The National September 11 Memorial in New York City. Twin waterfall pools set in the footprints of the two World Trade Center towers bear the names of those who lost their lives on 9/11 engraved on the parapets surrounding the pools. One World Trade Center, at center in this photo with flag, is being built on the site previously occupied by 6 WTC.
This past September, the nation paused to commemorate the 10th anniversary of the 9/11 attacks and honor those who died in New York City, at the Pentagon, and in a Pennsylvania field.

Many people in the University of Hartford community were touched by the events of that day. Six alumni lost their lives. Some lost family members and friends. Some found themselves called in to aid in the rescue-and-recovery efforts. Some served in the military and in government to thwart further terrorist activities.

What follows are the experiences of three alumni: a daughter who lost her mother, a psychologist who counseled survivors, and a civil engineer who worked at ground zero. Ten years later, they tell us about the lasting effects of the attacks. We also talked with Leonard C. Boyle ’80, deputy chief state’s attorney for operations for the State of Connecticut and former director of the Terrorist Screening Center of the FBI in Washington, D.C., for his perspective on how things changed after 9/11.


September 11, 2001

The time for dying has come. A season of long shadows invades the Island. In the heat of summer, wild clematis climbed over stone walls onto tree limbs, crawled into sunlight through sumac honeysuckle and poison ivy. Now it hurls white-blossomed last hurrahs at late-day skies mantles the Vineyard with ash only geese rise up to fly away. Burnt by the sun, leaves blacken what once was solid crumbles innocence is extinguished the rules change. Are you ready?

Brooks Robards M’70
Vineyard Gazette
9.21.01
degree from Hillyer College in 2002 and a bachelor’s in sociology in 2004. She currently lives in Brooklyn, N.Y., and works as a licensed social worker for Good Shepherd Services, which runs the Young Adult Borough Center at Abraham Lincoln High School in Coney Island, N.Y. She is planning to pursue a doctorate in social work next year.

Looking back over the past decade, Wright-Campbell says it remains difficult for her to form close relationships with people because of her fear of loss. She also has trouble being around her extended family because doing so makes her miss her mother.

“I’m a work in progress. I’ll always be wary of relationships with people, but I’m better than I was in 2002, and next year, I’ll be better than I am now.”

When 9/11 comes each year, Wright-Campbell says she avoids watching television and talking with friends. “The one constant thing is, I turn off my phone. I know people want to offer their support, and it’s great to know people still care and think about me on that day. However, it’s hard to have a conversation about it. So friends usually leave a message, and at the end of the night I listen to them.”

She did not go to the ceremony at the National September 11 Memorial in New York City, but she hopes one day to see her mother’s name on the granite wall that surrounds the fountains there.

The tragedy of 9/11 has taught Wright-Campbell that you shouldn’t waste time. “I want to make sure I do the things I really want to do. I know that my mother wanted to do so much more and because of not having tomorrow promised, she missed out. I know she would be happy that I’m doing everything I set out to do.”

Pauline Stefan ’00

Nearly a Year at Ground Zero

Pauline Stefan ’00 started her first job two months after graduating from the University of Hartford in May 2000 with a bachelor’s in civil engineering. The firm was Thornton Tomasetti, Inc., an international engineering firm with offices around the world. Stefan’s job in the New York City office was in a division then called LZA Technology, whose work included building collapses, preservation, and renovation.

The call came in from the Department of Design and Construction for the City of New York almost immediately after the 9/11 attacks. Stefan’s firm would be the structural engineers for the entire World Trade Center site. A little more than a year after starting her job, she was working at a disaster site beyond imagination.

“Our first day was Sept. 12,” says Stefan. “We were broken up into groups and assigned a fireman to survey surrounding buildings. Our job was to evaluate the amount of damage to them beyond the obviously damaged and collapsing buildings at the site.”

Other duties included deciding where it was safe for firemen and rescue workers to dig and search, coordinating the city surveyors, making sure there was no movement in a building while cranes were removing debris, and determining where the cranes could safely work and how extensive the collapse of the subway tunnels was.

“I always felt like it was something I needed to do, working there,” says Stefan. “There were times when it was very unnerving—when you remembered where you were walking.”

Stefan worked at the site for just under a year. In May 2002 the city held a ceremony for the construction crew and engineers marking the removal of the final building column from the south tower.

“For me, one of the best things was the closing of the construction portion of the site in May. We all understood the emphasis on the firemen and policemen, but it was a nice recognition for all the work [we] put in. There was a very large steel bridge constructed to get the heavy equipment in and out of the pit. As we walked out of the pit, there was a guard of army soldiers on either
side of the road, and we were each presented with a flag folded in a triangle.”

Although Thornton Tomasetti provided mandatory group counseling for those who worked at the site and offered individual sessions, Stefan says she found her own way to cope.

“For a while I had some problems sleeping, but I think that was more from watching the south tower being hit and buildings collapsing than from the work I was doing. My biggest stress relief was probably baking. I was always making cookies, pies, and cakes to bring in for everyone to eat. It was good to spend time with my friends whenever I could, but we worked really long hours and I was always exhausted. The baking was always enjoyable to me.”

Stefan’s advisor here at the University, David Pines, associate professor of civil engineering, was not surprised by her hard work on the twin towers project, even though she was just one year out of school. He says that as a student she was president of the student chapter of the American Society of Civil Engineering in both her junior and senior years. She also took the initiative to have the University host the New England Regional Concrete Canoe Competition and led the team in designing and constructing the University’s entry.

Stefan recently left her job and New York City after 11 years and has relocated to the Chicago area. She says her commemoration of the 10th anniversary of 9/11 was different from that of past years.

“If I were still in New York, I would be getting together with a bunch of former workers from there. I became friends with some engineers, city workers, and construction workers that I’ve kept in touch with over the past 10 years. At least once a year we would get together for dinner.”

Paula Madrid M’99, D’01
Helping Others Come Back from the Trauma

Paula Madrid says she became a psychologist to understand how individuals process trauma. Within weeks of Sept. 11, 2001, she was hired as the first staff member of a program being developed by the Children’s Health Fund in New York City to help living victims of 9/11. In the wake of the attacks, there was well-warranted concern about the mental health of survivors—the families of those killed; firefighters, police officers, and other city workers; as well as ordinary citizens.

Even though she was just out of graduate school, Madrid was a good candidate for the counseling program because her graduate work had focused on helping victims of various kinds of trauma. She had received her master’s in psychology in 1999 from the University and her doctorate in 2001 through the University’s Graduate Institute of Professional Psychology.

Madrid found that survivors’ symptoms and reactions were not always immediate. At first, her focus in the counseling program was on children. Parents wanted to know how to prevent further stress and trauma; they also had questions about how to deal with their own grief and insomnia. Madrid says some of the early patients were feeling unsafe and had lost their housing due to damage from the collapse of the twin towers.
“It wasn’t until several weeks later that the symptoms changed. Patients started to come in feeling hopeless, having severe difficulty sleeping, frequent crying, an inability to concentrate, apathy; some developed phobias, such as riding on the subway in particular, and some began having flashbacks to the events of 9/11.”

She describes working with clean-up, rescue, and recovery workers who began using more alcohol than before and exhibited irritability and flashbacks. Actual evacuees from the twin towers did not begin to arrive at the program until much later, when they began having trouble functioning because they had developed the symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder: nightmares, flashbacks, suicidal thoughts, grief, severe anxiety, and anger.

Madrid says her study and training in how individuals process trauma helped her know how to begin to help the 9/11 survivors. “You help people reconnect with important aspects of their lives that carry meaning,” she explains. “It is a very personal thing. The beginning stages are all about safety, basic needs, listening, helping people find whatever is going to help them make it to tomorrow, finding something to look forward to. People also begin to seek meaning and answers that, I believe, they only find many, many months or years later.”

The Children’s Health Fund, called the Community Support Program, later merged with a Columbia University clinic and became The Resiliency Program, which Madrid headed for the next four years. Although now in private practice, she still sees a few patients who first came to her because of 9/11.

“My are doing really well,” she says. “They’ve reinvented themselves, created new lives that give them a sense of meaning. Some widows/widowers have remarried, and though they will never forget what happened, they have bounced back. Others—for instance, someone who actually was in one of the towers and evacuated—may not be doing as well.

“For example, I am working with someone who sustained severe injuries, and his arm is completely scarred from burns. He was doing well in spite of his injuries, but after the death of Osama bin Laden, he started having nightmares, and that is when he came in to see me.”

How did Madrid cope personally with the stress of listening to her patients’ stories? She says she focused on the work that had to be done and tried to take very good care of herself. She also did a lot of yoga. “I became a big fan of Bikram, which helps with breathing and relaxes your mind and body.”

Len Boyle ’80
Self-Styled Catcher in the Rye

Like many others on the morning of Sept. 11, 2001, Leonard Boyle ’80 was frantic. In Boston, Mass., on special assignment for the Department of Justice that day, he could not reach his son, who was in Washington, D.C. “I had a harrowing few hours that morning because my son was an intern in Washington and rode the Metro through Pentagon Station on his way downtown. I was panicked until I heard from him late that morning.” The events of that day would lead Boyle to become more involved in the nation’s counterterrorist efforts.

He had been Connecticut’s commissioner of public safety since 2004. In late 2006 a friend in the Department of Justice called to ask if he would be interested in the position of director of the Terrorist Screening Center (TSC), which maintains and constantly updates a database of known and suspected terrorists and makes that information available to those on the front lines in municipal, state, and federal agencies.

“At that time I knew little about the TSC and its mission, but the call coincided with my desire to get more involved in counterterrorism matters. After speaking at several five-year anniversaries of 9/11 in the fall of 2006, I became convinced that protecting the public from terrorist threats was the best use of the lessons I had learned from a career in law enforcement and criminal justice.” Boyle was named director of the Washington, D.C.-based TSC in March 2007, a position he held until February 2009. He is currently the deputy chief state’s attorney for operations for the State of Connecticut.

Now, 10 years after the 9/11 attacks, he offers his own answers to questions many of us still have. First, what brought about the assault?
Boyle cites several contributing factors: a decades-long sense of oppression and disenfranchisement among some; a charismatic figure who exploited those feelings while having the financial, organizational, and social resources to arm those who were willing to act; the inability of American intelligence and law enforcement agencies to share intelligence effectively; and our inability to appreciate the likelihood of an attack of such an unconventional nature.

Second, what is the most important change we have made since the attacks?

“The most significant change since 9/11 is the willingness of agencies to share information and the breaking down of structural barriers—legal and technical—to doing so,” says Boyle. “Analysts spend countless hours sifting through a sea of information, attempting to find links. But the challenge that we still wrestle with is: How do those analysts determine whether identified links portray a true picture of an impending threat or simply a benign association? Simply put, we can easily connect dots, but we must yet develop methods to assess which dots are worthy of connection.”

Beginning as a police officer in East Hartford, Conn., in 1975, Boyle has had a very successful career in public safety. After his graduation from the University of Hartford, he earned his law degree at the University of Connecticut Law School, then became an assistant U.S. attorney. Prior to being sworn in as Connecticut’s public safety commissioner in 2004, he worked in Boston investigating law enforcement officials and their corrupt relationship with organized crime figures.

This work culminated in the trial of former FBI Special Agent John Connolly.

“I’ve never been quite sure why I chose public safety as a career,” says Boyle. “Maybe I’ve always fancied myself as the catcher in the reye, steering joyful children from the unrecognized dangers of the cliff; perhaps it’s an ingrained sense that those who play by the rules and do their best to lead useful lives deserve to have their government protect their safety, vindicate their rights, and preserve their values; or I may just have found it to be more interesting and fun than anything else I might be able to do.”

A Day of Memories

On Sept. 11, 2001, students, faculty, and staff came together on campus, struggling to cope with the news of the attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon as well as the thwarted attempt on the White House. Many had spent a harrowingly long day trying to reach family and friends believed to be near the twin towers or the Pentagon or possibly on Flight 93, which had crashed in a field in Pennsylvania.

Ten years later, more than 300 students joined University faculty and staff for a candlelight vigil to remember those who died on 9/11. Speaking about that night in his opening remarks, President Walter Harrison said, “We gathered in the Sports Center that evening, trying to make sense of what had happened and reassuring each other that the world would go on.”

As the setting sun was starting to slide toward the horizon, Aja Wilson ’10, an alumna of the University’s Hartt School, sang a moving a cappella version of “America the Beautiful.” Then Harrison led the group in silence across the Park River bridge to the Gengras lawn and the site where six oak trees were planted in tribute to the six alumni lost on 9/11 at the World Trade Center.

Once at the ceremony site, Shawn McQuillan, assistant director for community development in the Office of Residential Life and a Eucharist minister in the Catholic Church, offered a nondenominational prayer.

Ben Accardo ’12, president of the Student Government Association, stepped to the podium to read short biographies of the alumni who died on 9/11: James J. Hobin M’82; Robert L. Horohoe Jr. A’91, ’92; Richard M. Keane M’84; Stuart S. Louis ’80; George P. McLaughlin Jr. ’86; and Daniel R. Nolan ’83. As Accardo read, students tied a red ribbon with a photo of each alumnus to one of the trees.

Harrison then invited students and others to come up to the microphone and tell how 9/11 had changed their lives.

The crowd stood solemnly listening, some shedding tears, as speakers shared their stories. One spoke about not letting her initial fear consume her because that appeared to be part of the attackers’ purpose. Others described the courageous acts of a firefighter parent in Washington, D.C., and the loss of a firefighter uncle who, even though it was his day off, ran from 34th Street in Manhattan to the World Trade Center when he heard the call on his radio. Another spoke of a heroic uncle who worked in the second tower on his day off, ran from 34th Street in Manhattan to the World Trade Center when he heard the call on his radio. Another spoke of a heroic uncle who worked in the second tower.

The ceremony closed with the campus a cappella group L’Shir singing “God Bless America.” Attendees then placed their candles at the bases of the six trees and silently walked away, leaving the flicker of candlelight and ribbons blowing softly in the breeze as their tribute to the nearly 3,000 who died on 9/11 a decade ago.