

Source: [September Morning: Ten Years of Poems and Readings from the 9/11 Ceremonies](#). (powerHouse Books, 2012).

INTRODUCTION

Ten years have passed since a perfect blue sky morning turned into the blackest of nights. Since then, we have lived in sunshine and in shadow.

And although we can never “unsee” what happened here, we can also see that children who lost their parents have grown into young adults, grandchildren have been born, and good works and public service have taken root to honor those loved and lost.

In all the years that Americans have looked to these ceremonies, we have shared both words and silences. The words of writers and poets have helped express what is in our hearts. The silences have given us a chance to reflect and remember.

And in remembrance of all those who died in New York in 1993 and 2001, at the Pentagon, and near the fields of Shanksville, Pennsylvania, please join us in observing our first moment of silence.

PSALM 46

GOD IS OUR REFUGE AND STRENGTH, A VERY PRESENT HELP IN TROUBLE.
 THEREFORE WE WILL NOT FEAR,
 EVEN THOUGH THE EARTH BE REMOVED,
 AND THOUGH THE MOUNTAINS BE CARRIED INTO THE MIDST OF THE SEA;
 THOUGH ITS WATERS ROAR AND BE TROUBLED,
 THOUGH THE MOUNTAINS SHAKE WITH ITS SWELLING.
 THERE IS A RIVER WHOSE STREAMS SHALL MAKE GLAD THE CITY OF GOD,
 THE HOLY PLACE OF THE TABERNACLE OF THE MOST HIGH.
 GOD IS IN THE MIDST OF HER, SHE SHALL NOT BE MOVED;
 GOD SHALL HELP HER, JUST AT THE BREAK OF DAWN.
 THE NATIONS RAGED, THE KINGDOMS WERE MOVED;
 HE UTTERED HIS VOICE, THE EARTH MELTED.
 THE LORD OF HOSTS IS WITH US;
 THE GOD OF JACOB IS OUR REFUGE.
 COME, BEHOLD THE WORKS OF THE LORD,
 WHO HAS MADE DESOLATIONS IN THE EARTH.
 HE MAKES WARS CEASE TO THE END OF THE EARTH;
 HE BREAKS THE BOW AND CUTS THE SPEAR IN TWO;
 HE BURNS THE CHARIOT IN THE FIRE.
 BE STILL, AND KNOW THAT I AM GOD;
 I WILL BE EXALTED AMONG THE NATIONS,
 I WILL BE EXALTED IN THE EARTH!
 THE LORD OF HOSTS IS WITH US;
 THE GOD OF JACOB IS OUR REFUGE.

READING OF THE NAMES

They were our neighbors, our friends, our husbands, wives, brothers, sisters, children, and parents. They were the ones who rushed in to help: 2,983 innocent men, women, and children.

We have asked their families to come here, to speak the names out loud, to remind us that each person we lost – in New York, in Washington, and Pennsylvania – had a face, a story, and a life cut out from under them.

As we listen, let us recall the words of Shakespeare:

YOUR CAUSE OF SORROW
MUST NOT BE MEASURED BY HIS WORTH, FOR THEN
IT HATH NO END.

LETTER FROM ABRAHAM LINCOLN

President Lincoln not only understood the heartbreak of his country, he also understood the cost of sacrifice and reached out to console those in sorrow as best he could. In the fall of 1864, he learned that a widow had lost five sons in the Civil War and wrote her this letter:

DEAR MADAM:

I HAVE BEEN SHOWN IN THE FILES OF THE WAR DEPARTMENT A STATEMENT OF THE ADJUTANT GENERAL OF MASSACHUSETTS THAT YOU ARE THE MOTHER OF FIVE SONS WHO HAVE DIED GLORIOUSLY ON THE FIELD OF BATTLE.

I FEEL HOW WEAK AND FRUITLESS MUST BE ANY WORDS OF MINE WHICH SHOULD ATTEMPT TO BEGUILE YOU FROM THE GRIEF OF A LOSS SO OVERWHELMING. BUT I CANNOT REFRAIN FROM TENDERING TO YOU THE CONSOLATION THAT MAY BE FOUND IN THE THANKS OF THE REPUBLIC THEY DIED TO SAVE.

I PRAY THAT OUR HEAVENLY FATHER MAY ASSUAGE THE ANGUISH OF YOUR BEREAVEMENT, AND LEAVE YOU ONLY THE CHERISHED MEMORY OF THE LOVED AND LOST, AND THE SOLEMN PRIDE THAT MUST BE YOURS, TO HAVE LAID SO COSTLY A SACRIFICE UPON THE ALTAR OF FREEDOM.

YOURS, VERY SINCERELY AND RESPECTFULLY,
ABRAHAM LINCOLN

I NEVER STOPPED MISSING MY DAD

My father, Pete, worked on the 88th floor of the World Trade Center. I was thirteen when I stood here in 2003 and read a poem about how much I just wanted to break down and cry. Since then, I've stopped crying but I've never stopped missing my dad. He was awesome.

My brother, Austin, had just turned two when he passed. I've tried to teach him all the things my father taught me: how catch a baseball, how to ride a bike, and to work hard in school. My dad always said how important it was.

Since 9/11, my mother, brother, and I moved to Florida. I got a job and enrolled in college. I wish my dad had been there – to teach me how to drive, ask a girl out on a date, and see me graduate from high school. And a hundred other things I can't even begin to name.

He worked in an environmental department and cared about the Earth and our future. I know he wanted to make a difference. I admire him for that and would have liked to talk to him about such things. I've decided to become a forensic scientist. I hope that I can make my father proud of the young men my brother and I have become.

I miss you Dad.

TOLLING OF THE BELLS

The poet John Donne wrote:

NEVER SEND TO KNOW FOR WHOM THE BELL TOLLS; IT TOLLS FOR THEE.

This year, we will hear the bells toll six times. To mark the two strikes against the buildings in New York. The fall of the two World Trade Center Towers. The crash of Flight 93 over Pennsylvania. And – now – for the attack on the Pentagon in Washington, DC.

FDR's FOUR FREEDOMS (excerpt)

As Archibald MacLeish wrote:

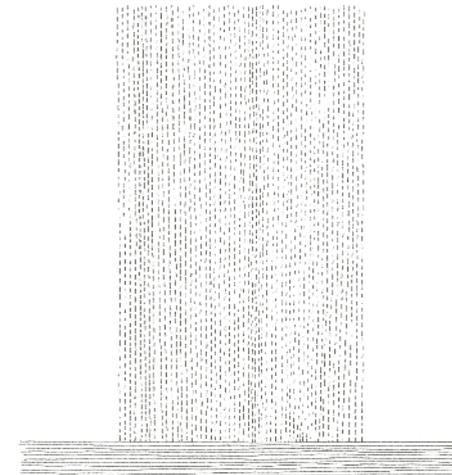
THERE ARE THOSE WHO SAY THAT THE FREEDOM OF MAN AND MIND IS NOTHING BUT A DREAM. THEY ARE RIGHT. IT IS THE AMERICAN DREAM.

In 1941, President Franklin Delano Roosevelt defined for the world the four freedoms on which the American dream is based:

THE FIRST IS FREEDOM OF SPEECH AND EXPRESSION — EVERYWHERE IN THE WORLD.
THE SECOND IS FREEDOM OF EVERY PERSON TO WORSHIP GOD IN HIS OR HER OWN WAY
— EVERYWHERE IN THE WORLD.
THE THIRD IS FREEDOM FROM WANT — EVERYWHERE IN THE WORLD.
THE FOURTH IS FREEDOM FROM FEAR — ANYWHERE IN THE WORLD.

That is our goal.

OUR STRENGTH IS IN OUR UNITY OF PURPOSE.
TO THAT HIGH CONCEPT, THERE CAN BE NO END SAVE VICTORY.



YOU WILL ALWAYS BE MY HERO

James:

Five years ago, with my daughter, Patricia, at my side, I told you about my wife and Patricia's mother, Police Officer Moira Smith, who ran into the towers time and time again to save as many people as she could. Moira sacrificed all that she had, and all the richness of life that laid before her, in order to save just one more person. Moira was killed when the South Tower collapsed.

Since that time, Patricia has blossomed into a lovely twelve year old, the very picture of her mother, with her mom's smile and sense of adventure. Our family has grown. Patricia now has two little brothers to share her zest for life. Five years ago we looked back and gave words to our sorrow. Today we choose to remember and share the joy Moira brought to us all, and we vow that she will always live in our hearts.

Patricia:

Mom, I am proud to be your daughter.
You will always be my hero and the pride of New York City.

TURN AGAIN TO LIFE

Today, as you look over the walls of remembrance, we want to share with you the words of the poet Mary Lee Hall who wrote "Turn Again to Life."

IF I SHOULD DIE AND LEAVE YOU HERE A WHILE,
BE NOT LIKE OTHERS SORE UNDONE,
WHO KEEP LONG VIGIL BY THE SILENT DUST,
FOR MY SAKE TURN AGAIN TO LIFE AND SMILE,
NERVING THY HEART AND TREMBLING HAND
TO DO SOMETHING TO COMFORT OTHER HEARTS THAN THINE.
COMPLETE THESE DEAR UNFINISHED TASKS OF MINE
AND I PERCHANCE MAY THEREIN COMFORT YOU.

THE NAMES (excerpt)

May God bless those heroes we lost on September 11. The brave men and women who responded so courageously, the heroes we have lost since that day defending our freedom, the men and women today who risk their lives here and abroad to defend our freedom.

No words cried out so fully from the broken heart of our nation as those of a poem called “The Names.” It was written by the United States Poet Laureate, Billy Collins, a year after the attacks – and dedicated, simply, to those who died and to their survivors. Its last verse reads:

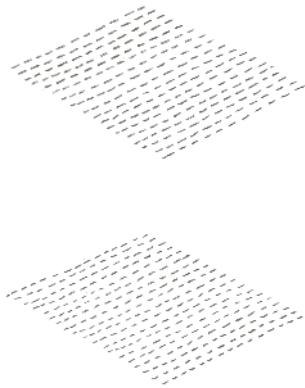
NAMES ETCHED ON THE HEAD OF A PIN.
 ONE NAME SPANNING A BRIDGE, ANOTHER UNDERGOING A TUNNEL.
 A BLUE NAME NEEDLED INTO THE SKIN.
 NAMES OF CITIZENS, WORKERS, MOTHERS AND FATHERS,
 THE BRIGHT-EYED DAUGHTER, THE QUICK SON.
 ALPHABET OF NAMES IN A GREEN FIELD.
 NAMES IN THE SMALL TRACKS OF BIRDS.
 NAMES LIFTED FROM A HAT
 OR BALANCED ON THE TIP OF THE TONGUE.
 NAMES WHEELED INTO THE DIM WAREHOUSE OF MEMORY.
 SO MANY NAMES, THERE IS BARELY ROOM ON THE WALLS OF THE HEART.

ECCLESIASTES

The perspective that we need, and have needed to get through the last ten years and the years that remain, are best expressed in the book of Ecclesiastes:

TO EVERY THING THERE IS A SEASON, AND A TIME FOR EVERY PURPOSE
 UNDER HEAVEN:
 A TIME TO BE BORN, AND A TIME TO DIE;
 A TIME TO PLANT, AND A TIME TO PLUCK UP THAT WHICH HAS PLANTED;
 A TIME TO KILL, AND A TIME TO HEAL;
 A TIME TO WEEP, AND A TIME TO LAUGH;
 A TIME TO MOURN, AND A TIME TO DANCE;
 A TIME TO CAST AWAY STONES, AND A TIME TO GATHER STONES TOGETHER;
 A TIME TO EMBRACE, AND A TIME TO REFRAIN FROM EMBRACING;
 A TIME TO SEEK, AND A TIME TO LOSE;
 A TIME TO KEEP, AND A TIME TO CAST AWAY;
 A TIME TO REND, AND A TIME TO SEW;
 A TIME TO KEEP SILENCE, AND A TIME TO SPEAK;
 A TIME TO LOVE, AND A TIME TO HATE;
 A TIME OF WAR, AND A TIME OF PEACE.

God bless every soul that we lost. God bless the family members who have to endure that loss. And God, guide us to our reunion in heaven.



TO SEE HIS NAME ENGRAVED

It has been ten years and it feels like it just happened yesterday. My brother, Christopher Epps, worked on the 98th floor of the North Tower, and not one holiday or birthday goes by that my four sisters and brother and I don't think about him. Our mother never takes off the necklace with his picture in it.

Something I have learned in these past ten years is that people come forward to help you in your hour of need. And today we thank you. The people of our great nation, our family, friends, and neighbors.

At work, Christopher sat next to his good friend Wayne Russo. The Russo family made a special request that their son's name be put next to my brother's name on the memorial wall. That has meant so much to our family.

What I understand now is that the "forces of good" are not just in movies, but all around us. People really do reach out to catch you when you fall. It has been a blessing. Christopher would have loved knowing that the love he gave so freely to others has been given back to us in his name.

A POEM SAVED

There was a family room just across the way, where families and friends came to write their thoughts or leave a photo and sign their name. A woman who lost her son wrote beside his picture:

TO THE WORLD HE MAY HAVE BEEN JUST ONE PERSON, BUT TO ME, HE WAS
THE WORLD.

A father wrote this poem in the scrapbook, and inscribed it to his daughter:

IF TEARS COULD BRING YOU BACK TO ME,
YOU'D BE HERE BY MY SIDE
FOR GOD COULD FILL A RIVER FULL
WITH ALL THE TEARS I'VE CRIED.
IF I COULD HAVE ONE WISH COME TRUE,
I'D ASK OF GOD IN PRAYER
TO LET ME HAVE JUST ONE MORE DAY
TO SHOW HOW MUCH I CARE.
IF LOVE COULD REACH TO HEAVEN'S SHORE,
I'D QUICKLY COME FOR YOU.
MY HEART WOULD BUILD A BRIDGE OF LOVE,
ONE WIDE ENOUGH FOR TWO.

CLOSING

Thank you all for helping us mark this tenth anniversary. The 9/11 Memorial, which opens today, is built as a place where we can touch the face of history and the names of all those we lost. We also remember that out of a day of unspeakable horror, came an endless outpouring of human kindness that reaffirmed our connection to one another. It will guide us as we go forward.

The great American writer James Baldwin wrote:

GENERATIONS DO NOT CEASE TO BE BORN...AND WE ARE RESPONSIBLE TO THEM
BECAUSE WE ARE THE ONLY WITNESSES THEY HAVE. THE SEA RISES, THE LIGHT FAILS,
LOVERS CLING TO EACH OTHER, AND CHILDREN CLING TO US. THE MOMENT WE CEASE
TO HOLD EACH OTHER, THE MOMENT WE BREAK FAITH WITH ONE ANOTHER, THE
SEA ENGULFS US AND THE LIGHT GOES OUT.