Lessons Learned from Loss

The start of the fall semester, for most Holy Cross students, is a time of joy and new beginnings. Upperclassmen return to campus to be reunited with friends, freshman get their first taste of college freedom, and the community eagerly anticipates the memories that will come of the new year. This past week, however, the spirit of celebration on the Hill was shattered by two tragic events. First, as a community, we were faced with the death of student in Jacob Jackson, whose death left the entire campus in mourning on Monday afternoon. Only hours later, the nation was rocked by a series of terrorist attacks that took thousands of lives and, among Holy Cross students, set off frantic attempts to get in touch with loved ones. For most of Tuesday, official reports of the destruction captivated our attention and left us shocked, as the country we once believed could protect us itself helpless in the face of terrorism.

In all the chaos caused by our nation’s tragedy, many of us found it difficult to keep the camps’ loss in the forefront of our thoughts. It is important that in the coming days we guard against letting Jake get lost in the first. Each day, each hour, each minute is calculated to be a memory that will remind us of the faces behind the numbers. Each of this week’s losses is felt as profoundly as we feel the loss of Jake. Whether or not we were touched personally by the recent tragedies, we all feel change has happened. Regardless of how closely these events have hit us, we, as a nation, feel completely helpless, and we realize that tomorrow may never come. If we can learn anything from this week’s events, it is that our lives and the lives of those we love can be taken without warning. In the aftermath, we must deal with the fact that we feel inherently unsafe and uncertain. We are all vulnerable and must deal with that vulnerability as best we can.

A Small Campus Mourns a Massive Tragedy

Before beginning, I would like to send my condolences to the family of Jacob Jackson ’04 - a young man and fellow Crusader who left this world too early. While I regret not knowing him personally, everyone I have talked to about him had nothing but glowing words for him. I, like John Price ’01 and the rest of our classmates who have passed away, will be missed. I would also like to send my heartfelt grief and prayers to those of us struggling to deal with the maddeningly nonsensical actions that crippled both towers of the World Trade Center, cleaved a section of Pentagon in twine, and left countless injured and deceased.

There have been times in the history of mankind that transcend description, that leave us at a loss for words with indelible impressions. That was the case with a trip to the site of Tuesday’s attack and the sight of the second plane collapsing and the Pentagon cleaved in twine, and left countless injured and deceased. Whether we’re witness to the death of a young member of the Holy Cross community or to the death and destruction we hear of every day on the evening news. To us, hijacked planes, collapsing buildings, and nationwide emergencies belong in the world of fiction. On Tuesday morning, when we watched the unbelievable become reality, our security blankets – the very foundations of this country, and in the same vein the faith and camaraderie that is prominent throughout our community – were cleaved in twine, and left countless injured and deceased. The potential for more hardship is prevalent in the United States - we have only begun to scratch the surface on a concentrated war against terrorism and those who implement it. In times of crises, the bonds of the Holy Cross community are strengthened, and we must find another one on which to stand. As individuals and as a country, we must seek out any scrap of certainty we have left.

In the coming weeks, as we begin our recovery as a college community and as a nation, we must come to accept the fact that we can’t always control our fate. Holy Cross students responded to this week’s events with fear and anger, but we can’t live our lives terrified and enraged about what we cannot control. Death is not within our power. Nothing we can do will change that.

The fact of the matter remains, however, that our country received a wakeup call of apocalyptic proportions. The situation was perhaps most hauntingly by Chris Matthews ’67, the host of MSNBC’s Hardball, when interviewed by Brian Williams (paraphrased): “Americans need to realize that we live in two worlds. Outside of the United States, there are a great many people living in this world that do not like us, and may very well hate us. We need to understand that.” It took a devastatingly tragic event for us to finally understand these harsh truths, but now that this is our reality, there is more reason for us to look inward and find support in our communities as we heal as our government steadies our country to prevent further bloodshed of this manner.

I speak of communities in a broad sense, since our school has showed that a variety of them exist here in the past few days. People gathered in Crossroads to watch screens provided by the school. Students huddled in their dorm rooms as halls congregated to share their grief. Crowds gathered to attend campus Mass. Almost my entire house crowded into our den on the first floor, watching in union with the rest of the world, sharing the same fear, coping with the same pain. I can only imagine similar situations arose at HC in other times of crisis in the nation, such as the assassination of John F. Kennedy, or perhaps the bombing of the World Trade Center in 1993. It is heartbreaking to know you could depend on people who you may have only known for a few weeks (as in the case of freshmen) or a year or so (as with upperclassmen) to be there for you in a time of need.

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