

Beacon Hill Byline by Mary Rogeness

September 20, 2001

The Nation Adjusts

Because the Longmeadow News is a weekly newspaper, its stories about the terrorist attacks of September 11 are written with some distance, several days removed from the tragic events. Here are some of my thoughts about the events of the past week.

The first reactions of shock and disbelief changed quickly to anger at the devastation that befell New York and Washington, combined with grief at the loss of life in the catastrophe. The loss is felt individually by any of us with friends, or relatives who may be among the missing, and it is felt by the entire community because Longmeadow's Jean Roger was a flight attendant on American Airlines Flight 11. Jeanie grew up just around the block from me. I thought she was too young to be out of school, and I know she was too young for her life to be over.

Longmeadow joined the Roger family when more than a thousand mourners attended a Saturday memorial service for Jean, and the town congregated again for a second service that evening on the Green. The two gatherings allowed us all to share our sorrow.

The compassion of the nation is shown through donations of money and blood. People continue to contribute supplies, even as relief organizations protest they cannot handle such quantities of merchandise.

We responded spontaneously to the request to light a candle, and many windows still display those beacons. Massachusetts firefighters are on the scene in New York to assist in rescue efforts, and Father Larry Provenzano, the St. Andrew's rector and the town's fire department chaplain, has been called to New York to serve as a chaplain at the site. Last week forced us to consider again that a draft card is more than a form of identification. Military service is less visible than it was in my youth, but Longmeadow is already represented in the Armed Forces. I discovered that over the weekend when I spoke with parents of a Navy pilot, a member of the National Guard and a West Point cadet.

Driving to Boston this week, I see flags taped to antennas and attached to truck bodies. Flags fly on turnpike overpasses. Looking up, I can see a few planes from time to time, but do not know if they are military or civilian aircraft.

Many of us are searching our memory for reference points, events that suddenly changed our nation. For me it's the Kennedy assassination; for older individuals it's Pearl Harbor. Oklahoma City, deadly as it was, was finite in its scope, and the first World Trade Center bombing was over so quickly. We do know that September 11 will be a new reference for all of us. We do not know what repercussions will come. Alliances are being sought by our government, and nations are responding, domestic political differences receding.

We face a deadly, but hidden enemy. As President Bush said in an address to the nation, "This conflict was begun on the timing and terms of others; it will end in a way and at an hour of our choosing."

God Bless America.

NOTE: The lack of a state budget, which seemed so important last week, seems almost irrelevant now. Legislative leaders continue to work toward a resolution and Governor Swift has filed another interim budget document for the coming two weeks.