

Author's Note: This article was originally written 10 days after September 11th for my website (www.personal.psu.edu/mpw147).

It has now been 10 days since the day of infamy on which the United States was attacked by a faceless coward. Over those ten days I've felt shock, sorrow, anger, and fear just like all Americans and I've felt the need to write them down although until now I just haven't had the drive to do so. With so many people feeling the same way, why would anyone care what I had to say? Chances are no one will read this, but I am going to do this anyway if only to archive my feelings for myself. Historically, I am devoid of most emotions and to be honest the past week has been scary and comforting at the same time to know that I'm actually capable of having them after all. Maybe not even I know how much this has affected me. As I looked up to my calendar to see how long it had been since the attack I realized that my desktop calendar still read "Tuesday, September 11." The date that America lost it's innocence again.

That Tuesday was just a beautiful day. Not a cloud in the sky-the perfect weather for me to be wasting indoors going to school. Generations from now when people ask me, "Where were you?" I will say "At Penn State Lehigh Valley." I had an English class and as I was walking to my class I passed someone saying on their cell phone, "Turn on Fox News." To be honest, I was thinking more of his political leanings based on his news network preferences more than anything. It never even dawned on me that *something might have actually happened*. This is America, and the news was more likely to be a Michael Jordan press conference than an attack on our shores. The America I lived in then is an entirely different America that we live in now.

Looking back, there was almost nobody in my English class that morning, and still it never dawned on me that something tragic might have happened until I walked into the Atrium and saw about a dozen people just staring at the TV hanging from the ceiling. I knew from everyone around me that this was something big and thus, something in America. My first thought was that a volcano had erupted (this will not be the last time that movies will cross my mind that day). I asked someone what was going on and literally no one answered. Whether it was shock, not wanting to actually say it, or not even hearing me I don't know. I glanced in the cafeteria and I spotted a friend of mine watching on the bigger TV. I asked her what was going on and her reply was, "The World Trade Center just collapsed."

I've never been hit in the head with a brick before, but I imagine that it would feel about the same as what that moment felt like. I don't even remember what I said back; I remember trying to hold back tears that hadn't flowed down my cheeks in years. I don't even remember the last time I lost control and I certainly wasn't going to do it in front of 35 people at school. I don't know which blow was harder: hearing the news, or actually seeing the towers collapse on TV. I sat down gazing at the screen, agape with the rest of a stunned nation. I don't know if what I was doing could be called shaking; it was more like a nervous energy. But whatever it was, I could not control my own body's movement. Thankfully, I still maintained command over my emotions.

Decades from now, I'm not even sure what I'll remember. I'll remember the way I felt, but already fading from memory is how scary that day actually was. The symbols of America's economic and military might had been attacked with reports of another plane missing. Not even the President was thought safe as he was whisked across the country before returning to Washington. Nobody knew what was next so we just sat in front of the TV praying that it was over. I went through periods lasting about a half an hour where things almost seemed OK, and then suddenly the hellish reality would hit me all over again.

For about 30 seconds the next morning I actually forgot what had happened, and for maybe a split second thereafter I even thought that it might have been a dream. Driving to school that day for a prayer meeting, I had my closest encounter with "losing it" when "Proud to be an American" was played on WAEB. I came *this* close to breaking down, but it wouldn't have been good for me to crash my car on route 22, so I was able to pull it together.

Now that the country has for the most part gotten over it's shock and sorrow, the anger and resolve is setting in. When I said that America lost its innocence again that day, I wasn't trying to be dramatic, I meant it. Perhaps the word "naiveté" would fit better in that slot. I have a strongly held belief, that Americans are a great people, and yes, the greatest in the world. At long last, the past week has confirmed what I've believed deep down for a long time. When any other nation in the world has a disaster or is in need of help, the United States of America is *always* the first nation to step up. Despite what some say in my own religion, and despite our many, many flaws, in relation to the rest of the world we are a very moral people. We are nowhere near perfect and do condone *many* sins, but I still feel that "moral" is an appropriate word to describe us. The problem with this is that many just automatically assume that everyone else in the world will see what we do and want peace the same way we do. Americans simply don't understand (myself included) the kind of mindset that these people have: they hate us simply for being Americans.

Why do they hate us? They hate our freedoms. They hate our prosperity. They hate the fact that we have a democratic-republic. They hate that we support Israel, and maybe first and foremost they hate that we allow all religions to reside here peacefully. Who knows? Maybe it just boils down to jealousy. I certainly cannot get into their minds. The difference between us and them is that we are literally incapable of hating so much that we could dance in the streets after killing thousands of innocents, even if they are our mortal enemy. (Chances are, we'll end up rebuilding whatever nation we destroy in the coming war).

Adding to their ignorance is a total lack of understanding of our psyche. What could they possibly have imagined would come of this? Do you think that even in their wildest imaginations they thought that this disaster would unite what just 10 days ago was a deeply divided country? I am not going to use the "sleeping giant" cliché, but we stand united, we are angry, and we want retribution. And you know what? We will have it. Why? Because we are the United States of America and we CAN do it. I can guarantee

you right now that they are petrified because whatever they thought was going to happen certainly did not. They should be afraid, because we *will* kill these monsters and the old world of tolerating anti-American activities will cease to exist. You won't support US troops? Fine, no more financial aid. Your government sponsors terrorists? Fine, we will topple it.

As long as we stay united, we will win. No question. The only time we have been divided on a war was Vietnam, also the only one we lost. We are all fired up now, but I pray that 5 more maybe even 10 years from now we will still have the same resolve to eliminate this bane to humanity. We can also show our resolve by going back to work and resuming our lives as usual. Go to a movie; see a ballgame. If everyone does this we will again strengthen our economy. If we change our way of life, then they have won even in their eventual defeat. This defeat will come because we are a great people who have always risen when a challenge arrives. For generations now, we have had it so good that we've had to make up problems like mid-life crises to pretend we have it rough. Well, now a real menace has emerged and I know that we will respond as we always have during crucial periods of history. Our generation now has it's Pearl Harbor. We need to see to it that it has it's D-Day.