake" perpetrated by fanatics intent on spreading hatred and fear. He concluded that the terrorists failed. He wrote:

"But the American people did not bend. Never have they been more motivated, more generous. Their behavior was praised the world over. Instead of trying to save themselves, men and women, young and old, ran to Ground Zero to offer assistance. Some stood in line for hours to donate blood. Hundreds of thousands of sandwiches, sodas and mineral waters were distributed.

And so, the terrorists achieved the opposite of what they wanted. They moved people to transcend themselves and choose that which is noble in man -- for in the end, it is always a matter of choice. Even when faced with the murderous madness of criminals, and in the presence of the silent agony of their victims, it is incumbent upon us to choose between escape and solidarity, shame and honor. The terrorists have chosen shame. We choose honor."

Wiesel said that reacting to this heinous attack with prolonged hatred would only have wounded Americans more. Anger and hate hurt only the person who hates, never the targets of the anger.

It's much the same in your personal life. One of the lessons you can learn on this tenth anniversary of 9/11 is the lesson Wiesel wanted to teach. Choose honor over hate. Choose forgiveness over anger.

That doesn't mean that you don't hold the terrorists or anyone else who wrongs you, accountable. Holding them responsible isn't an obstacle to your ability to let go of anger. Forgiveness does not mean that you forget what happened. It means that you let go of the anger or fear that you felt as a result of what happened.



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Forgiveness has little to do with the person who wronged you. Rather, forgiveness is something you do for yourself.

Wiesel has been quoted as saying, "Peace is our gift to each other." When you learn to forgive, and you give yourself the gift of peace, then you can pass it on to others.

Perhaps that is one way to honor this 9/11 anniversary – by passing on the gift of peace.

How best to do that?

Wiesel survived the Holocaust and has spent his life telling stories about his experiences in order to stop such a horrific event from recurring. He explains his mission this way:

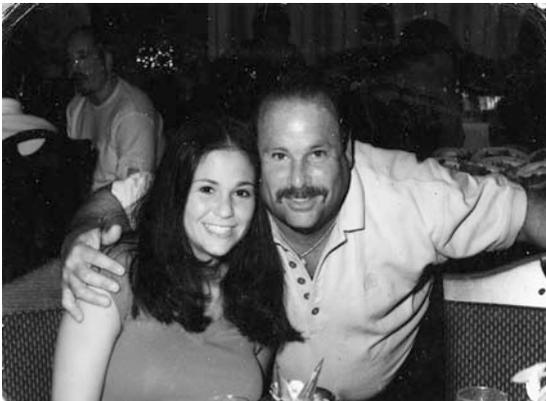
“Our task is to inform. But information must be transformed into knowledge, knowledge into sensitivity and sensitivity into commitment.”

That’s why the sharing of stories is so important on this anniversary. With the stories comes information, and with information comes knowledge and then sensitivity.

The families of some of those killed on 9/11 agree. That’s why some of them wrote letters to the loved ones they lost and published them in a book. They wanted to share what they knew, what they lost, and what they learned.

Excerpts from “The Legacy Letters” appeared in the July 31 issue of PARADE. The book is dedicated to the victims of Sept. 11.

Tara Feinberg wrote this to her dad, Alan Feinberg, a firefighter killed on 9/11:



You were always my hero for all the little things you did daily in our family, but on September 11, 2001, you became a hero to the world as one of the brave 343 firemen who gave their lives to help save so many others. I knew I always admired your strength, your compassion, your constant desire to help others and your dreams of making every day a better day no matter what but on that day I truly understood what a selfless and remarkable man you were.

You inspire me to live my life, to help others, and to be grateful for each moment. I don’t know what the next ten years will bring in my life, but I do know that I have enough strength, wisdom and support to take on anything.

The legacy Alan Feinberg left for his daughter was one of helping others and of gratitude for a life well lived. What do you believe is the most important legacy a parent can pass on to a child?

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Lisa Ventura lost her mother and her husband on 9/11. Her husband Anthony was last seen walking up the steps in the World Trade Center on his way to reach his mother-in-law, who also worked there. Lisa wrote to her husband, Anthony Ventura:

Only you would take a twenty-mile bike ride at 7:00 a.m., so that you could be home and ready to start your day with your family. We knew we came first—thank you! You would be so proud of the girls and who they are today. They are so much like you. Jessica loves to read. She always has a book in her hand. Nicole is my handyman—always putting things together or taking things apart. That was so you.



Anthony Ventura's legacy was visible even in his last act on the planet, as he was seen trying to save a member of his family. It's clear that the guiding force of Ventura's life was his love of family. What is the value of a loving family? How do you show your love and concern for the people in your family? How do they show theirs?

While the word "family" once conjured images of a mother, a father, and children living together, the definition of family has broadened in recent years. How do you define "family"?

After a catastrophic event like 9/11, people often re-examine what's truly important in life. If you were to list the five things that matter most to you, where would family fit on that list?

Leslie Blair described the legacy of her sister, Susan Blair:

But on this anniversary, I don't want to tell them the story of how you were killed. On this anniversary, I want to tell them just a few lessons that you taught me that I think they should know. I hope we can say that we have lived with purpose, determination, bravery, adventure, compassion, friendship, joy and love, and that our loved ones are as certain of our love as we are of theirs. Surely, this is your legacy.



What do you think is the best way for America to honor the legacy of those lost on 9/11? What is the best way to honor those lost since that day, fighting in Iraq and Afghanistan to protect America's future?

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Joe DiFazio's father, Vincent DiFazio, was a stockbroker working in the offices of Cantor Fitzgerald in the World Trade Center. Joe wrote to his dad:

*"Thank you for teaching me to hold my head high, to be confident in who I am and in what I do, and to stand up for those who can't stand up for themselves.
Thank you for teaching me how to hit a curveball, to make a free throw, and to run a sharp slant.
Thank you for showing me that laughter can cure all, but that it's okay to cry.
Thank you for showing me how to be a man.
I'll always remember to look out for Mom and my little sisters, to treat women like the angels they are and to show kindness to everyone, especially those who need it most."*

Some of DiFazio's legacy is quite grand, while some depicts almost ordinary aspects of life. Why do you think Joe chose to describe the sports achievements his dad taught him? Do life's little lessons matter as much as the big ones? Does a legacy left behind have to be an enormous and grand concept? Can a person leave a legacy that includes some everyday aspect of life?

Elie Wiesel says, "We choose honor." How can you choose honor every day?



Discussion Points:

- A. Who will leave a legacy for you? What do you think it will be?
- B. What is the best way to honor those you love and admire while they are alive?
- C. What would you like your legacy to be?
- D. How is the Golden Rule applicable to all of these legacies and lessons?
- E. How will you commemorate the 9/11 tenth anniversary? It has been declared a national day of service and remembrance. Look in your local newspaper for ideas about organizations or people who need help. For more ideas on how you can participate, visit these websites:

<http://911dayofservice.org/>

<http://www.handsonnetwork.org/nationalprograms/signatureevents/911day>

<http://www.volunteermatch.org>