

# Character gains strength from tragedy of Sept. 11

Initially, I shied away from writing a column on the anniversary of 9/11. I wasn't entirely sure if I could add any particularly new or striking insights, especially given the enormous outpouring of media attention over the past week or so. And I certainly didn't want to indulge in the kind of macho chest-thumping or maudlin sentimentality to which we've been exposed.

But I know in my bones that the events of 9/11 were so horrific and the consequences so profound and long lasting that they deserve at least a word or two written in the context of your hometown newspaper.

In my ruminations, the two words that keep coming to mind are "confidence" and "innocence." Even more than the loss of so many lives, the ultimate effect of 9/11 has been to erode our sense of confidence in so many aspects of our daily lives, while losing our blithe sense of innocent optimism about ourselves and the world around us.

Confidence in our security as a nation: In a column I wrote a year ago, within hours after the two hijacked planes slammed into the World Trade Center towers, I argued "Up to now, mainland America has been protected from direct attack by two mighty oceans. But in an age when planes can fly, evil viruses can be spread from an aerosol bottle and nuclear weapons smuggled in suitcases, oceans alone are no longer a guarantee of security."

Anybody who has fumed in security lines at Detroit Metropolitan Airport or been obliged to take off their shoes or experienced a strange feeling in the pit of their stomach when the airplane abruptly banks hard left over New York knows that as a people we have lost, possibly forever, our old happy-go-lucky feeling about our and the country's security from attack. The uncertainty alone represents a profound change in the way we feel about our daily routine.

Confidence in the effectiveness of our military response: We smashed the Taliban and pushed Al Qaeda out of Afghanistan, but it looks very much as though we have neither killed nor captured the big fish. Worse, it looks as though the nasty cancer of terrorism has metastasized into quasi-independent cells in Pakistan, the Sudan and God knows where else. We might have the most powerful military force in the world, but fighting a shadowy enemy in the smoky, ill-lit bazaar and lawless mountains is not solely a military issue.

Innocent expectation that everybody around

the world loves us: America is now so economically, technologically and militarily dominant that we have become the focus for the fears and hatreds of the world's less privileged. What a puzzle, though, that the vast majority of the world's poor would still give anything to come live in America!

Innocent confidence in the integrity of our own government: Nationally, more than 1,000 men of Middle Eastern descent are still being

**The end of innocence: Maybe what's really happening as a result of 9/11 is that we are growing up as a nation.**

held in jail without being charged, often without access to a lawyer and some without their identities being made known. For Heavens sake, what happened to the fundamental right of habeas corpus! Our government justifies this by arguing we are at war. But the war against terrorism is not purely military, and our ability to live up to our stated principles has a lot to do with our ability to win.

This is especially a problem in Michigan, the home of the largest community of Arab-Americans in the country. An Arab friend of mine — very intelligent, hard working, a loyal American citizen with a face too dignified to cry — tells of casual stereotyping and rigorous profiling that is now permissible against his people but not permissible against other groups.

The end of innocence: Maybe what's really happening as a result of 9/11 is that we are growing up as a nation. Children have innocent expectations that everybody will like them and a confident optimism that everything will be OK, whereas adulthood is often characterized as the end of innocence and the beginning of a chastened confidence. My friend, no longer innocent but chastened at the quandary of living as a loyal Arab-American, hastens to point out that his next door neighbors keep checking in to make sure he and his family are all right.

At the end of the day, the true measure of maturity character is the capacity to gain strength and compassion from tragedy. At the anniversary of our greatest national tragedy since Pearl Harbor, and I am absolutely convinced that we are passing this test.

Phil Power is the Chairman of the Board of the company that owns this newspaper. He would be pleased to get your reactions to this column either at (734) 953-2206 or at ppower@homecomm.net.



Dave Varga

## You probably never want to be that driver either

I never want to be that driver. You know, the one you read about. Little mistake, lifetime of guilt.

First time it almost happened, I blamed the circumstances. Pulling the car out of the Busch's mall onto Newburgh, just about dusk, stopped completely just before the stop sign, just like you're supposed to do. I'd looked left, glanced right where a stand of chest-high decorative grass decoratively blocks the view, and started to turn.

All of a sudden, a skateboarder was there, right bumper, steps away. He stopped. I stopped. Inches apart. After a glance, he kept going. Kid behind him actually waved appreciation for me having stopped.

After I got my breath back, I looked at the grass and shook my head. "Damn, they need to mow that," I thought. Since then, I've spotted other sites town where bushes, flowers and trees make it tough on drivers. There's a gas station on Farmington that comes to mind.

But more often we drivers make it tough on ourselves. Next time it happened, I had nothing to blame. Purely a chance meeting that almost happened. It didn't. Boy on a bike, slicing out of the swim club parking lot and me pulling away from a day at the pool. I'd looked around and just accelerated, and at that, I'd only accelerated just a bit. But we both hit the brakes pretty quickly. Again, it was close.

I remember it wasn't long after that I had read about that teenager hit and killed bicycling at Laurel Park Place. It wasn't the driver's fault, it was an accident. The cyclist pulled out in front of the car. And I remember thinking about that poor driver.

Another time, I was heading to the store, pulling out of our subdivision. Thought about this again just a week or so ago when a letter writer to this newspaper referred to the white

lines that mark cross walks as the "on-deck circle." It's an apt analogy for the way some people drive.

I never wanted to be that driver. But there I was distracted pulling up to the intersection, going from a sidewalk to a mile road. I glanced both ways at the about-to-open road, but not closely at the sidewalk as I slowed and readied for my quick acceleration to get up to traffic.

All of a sudden, near my passenger door, there was a walker. He obviously wasn't going very fast. And he would have avoided me. But he had already been in the crosswalk when I'd gotten there. Felt like the ugly invader to his already claimed land. I backed up and waved sheepishly, deserving a lecture and making sure it was a self-delivered.

Now I have one daughter driving; the other is nearly there. Sometimes I get that look or even the "Oh Dad" as I try to putter at what I figure is a safe speed down my winding street with lots of cute little faces playing and riding and running, and too many cars clogging up the road. Yes, I know the speed limit is 25 but we don't need to go that fast.

Those close calls may not have happened yesterday, but they're hard to forget.

We have one driver in the neighborhood, woman in a SUV. Sort of has a lead foot. Some teens in the area drive too fast, too. If I'm sounding like a crochety old bag of wind, I apologize. But I'm guessing they've never had that close call. Or maybe they didn't see the eyes of their neighbor, their friend or their own child when they've stared down fate and won.

Sure we all have some place to hurry off to. Something important to do, to see, to get to, to be.

But I'm guessing they'd never want to be that driver either.

Dave Varga is editor of the Livonia Observer and Redford Observer. He can be reached at (734) 953-2219 or e-mailed at dvarga@oehomecomm.net

### LETTERS

#### Real issues

Councilwoman Cheryl Oliverio would have us believe that Mr. Vagnozzi is the right choice for State Representative by fanning the embers of controversy that surrounded an unsuccessful candidate in the August primary.

Mr. Vagnozzi may be a nice man, but with all due respect, he has had his time. We need a State Representative with a vision for the future of our community who is motivated and energized to make a real difference!

Valerie Knol is a tireless worker who will be an excellent advocate for the people of

Farmington/Farmington Hills. It does not serve the electorate well, at this juncture, to resurrect from the ashes the non-payment/payment of tax brouhaha that enveloped Mr. Sever.

I urge the good people of this area to move forward in a positive manner, addressing REAL issues: Valerie Knol, a clear choice and a new direction or Aldo Vagnozzi, a past administration that the voting citizenry retired.

Crystal Gotterlieb  
Farmington Hills

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