

Generation X Realizes the Impact of "America's Greatest Generation"

Yesterday, September 11, 2001, was a day that will forever change the physical and figurative landscapes of the United States of America, and indeed the world. The still unbelievable terrorist attacks perpetrated against the very symbols of United States economic and military power have brought my generation to understand the true meaning of war, fear, and nationalistic pride.

As a 30-year-old married father of two, I--and most members of my generation--have no frame of reference for war or acts of war against the United States. We have little recollection of the final years of the Vietnam War, and in fact, many of us have only been exposed to war through the mini-series-like television accounts of Desert Storm. While the majority of the military forces in the Persian Gulf region during Desert Storm were of my generation, the small percentage of those in the military provides little insight for the rest of us.

Additionally, the mere fact of our military's technical superiority over Saddam Hussein's forces led us to believe that America's forces are nearly invincible, and that any battles fought with lesser militaries would result in quick victories with little loss of American life. Consequently, we, and most Americans, were possibly lulled into believing that our country, its borders, our airports, our physical symbols of freedom--and most importantly our citizens--were invincible and indeed, untouchable. We now know that the United States of America is susceptible to massive terrorist attacks on our soil, and we now understand what "America's Greatest Generation" felt after the Japanese attack of Pearl Harbor on Dec 7, 1941.

While watching recent films like *Pearl Harbor* and *Saving Private Ryan* and witnessing the graphic accounts of war, I questioned how American citizens could volunteer for military duty while knowing that extreme distance, and ultimately death, could separate them from their loved ones and normal ways of life. After watching the horrible acts of violence unfold against my fellow Americans yesterday, I now understand completely the source of nationalistic pride that drove the men and women to volunteer to serve their country during World War II. In times like these, the overall protection of The United States of America, its people, its interests, and its ideologies far outweighs any individualistic, self-centered concerns.

Yesterday's attacks invoked personal reaction on many levels. My initial disbelief turned too sheer horror and concern when I realized that a sibling of mine was close to the point of impact at the Pentagon, actually only hundreds of yards away at the WorldCom building. After hours of worry, the technology of the twenty-first century paid off, enabling me to make contact with her through Internet instant messaging and text pager. Additionally, fear for the safety of my wife and children weighed heavily on my mind until I was home with each of them. That fear never totally subsided, and I think I speak

for many Americans when I say that we now must at least respect the fact that we are no longer untouchable.

For the most part, a feeling of helplessness overcame me as I watched the images unfold on television. I felt compelled to do something, no matter how small. So for the first time in my life, I purchased an American flag and displayed it proudly outside of my home. I am proud to be an American and I am happy for our freedoms. Also for the first time in my life, I fully valued our Second Amendment rights to bear arms. If necessary, I know that I, and countless others, were prepared to defend our country against any further, ground-based attacks. I realize that this previous statement may offend people, may lead people to provide literal interpretations of the Second Amendment, and may stir images of a "gun fanatic" in the minds of many. However, rest assured, I am a proponent of firearms safety, and I am not fanatical by any means. However, I think that yesterday's acts enabled many of us to realize that some level of security exists in an armed society.

Disgust, outrage, and sympathy for those lost now dominate my emotions. Do I want revenge, or do I want justice? These are two very different concepts in my mind, and I think I want both. But first and foremost, I want all us as Americans, regardless of race, color, religion, and economic status to come together and stand proudly against the common enemy of terrorism that is seemingly interwoven through our daily lives. Together, we can prove that we will not succumb to these acts and threats of terror.