Still speechless after ten years

“Mama, were you alive when 9/11 happened?” I looked at my 8-year-old daughter with surprise. We had never talked about 9/11 before, and here on its 10th anniversary, I was suddenly presented the opportunity to share one of our nation’s most indelible moments with her.

Torrents of ideas fell forth from my mind toward my mouth. Where should I begin? Do I tell her what I was doing that day? Where was I? How did I feel when I saw the airplanes crashing into the World Trade Center? Do I tell her about watching people falling from the sky? Why someone would choose to jump rather than be burned alive? Do I say how it felt to see the collapse of the Twin Towers, or watch the Pentagon in flames? Do I talk about the nearly 3,000 people who died that cloudless morning or morning? All the 1,000 children growing up without a mom or dad?

Should I tell her that the law school room I was in, or the amazing system of emails and BlackBerry’s that were used by people like us to track survivors down? Do I tell her how even 3,000 miles away, we all felt unsafe, and so we stayed home from aboard the aircraft carrier miles away, we all felt unsafe, her or of the label security, clinging to the companionship and life and love Kevin, was coming home from work the day the attacks took place. She will ascend to her father at the flight gate on her way to college or stand on the open observation deck of the South Tower and feel the wind whipping through her hair while staring out at America’s expanse from east to west? Does she need to know that instead she will visit an underground memorial site where will read about dead people and cry over lives unknown?

Do I tell her about the beauty of patriotism when it is born from humility and gentility and the ugliness of arrogance or aggression or bigotry? Do I share with her the beauty of patriotism when it is born from humility and gentility and the ugliness of arrogance or aggression or bigotry? Do I tell her about the beauty of patriotism when it is born from humility and gentility and the ugliness of arrogance or aggression or bigotry?

Do I tell her that good or bad, the wars of the last decade have cost over $3 trillion and that she and her sister and their friends will inherit the debt of the wars we have chosen? Do I tell her about the beauty of patriotism when it is born from humility and gentility and the ugliness of arrogance or aggression or bigotry? Do I share with her the beauty of patriotism when it is born from humility and gentility and the ugliness of arrogance or aggression or bigotry?

Do I tell her about the importance of living intentionally? What will I tell her when she asks me about his words, the effect of his actions? Do I share with her the blessings discovered in the aftermath of the attacks—the clarity of vision, the reprioritization of values, the contrast it with the ugliness of patriotism when it comes from arrogance or aggression or bigotry? Do I share with her the importance of living intentionally? What will I tell her when she asks me about his children?

Do I tell her this is why she has lived her entire life in a country at war? Do I share with her that she herself was a “9/11 baby,” conceived in New York the weekend her father and I visited the World Trade Center site 10 months after the attacks? Should I tell her how she was born was a “yellow alert”? Or that the day previous had been an “orange alert”? Does that matter?

Should I make her aware of the religious literacy and cultural awareness that has grown from 9/11? Will she value the fact that she can now classes in Paris and Islam on many college campuses? Do I point out that even at her young age, she knows the difference between a Muslim and a Sikh and is amazed that some people confuse the two? Do I opine on the exploitation of the tragedy by so many politicians, and reflect on how quickly the good will of the entire world can be squandered? Do I assure her that with all the powerful moments in life, including birth and death, happiness is given a clarity of vision that allows us to decide who we are and what we will become and that 9/11 was no different? When she asks me why they test her at school, I answer that 9/11 was no different.

As I prepared to share these things with her, my mouth opened and I felt silent. “Yes, honey. I was alive when 9/11 happened,” was all I could say. Ten years have passed, and still I am speechless.

Warren Biford of Salem is an associate professor of law at Willamette University.

In the wrong place at a very frightening time

KAETHE ANDERSEN Commentary

On the morning of 9/11, I was aboard the Navy aircraft carrier Constellation standing on San Diego on a “Tiger Cruise” with my son, Kevin, who was coming home after a six month deployment in the Persian Gulf/Arabian Sea. We’d (and about 1,000 other civilians) left Pearl Harbor, Hawaii, on the morning of Sept. 9 with the expectation of a fun cruise to San Diego while watching how our Navy operated. Where we left that morning?

I was in my jammed shuffle to the war room for some breakfast as I left the ship, and I was OPC when the overhead speakers came on: “This is the Captain speaking. The United States has come under attack by terrorists with action stations. This is no drill. Repeat: This is no drill. We are in my son’s war room where he ushered me in and sat me down. He said they were just

We all live in a changed world

RON HAYS Commentary

Each of us has our own unique perceptions and insights into the specifics that happened that day of Sept. 11, 2001. I watched on television live as the second plane flew into the World Trade Center.

Once the skies were cleared for flying again, I flew out to New York City on the second flight leaving Portland bound for New York. It was the first flight that had seats available! I went with a team from Northwest Medical Teams (now known as Medical Teams International).

My experience consisted of working both in lower Manhattan as well as at ground zero and also at the World Trade Center. Pre-9/11 values and lifestyle will not return quickly, if at all. However, we do need a return to the pre-9/11 pursuit of life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. That pursuit requires civility, cooperation, peaceful dialogue and value-driven goals: Harmony, partnership, the growing divide