

This summer I had the opportunity to visit the 9/11 Memorial and Museum in New York City. I walked around the somber exhibits as my eyes lingered on charred, twisted metal and artifacts from one of the most devastating events in our country's history. I witnessed people crying silently, some shaking their heads, and others just standing still, taking in the horror of it all. I felt like there was a heavy weight on my chest and a massive sadness filled my entire body.

My family and I had the opportunity to meet a few incredible people who managed to escape the Towers as they were actively burning, and a few of their stories completely shocked me. One woman told us about how chaotic it was in the stairwells with thousands of panicked bodies packed into a small space. She shared about watching her coworkers carry a man in a wheelchair down the many flights of stairs and how struck she was that in the midst of chaos and tragedy, people were still so willing to help each other.

Another man held up a simple metal handle and told us the story of how his refusal to change his old squeegee saved multiple lives. He retold the horror of being trapped in a stuck, pitch-black elevator while himself and his fellow window washers tried in vain to escape. They shouted and called for help, but no one heard them. They thought all hope was lost until the man remembered his sturdy squeegee. See, the other window washers had recently replaced their metal tools for plastic, but he stubbornly refused. In the end, he pounded the solid handle of the squeegee repeatedly against the elevator wall until it broke through the next wall, which turned out to be a mens' bathroom. Everyone stuck in that elevator escaped and lived to tell their story.

Even though I was not alive when it happened, the pictures I saw leading up to and then immediately after 9/11 fill me with immense emotion. I saw a picture taken in the split second before Flight 175 hit the South Tower, with the North Tower still in flames and black smoke curling into the sky. I saw pictures of Flight 93, reduced to twisted metal, ash, and bits of glass smashed into a field in Pennsylvania. Additionally, the audio I heard fills me with sorrow as people said their goodbyes and made peace with leaving their loved ones for good. In Linda Gronlund's voicemail to her sister from Flight 93, she explained with a shaking voice that hijackers had taken over the plane and she didn't think the passengers were going to make it. She finished the voicemail by saying how much she loved her sister and her parents.

This event has reshaped so many lives in our country and moves others as the stories continue to be passed down. Hundreds of millions of Americans were either born after 9/11 or were too young to remember it clearly, meaning that some of Generation Z, all of Generation

Alpha and Generation Beta were born after 9/11. Even though I was not alive during the events of 9/11, I have been indirectly shaped and impacted by this day. On Tuesday, September 11, 2001, my parents met in college for the first time ever. They attended a prayer vigil at their university and spent time together rollerblading and talking about what this meant for our country. My dad expressed a deep desire to join the military and support his country. While he ultimately decided to finish his last few years of college and continue on in seminary, he eventually joined the Navy to serve his country as a chaplain. That deep desire was born on 9-11 and has shaped the course of my life as a military child.

I think that the best way I can help to honor the events of 9-11 is to continue telling the stories that have been entrusted to me. Oral history is personal and powerful, so I will continue sharing the story of the window washers and the heartbreaking last voicemails of someone stuck on Flight 93. To share the story of my parents meeting on 9-11 and being moved to action. I want my future children to know about our country's past and to know about the thousands of people who died in the Towers and planes involved. I want them to know about the survivors and the ways in which mankind showed the very best of itself in helping each other.

When I think about our country, I might first imagine eagles soaring and an anthem about American pride and victory. But when I think deeper, I remember the events that have really shaped the United States, bloody battles and events like 9/11. It is difficult to imagine being someone directly affected by terrorism attacks, whether it be a family member of a person on Flight 93 or someone who escaped one of the Towers. As someone indirectly involved in the devastating events of 9-11, I will honor them by retelling the stories with care and remembering everyone who fought back, survived, helped, and will forever carry the scars of September 11th, 2001.