

A CAMPUS RESPONDS

On Wednesday, September 12, the magazine received this letter from the Chancellor, as did the rest of the campus community.

Stop and Consider! Life is but a day;
A fragile dew-drop on its perilous way . . .
(from "Sleep and Poetry" by John Keats)

Yesterday, we all were reminded, in the most terrible way, of life's fragile nature. For most of us, as the news arrived from New York and Washington and Somerset, it produced a state of disbelief.

We were stunned that our nation's security systems could be breached so effectively.

We simply could not comprehend the magnitude of the carnage and destruction. Perhaps more than anything, we were shocked that human beings could deliberately and coldly inflict this kind of suffering on others.

It seems very unlikely that those initial feelings will be changed by the arrival of new information. From what we now know, when a final death toll is released and other damage is quantified, the staggering size of the numbers almost certainly will make this tragedy even more incomprehensible. And, given those numbers, as the news becomes more specific, members of our University community almost certainly will be personally touched by the tragedy, further deepening our collective sense of loss.

In the midst of yesterday's unfolding crisis, it was concern for others that characterized this community. Certainly, that was true of the members of the University's staff. Capable and dedicated members of this group quickly mobilized. Over the course of the day and through the evening, they worked to upgrade security, to ensure that there was a smooth sharing of available information, to provide comfort and counseling to those who needed it, and to ensure that essential services continued to be delivered to our students.

A selfless focus on the needs of others also was characteristic of our students. Even as the events of the morning were unfolding, small groups of students periodically came to my office, and I later talked to others on campus. Particularly after the plane crash in Southwestern Pennsylvania, students had some reason to be apprehensive for their own safety. However, in conversations with me and with others, what they wanted most to know was how they could be of help, especially to people in the Pitt community with loved ones who lived or worked near any of the disaster sites.

The fact that the absence of humanity in some could bring out the most generous of human qualities in others is one of life's great ironies. Looking forward, it also is our greatest source of hope.

Today, we return to what might be called "normal" routines under the most abnormal of circumstances. For the foreseeable future, there will be regular and graphic reminders of the horrors of September 11, 2001, as well as commentaries on how those destructive events have permanently changed our lives. Presumably, there will be ways for some of us to be of help to those dealing most directly with the tragedies, and we clearly should offer whatever assistance we can.

And as we move forward with our own lives, we all should do so with a renewed sense of commitment to civility and to community. Our actions should reflect the fact that we care about and respect each other. We should listen to and try to understand differing points of view. We should actively pursue ways of resolving conflicts that ultimately strengthen, rather than destroy, our common bonds and that elevate, rather than demean, our humanity.

In a sense, there can be no silver lining in a cloud as dark as the one that cast its long shadow across America yesterday. But there are lessons that can be taken even from such a terrible experience. And those lessons, if we embrace them today and consistently apply them in the future, can make this community, this country, and even this world, better places.

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We gladly receive letters and photos (which we may edit for length, style, and clarity).

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ON THE ROAD

Now the med school is coming to you. Expect sizzling speakers and significant schmoozing when Pitt comes to your town. We're fueling up for programs in Florida (this January), Philadelphia, New York City, and California. To volunteer to help with a program in your area, contact Jennifer Rellis at 877-MED-ALUM or jrellis@medschool.pitt.edu.

MUSICAL NOTES

ANSWERS FOR p. 5, "FOOTNOTE"

Bassist/trombonist: Rick Wood
Swing Band Director: Stewart Sell