

# 9/11 at 11: We go from here



We go from here. When I was growing up, my father said this to me when I did something that threw me off stride in my march to adulthood. No choir boy, I heard it often.

I'm grateful to have been raised by parents born in the 1920s. Mom and Dad weathered the Great Depression and WWII. "Potato pancakes" was a staple at their supper tables. Mom was a survivor of polio, Dad of bloody combat. When he was 19 his platoon was decimated in the Battle of the Bulge, seven soldiers alive at the end; five walking, they carried the other two to a field hospital. The platoon was filled with replacements and Dad and the others followed Patton across Europe to victory.

We go from here.

My parents experienced suffering in a way few from succeeding American generations have. But that suffering provided a sense of proportion to their daily lives. Far too often now, Americans, as indi-

viduals and a country, invoke the term "crisis" to describe things that I'm certain my folks would view as challenges but not crises.

9/11 was different.

I asked Mom if it was worse than Pearl Harbor.

"Yes," she said, voice cracking.

I called Dad. Only months from death, three packs a day of Lucky Strikes taking their toll, he struggled to breathe and his short-term memory was shot. But he understood what happened on 9/11.

"We'll beat 'em," he whispered.

We go from here.

A few weeks after 9/11, I drove to West Lafayette, Ind., with three buddies from high school to watch the Illinois-Purdue football game. I don't remember who won. I recall a small plane approaching the stadium, a wind-whipped advertising banner in tow. Everyone's attention went from the game on the field to the plane in the sky. I realized I'd never hear the approach of an airplane or gaze at its flight path in the same way again.

Ten years passed.

The fall of 2011 I was at the Illinois home game against South Dako-

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ta State with a friend I've made since 9/11. Two trumpeters played taps and there was a moment of silence. Throughout the game, uniformed service men and women, Illinois alums, talked and waved from the big screen on the stadium scoreboard, some holding babies, others taped from overseas posts.

The next morning, the 10th anniversary, I stretched in front of the TV, preparing to run 3 miles on a quiet Sunday morning. Relatives of people who were killed on 9/11 read names of victims, ending with their

loved one and a brief remembrance of what they meant to them. Tears welled in my eyes.

I ran.

Along the way, I waved to friends, neighbors and a local cop on patrol. I thought of the last decade, years 9/11 victims and their families lost. With rare exception, my wife, Yolanda, and I put our children to bed every night and awoke with them each morning. We went to piano recitals, soccer games, swim meets, first communions, birthday parties and high school graduations. Our daughter, Anissa, blossomed into a woman. Our son, Michael, survived a horrific auto accident. The paramedics told us there was a 10 percent chance someone survived such a crash in one piece. Our son walked away and, two years later, off to college. Both my parents died.

I finished my run strong, racing up the final hill to our house. I snatched a cold bottle of water from the fridge and wandered into the TV room where Yolanda was watching the 9/11 memorials. Paul Simon sang "Sound of Silence."

When he finished, Yolanda told me that earlier that day a suicide bomber injured 77 American service men and women at a base in Afghanistan. Five Afghan civilians, including a 3-year-old girl, were killed.

It's Sunday, Sept. 9, 2012, and I open The News-Gazette to articles about memorial plans for the 11th anniversary. At the bottom of page one is the headline "On average, U.S. has lost a soldier each day in 2012." One of the latest casualties was Pfc. Shane W. Cantu, 20, one year younger than Michael. Cantu was, according to his buddies, a lot like my son, a gregarious guy who lit up every room he entered. Cantu was 10 years old on 9/11. In the story, a military historian says Afghanistan has become the "Who cares?" war."

Ten years, now 11.

We go from here.

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