

# Through a Child's Eyes - A Perspective on 9/11

## A Lesson from The Flame of Liberty Memorial

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Hillbrook School students hear the first hand experiences of Captain Doug Beck in Iraq & Afghanistan. Major General Kent Hillhouse waits in the wings to share the story of The Flame of Liberty Memorial. [Credit: John Lochner]

The Flame of Liberty Memorial honors two heroes who were aboard United Flight 93 on September 11, 2001 - Mark Bingham and Todd Beamer. To Mark and Todd, the morning of 9/11 was just another ordinary day. They individually departed for Newark Airport to board United flight 93 bound for San Francisco. Little did they know that the world would later view their actions aboard that plane as a response of extraordinary heroism.

Four terrorists of a 19-member terrorist team boarded United flight 93. As United flight 93 ascended to 30,000 feet, the remaining 15 members executed a strategy that resulted in making 9/11 one of the most tragic days in civilian history. Terrorists crashed two airliners into NYC's Twin Towers - thereby crippling America's financial district on Wall Street. Terrorists next plummeted a plane into the Pentagon - thus sending a message to America's defense system. Their plan called for a finale that would have brought America's governmental

center to its knees at a time when it was critical to act. The terrorists' plan called for converting passenger United Flight 93 into a human missile that had the nation's capital, Washington DC, as its final target.

About a decade earlier, Todd Beamer and Mark Bingham attended Los Gatos High School where they were a year apart. We don't know if they recognized each other aboard United Flight 93. Todd and Mark, along with Thomas Burnett, Jr. and Jeremy Glick, became the members of a four-person pick-up team who planned an impromptu counter-attack against the terrorists aboard their flight. The foursome was all of athletic build and height. They attempted to storm the cockpit to regain control. In the end, United flight 93 crashed in a vacant field in Shanksville, Pennsylvania, taking the lives of all 44 parties on board and preserving the lives of those in the Capitol Building and White House.

The heroic acts of Todd Beamer, Mark Bingham, Jeremy Glick, and Tom Burnett are distinguished. And while the four wore neither military nor first responder uniforms aboard United Flight 93, they hugely served America. The four are responsible for the first civilian counter-attack to the 9/11 terrorist actions. Todd Beamer, Mark Bingham, Jeremy Glick, and Tom Burnett are heroes killed in action.

Earlier this summer, the Veterans Memorial & Support Foundation dedicated the Flame of Liberty Memorial which honors Mark Bingham and Todd Beamer for their heroism along with veterans and first responders. The Foundation posted information on our Facebook page during the week of 9/11 as a tribute to our local 9/11 heroes. We received a comment from a Facebook page subscriber who wrote: "Posting this 'never forget stuff' is nothing but lame platitudes, we won't forget, now, you should use your podium for some hard action." The subscriber was encouraging us to tell our readership about the multitude of things our Foundation volunteers have done, are doing, and plan to do for veterans.

The Foundation's mission is to establish a world-class veterans memorial, educate the community, and deliver support to those who serve. Memorials serve as a catalyst towards healing and today, thanks to the efforts of the Veterans Foundation, the Flame of Liberty Memorial adorns the Los Gatos Civic Center. Veterans, first responders, families, and friends are capable of visiting the memorial and reaping the honor, respect, gratitude, and healing that they so rightly deserve. While the Foundation has completed a great deal towards the Foundation's first tenet of establishing a world-class memorial; the Foundation is hardly finished; the volunteer Board continues to raise \$1.5M in support of the memorial and ongoing maintenance reserves.

The Foundation's mission also includes educating the public on the sacrifices borne by those who serve. Why educate on this "never forget stuff" - the events of 9/11 as coined by our Facebook subscriber, and on the sacrifices borne by those who serve? For one, educators who attempt to incorporate 9/11 into their lesson plans, often struggle with the difficulty of making 9/11 relevant to their students, most of whom were born after the attacks took place.

Ben Yakas of Gothamist News asked Emmy-winner Amy Schatz producer of *What Happened on September 11*, about the concept behind her new documentary recently created and aired to educate children on the events of 9/11. Ms. Schatz said she was "Inspired to make the film when a 3rd-grade girl told her about a play date where she and a friend Googled: 'September 11 attacks.' When a child does that, what he or she finds are some pretty horrific images that are not necessarily appropriate for kids," Schatz said. "So I felt a responsibility to try to fill that void and try to give kids something that isn't horrifying and kind of fills in the gap." [Source: *New Documentary Explores How To Teach Kids About 9/11*]

Fortunately, the public cares about this "never forget stuff" and the decades and centuries that preceded 9/11. [Alan Sears](#) Professor of Education, University of New Brunswick Canada, believes that history education is pivotal to the survival of democracy. In his article *Why History Education is Central to the Survival of Democracy* [source: The Conversation], Sears remarks that: "History education must include attention to historical consciousness, or how history and memory work to shape how we think about ourselves, our communities, and our place in the world." Sears goes on to further state that "... memorials are often central to



collective memory, and they provide a window into the construction of personal and national identity." And finally that "history education must engage students in thinking about what constitutes evidence about the past and how we assess and construct accounts about the past."

The Hillbrook School demonstrated that they *get it* when they brought their eighth-grade students to The Flame of Liberty Memorial site to learn about 9/11, our local 9/11 heroes and the War on Terror.

At The Flame of Liberty Memorial, students met Navy Captain Douglas Beck who served from 2006 through 2007 in Iraq and Afghanistan where he was a recipient of the Bronze Star Medal, the Combat Action Ribbon, and Presidential Unit Citation. As a civilian, Mr. Beck serves as an appointed member of the nonpartisan Chief of Naval Operations Executive Panel, directly advising the uniformed head of the Navy on matters of policy. Mr. Beck is a Board Director on the Center for New American Security (CNAS). In addition to CNAS, Doug Beck is Apple's Vice President for the Americas and Northeast Asia. He is a member of the Board of Directors of the Association of American Rhodes Scholars, is personally a Rhodes Scholar, as well as a member of the Council on Foreign Relations and a member of Yale's Jackson Institute Council on Global Affairs. Hillbrook students learned of Mr. Beck's experiences in Iraq and Afghanistan.

Speaking on behalf of the Foundation were the Honorable John Lochner, Korean War veteran and former two-time Mayor of Los Gatos who spearheaded the effort to return the fire bell to its original home now at the memorial site in Los Gatos, and Foundation President Major General Kent Hillhouse. Foundation President Kent Hillhouse is a Vietnam War hero who received some of the most recognized medals of valor in America's military: two Silver Stars, a Bronze Star, the Distinguished Service Medal, the Legion of Merit and a Purple Heart. Kent Hillhouse served in the Pentagon up until a week before 9/11, which is when he retired from the military. In Kent's case, one might say that his departure from the Army was more welcomed than in most. Kent's retirement also saved his life. Seven days following his departure, American Airlines flight 77 at the hands of terrorists, nose-dived into his former office and wing of the Pentagon. Only a book originally given to Kent by his Father, found in the rubble, now oil-stained and smelling of gasoline fumes remains from his Pentagon possessions.

For Father and Grandfather Kent Hillhouse, hosting the Hillbrook School event at the Flame of Liberty Memorial delivered a two-way benefit, both to students and presenters. "It was extremely rewarding for me to hear the students ask well thought out questions and demonstrate their desire to learn more about the history behind the Town's veterans memorial. It was heartening for me to watch the students linger in the memorial absorbing the comments made on the pavers and reading the wall plaques that led to more discussion," said Kent Hillhouse following his experience.

John Lochner had an additional perspective. "The best part of doing this was getting the satisfaction that we were able to inform students on what it means to be a veteran and the importance of a memorial. Knowing that they will go home and discuss this with their parents is significant."

Vice President George Hall was also in attendance. George's son, Ryan, is an Army Ranger who served five tours in Iraq and Afghanistan. According to George, "This is probably the best education students will ever receive about the honor and bravery of our armed forces personnel. They also learned that peace and freedom are ensured by strength. Personally, I would love to see every eighth-grade class in the Saratoga- Los Gatos School District have the opportunity to tour the memorial."

What matters most is the perception of those of the future generation who will ultimately lead this country - the students. "The design of the Flame of Liberty with the Soldier's Cross made me think a lot about what happened that day and the people involved." according to Ben F. an 8th grader at Hillbrook School. And Ben's fellow 8th grader and colleague, Amanda K., offered that "This field trip completely changed my vision on 9/11. It was such a meaningful experience to be able to hear different stories about the attacks."

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The Veterans Memorial & Support Foundation will be hosting additional tours of the memorial in the months to come. Is your school or organization interested in a tour of the Flame of Liberty Memorial? Interested schools or organizations can send tour requests and inquiries to Board members at [honorAvet@gmail.com](mailto:honorAvet@gmail.com).

