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It Is Defined as a Lack of Emotional Responsiveness

Katie Marotel

First Place Winner

I read the news clip on MSN, “N.Y., D.C. rocked by attacks”: shock. I called my boyfriend, my mom: fear. I put clothes on and walked to my class: dream (nightmare). And then to my next class, and then to my boyfriend’s room: all consuming apathy.

For a while I felt like I was a bit actor in some movie based on one of Tom Clancy’s novels. Planes hijacked by terrorists don’t run into the World Trade Center unless it’s a movie and usually someone like Harrison Ford or Denzel Washington manages to miraculously outsmart the terrorists and saves the day and the plane lands safely in L.A. or San Francisco. But this wasn’t a movie; people were actually dead, and I actually had to deal with the fact that life is a precarious, precious thing.

Except for the fact that I realized as the hours, days, and months passed I found it didn’t really affect me. My original, irrational fears of World War III and massacred people lining the streets gave way to the daily worries and fears that plagued me even before the attack. Homework assumed its usual level of importance (if I don’t get an “A” on such and such paper it will affect the outcome of the entire Universe). The little tiffs with my boyfriend did not cease (an argument over nothing at all can make my blood boil). Life resumed its normal pace and the events of September 11th left me unfazed. And disturbed.

Disturbed because homework is important but I only feign interest in world news. Disturbed because I’ve cried many tears on account of my boyfriend while I had to force myself to cry as I read the names of the dead who were on the flights. Disturbed because I’m not so abnormal that I can be the only one who feels this way. This absolute lack of emotion towards the events.

I hear stories of adults who still cry when they think about what happened. I read articles in The Mercury of people who have no sex drive as a result of the attacks. My mother had to take a sedative in order to take a cross-country flight to Boston. These are people in their mid twenties or later and I think they are reacting as perfectly normal human beings should. But what about this generation? The MTV generation. Generation Y. Whatever you would call us. Sure, I noticed that they turned off MTV in Elizabeth Hall to watch CNN for a few days. Yeah, we had a prayer service, once or twice. I see flags hung up in a few windows of East and Holman, a syrupy patriotic article in the newspaper. But for the most part, I’ve seen us sink into apathy.

And when I say us, I mean myself and those whom I talk to on a regular basis. And when I say apathy, I just mean that we stopped caring (if we ever did) 3 days after it happened and resumed life. Shouldn’t we still be obsessed with what
happened? Isn’t the day that Kennedy was shot engraved in every American’s mind? My mother says, “I remember exactly what I was doing the day Kennedy was shot...” She was 13 years old. Life in America stopped. Everything. Hearts stopped beating. November 22, 1963.

September 11, 2001. Something appears so strange in my reaction. My heart did not cease beating. My life did not stop but for a second. I am 19, and I was asleep when it happened. Am I still asleep? Am I such a heartless beast that it doesn’t seem to matter? That for only a tiny second of time did I realize the ramifications of what had occurred, the impact it had inflicted? That there is more anger in my heart towards the American government for what they are doing in Afghanistan than there ever was for whoever it was that attacked us?

There is a fear, a dread that surrounds this little, empty heart of mine as a result of the September 11th attack. It is not the fear of future attacks (I laugh at the thought of Anthrax meeting us here at Concordia University.). It is not the fear that the man I love may one day be forced to enlist in the army, to fight, to die in a war that could end in ... (only God knows what). I’m not fearful of stepping on a plane, nor do I partake in irrational, stereotypical fears for my safety when I see an Arabic Muslim on the street. My fear stems not from what occurred and what may soon occur, but instead from what these events have shown me about myself.

I could take the easy way out and say that I am a product of my generation. Can you really blame me? So many things seem to have gone wrong in our general upbringing; poorly funded education, far too much television, and many parents who just weren’t there. But I refuse to simply be a product of my generation. I am different. This depression is different. Because something inside of me tells me that I should and must care about what has happened. That I should have cried when I found out. That I shouldn’t continue to be so selfish in my worries about schoolwork and petty fights. No, I will not say I am not a product of my generation but I do believe that I am a reflection of their state. For all the terrible, fearful, dreadful things that the attacks of September 11th have shown us, perhaps the most disturbing is what is reflected in my heart, on this page. That behind the few who do care, there are many of us who have given up a reason to care. Who have lost the ability to feel.