

By Miriam Krinsky

A Lesson in the Three Rs

The memory of September 11 challenges us to awaken in our children a faith in our values

Remember. Rebuild. Renew. These words embody the challenge faced by the Lower Manhattan Development Corporation as it unveiled its proposals a few weeks ago for the reconstruction of New York's World Trade Center site. All the preliminary designs under consideration prominently feature a memorial park honoring the men, women, and children whose lives tragically and prematurely came to an end on September 11, 2001.

It is doubtful that anyone in our lifetime will forget the devastation that our nation experienced that September day. The acts of terrorism perpetrated against this country did, however, unify Americans in unprecedented ways. Regardless of our politics, race, religion, gender, or sexual preference, we shared our grief and transcended our differences to unite under one banner. The displays of red, white, and blue in all corners of our nation helped express emotions that words could not describe. In one of this country's darkest hours, new heroes emerged from the rubble and chaos, exemplifying the very traits that built the United States: determination, courage, and resolve.

With the passage of time, our lives inevitably return to normal and the impact of even singularly momentous events begins to fade, especially among members of a younger generation who have no direct experience with watershed moments in modern U.S. history. As with other defining moments for our country, the events of September 11 have left an indelible mark on our heritage and our history. On September 11, it was our core values and the rights and liberties embodied by our government that were assaulted. It is our duty as responsible adults to ensure that our youth—tomorrow's decision makers—understand these events, their impact on our lives, and their imprint on the nation's identity.

Many years ago, Ernest Hemingway observed, "The world breaks everyone and afterwards many are stronger at the broken places." On September 11, our world experienced a break of epic proportions. While we now endeavor to repair our nation's fractured seams and discover our renewed strength, a critical need exists for dialogue about the principles of democracy and freedom and what it means to live in a country based upon those ideals.

To that end, on September 12, 2002, one day after the anniversary of the tragic events, the Los Angeles County Bar Association, in collaboration with the Los Angeles Unified School District, will present a Dialogue in our Schools program. This program—chaired by Los Angeles Superior Court Judge Laurie D. Zelon, a past president of the Association, and Laura Farber, a partner at Hahn & Hahn and former president of the Association's Barristers Section—is modeled after the Dialogue on Freedom initiative developed by the American Bar Association in consultation with U.S. Supreme Court Justice Anthony Kennedy. It will focus high school students on the freedoms and

responsibilities that make our nation unique. As Justice Kennedy explains, these dialogues "foster among our nation's youth the identification and understanding of fundamental American values and those universal moral precepts that all free people share."

The Los Angeles dialogues will take place simultaneously at approximately 20 local public and private high schools and will create invaluable opportunities for students to explore with volunteer lawyers, judges, and community leaders the rights guaranteed by the U.S. Constitution and their meaning in light of the September 11 tragedy. Our Association has also encouraged other California bar groups to conduct similar discussions in their cities. Later in the month, on September 24, Justice Kennedy will share his views on the importance of ongoing discussions with the volunteer lawyers, judges, teachers, and selected student participants at a post-dialogue "town hall" gathering.

Yes, a year has passed. While the words to describe fully both the events and the emotions of that day still elude us, we must endeavor to connect with our youth as we move forward. As lawyers, we are in a unique position to share our knowledge of the U.S. Constitution, government, and justice system, which define us as a country and reflect our nation's soul. We can use our professional perspectives to explain the values upon which our country was founded and our responsibility to protect and preserve these values. As Robert Hirshon, 2001-02 ABA president, said, "[W]e represent our citizens in our institutions of justice. Our oath is the same oath taken by our elected officials: to protect and defend our constitution and uphold our nation's laws. We take this oath seriously and were reminded by the events of September 11 that we are joined in this noble endeavor by millions and millions of other Americans, each of whom reaffirmed in one way or another his or her commitment to our constitutional form of government."

All of us can join as participants in this dialogue on this first anniversary of September 11: Take time to talk with your children, their friends, your neighbors next door. These dialogues, admittedly, are just a small step. They aren't meant to replace the original three Rs—reading, 'riting, and 'rithmetic—but they nonetheless can play a critical role in our next generation's commitment to the challenges ahead—to remember, rebuild, and renew. ■



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