

Jonathan Beagan

A. The events of September 11th, 2001 have left a scar in every American's memory that will last for the remainder of their life. The unnecessary death of those such as Michael in the towers, planes, and on the streets horrified a nation gripped in fear on that day. And that fear has continued to this day. I could speak of the inconvenience at the airport, the extra money we are paying for homeland security, and the anxiety we have when we are in a crowded place. The distrust we now have when we look at people of foreign origin is a serious problem and keeps us at a distance with each other. This damage to the American psyche is the most wide reaching effect of modern terrorism.

The distrust terrorism fosters has created a feeling in America of almost "us against the world," a feeling that no one else will help us so we'll go it alone. In a modern, globalization world, a lone wolf view of how to act is not healthy, and has affected our standing in the world, and therefore has affected all of us living in the country.

Most recently, I've felt the effects of terrorism in my AP Government and Politics class, as we debate the candidates for the upcoming election. With Iraq and the War on Terror as major topics for debate, I am now looking at how our next president can influence terrorism in the years to come. It is my strong belief that the lone wolf image we present now can only make matters worse, and I feel we need to present an entirely new image to the world. A black man, who grew up in Indonesia, with a middle name Hussein, would clearly silence a lot of America's critics; obviously I am not voting for Barack Obama just because of his name, but I truly feel that his experience and image and plan can greatly improve America's image to the rest of the world. I have been to Obama rallies, volunteered for his campaign, and a huge reason is because I feel he can do the most to solve our terrorism woes. When terrorism became a major basis for the huge decision of who to elect for the next president, it clearly has had a major impact on our lives.

However, my involvement in Obama's campaign brings me to another point about terrorism. As a way of life, I have always tried to look at the bright side of situations, and the current American psyche is no different. I have never felt such a connection to fellow Americans like I did after September 11th. I recall the abundance of flags flying, inspiring speeches, and just a real sense of patriotism. While terrorism is a horrible problem the world is facing, it definitely unified a divided nation. Furthermore, the current state of affairs caused me to be as politically involved as I have ever been, and it has been a tremendous experience. Involvement in our government is a value I now strongly value, and I feel the differing views of the politicians on how to deal with foreign problems is increasing the political participation of our nation.

The horrors of terrorism have damaged all of our views of the world outside, as well as their view of us. The senseless loss of lives in the tragedies of 9/11 are in no way justified by anything any politician, speaker, or student says today; however, our nation is now looking to address the problem. Greater national unity and increased political participation can at least be cited as reactions to modern terrorism that attempt to tamper the wretchedness already caused. The prospect of Barack Obama being president and greater national unity makes me feel much better about our future than I normally would be under the circumstances; therefore, in the future, I just hope to improve our world standing.

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B. In his speech at the clock dedication ceremony to Michael, Jay Rothberg said, "It's not the amount of time that we have on this earth, but how we spend our time that counts." If there was only one lesson I could take from Michael Rothberg's life, it would be this one. A recurring song in my house is "I Hope You Dance" by Lee Ann Womack, which represents just what Mr. Rothberg was trying to say: "I hope you never fear those mountains in the distance / Never settle for the path of least resistance / Living might mean taking chances / But they're worth taking / Lovin' might be a mistake / But it's worth making." These words have always touched a special place in my heart, and I have always tried to live my life as the Mr. Rothberg's words and Lee Ann Womack's words imply; to always live life to the fullest.

Living life to the fullest involves helping those around me, which I know Michael always tried to do, and I have tried to follow this example. In the past I have taken part in such programs as the Susan G. Komen Race for a Cure, Christmas in the City, and the Chernobyl Children's Project. In the future I look to continue my constant involvement, as I look forward to the Relay for Life coming up. It is how we spend our time that counts, which means giving back is not a cause for every few years to accumulate over our lifetime; charity work must be a constant goal to chase, because we never know when we won't be able to give any more.

It is clear in the many tributes, stories, and recounts of Michael's life that he was deeply attached to his family and friends, a trait which encompasses my life. Almost my entire extended family lives within a half hour of my home, which basically means I have a spread out immediate family. Although I have no siblings, I have always viewed my cousins as my siblings, and we remain close to this day. Similarly, while I continue to make new friends, I have always tried to retain those I have known since preschool close to me. Many of my friends trace back to kindergarten in the Alternative School, because, just like Michael, I know how great a source of happiness surrounding yourself with supportive friends and family is. In order to live my life to the fullest, I need that support system my family and friends provide, and without those I care about around me, I would not have the same optimistic view of the world I currently see the world through.

Michael's sudden death saddens us all, but I have made it a goal of mine to always see the bright side of every situation. This scholarship program does great work in spreading the life lessons Michael can give to all of us, especially one: as Miss Womack sang, "May you never take one single breath for granted." I hope to constantly have this thought in my mind as I pursue my goals in my life to come.