

Testimony for Liz Howell

I am honored to have this opportunity to express my support for the establishment of a national memorial to the victims of terrorists' attacks.

My husband and best friend, Brady Howell, was killed in the Pentagon on September 11th. His death changed my life forever.

We had moved to Washington, D.C. a year earlier to fulfill Brady's childhood dream of working at the Pentagon. He had just finished graduate school and was thrilled to have won a prestigious Presidential Management Internship that allowed him to work with Naval Intelligence at the Pentagon.

On September 10th, we stood on edge of realizing so many dreams we had woven together during our five years of marriage. On September 11th, my life changed forever. So did the lives of thousands of Americans who lost someone they loved in those four jetliners, in the World Trade Center or in the Pentagon.

I think the American psyche also underwent a sea change. As a nation, we felt vulnerable in a way we hadn't felt since the attack on Pearl Harbor more than 50 years ago. But we also felt united, determined and proud to be Americans with a passion we hadn't felt in a very long time.

Words that had almost disappeared from our collective vocabulary emerged again. "Heroes" is my favorite. Before September 11th, I rarely heard the word "hero" in casual conversation.

After September 11th, talk of heroes was everywhere. Thousands of heroes died that day. Many died trying to save the lives of others. Thousands of other heroes risked their lives or gave unstintingly of themselves to ease the suffering of others. Todd Beamer was a hero. Brady Howell was a hero. Joe Finley and Ted Anderson are heroes.

Patriotic songs were playing on the radio again. People wanted to join the military. We talked of finding the lessons in our grief and a renewed meaning in our lives. Suddenly, we wanted something deeper and more substantial in our role models.

And this spring, we have celebrated life with a fresh intensity. The babies born to widows of 9-11 are a source of national delight and pride.

I don't believe these changes are temporary. I think Sept. 11th changed a generation of Americans. Our national generosity and compassion continues. As we fight this new war against terrorism, the suffering continues.

I believe all that America lost that day, all that we gain and the ways we have changed as a country should be commemorated in a national memorial to the victims of terrorism.

Of course, this isn't just about Sept. 11. Since 1979, more than 500 Americans have died in acts of terrorism, including the 168 people killed in the bombing of the Alfred P. Murrah Federal Building in Oklahoma City and the 259 killed in the 1988 mid-air bombing of Pan Am Flight 103.

This memorial would be for them, too. Just as it would be for the Americans we may lose in future acts of terrorism – as terrible as that possibility is.

One of the things I love most about Washington, D.C. are the memorials. My favorite is the Vietnam Memorial.

I was born after the Vietnam War ended. I've heard about and read about the war, of course. But that war didn't touch me emotionally until the first time I saw that long wall. All those names, one after another, for the length of that dark wall drove home to me the cost of that war. For the first time, I sensed the breadth of our nation's loss. I sensed the unrealized dreams, talent and potential that died with those thousands of young men and women. I could imagine the tragic heartbreak of the people whose lives would never be the same, just as my life and Lisa Beamer's life will never be the same.

I cried the first time I saw that wall. I cry every time I see it.

I believe a national monument to terrorism would become a hallowed place for the people of this generation to remember and grieve. Perhaps even more importantly, it will teach future generations about the heroism, sacrifice and patriotism that surrounded the deaths of people who died simply for being Americans.

I want future generations to understand what America lost on September 11. I want them to understand how we rallied and went forward, a more compassionate and united nation. I want them to feel a little grief and a

little pride over a tragedy that happened before they were born. This national memorial can do that just like
memorials throughout this city bring all of America's history alive for us.

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