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How 9/11 Impacted My Life

The attacks on September 11, 2001 were a tragic event that significantly shaped how the world, and more specifically the United States, is today. The multitude of security measures in place across our country today may not have been implemented at all if not for the attacks on 9/11 because the country would not have seen the need for these various measures. Immediately following the attacks, however, the country changed, especially with regards to security.

I was a little over a year old on 9/11 and my brother had just been born in April of 2001. Because I was so young, I have no memory of that day or what exactly happened but have heard many stories from my parents. The events of 9/11 definitely shaped my world and life, as well as gave me a different definition of what a normal life is compared to those older than me and to my peers.

My dad joined the Army in 1999, so I was born into a military family and have known nothing else. I grew up living on military posts until I was thirteen, but I still lived in an area with a decent sized military population, even though most were in the Navy instead of the Army. Growing up, it was not unusual for my dad to be gone for a couple nights, a few weeks, or even a month because he had to go to the field or a school. My mom always knew where he was, whether it be on post, a different state, or a different country and we never had to worry about him being safe because there was nothing to put him in danger or any reason why he would not come home. While this was normal for me, many children outside of military families did not have to deal with this. Their parents were almost always home every night and did not have to miss holidays, birthdays, or any other special occasion. But the four children in my family never thought twice about our dad missing certain events because it was something we had all become accustomed to.

After hearing stories from my parents, I realized that our world and daily lives changed immediately after the attacks on 9/11. Before 9/11, anyone was free to come and go on post. They could drive around and go into any of the stores without having an ID card or anything checked when they entered. Occasionally, a vehicle would be randomly stopped to be searched, but as long as the driver had a form of ID, they were fine. My mom told me that on the day of or day after the attacks, she tried getting back on post and had to wait in line for six hours. The guards at the gates were thoroughly checking every vehicle and everyone’s ID cards. If you did not have a military ID and your car did not pass the inspection, you were not allowed on the post. Every single building on post immediately went to a 100% ID card check for whoever entered, where previously, only a few buildings, if any, checked ID cards every now and then. For the following few months, every building still had a 100% ID card check and it was almost impossible to check civilians into the base or buildings. Growing up, I remember always being stopped at the gate while the guards checked my parent’s ID cards and said hi to my siblings and me in the back seat, occasionally having our car searched before we could get through the gate, and my parents having their ID cards out every time we went to the hospital or grocery shopping at the Commissary. I could not imagine a world where this did not happen and was shocked to hear that less than a decade ago almost none of these measures were in place, or at least not nearly as strict as they are today.

Although all of these measures were in place for pretty much all of my life, growing up on different military posts never felt insanely strict or like we were drowning in all the security that was present, but felt safe and to me, normal. For my entire childhood I was surrounded by other children who all had at least one thing in common with me: one of our parents was in the Army. I was allowed to go anywhere I wanted to within the neighborhood and could be out all day long, sometimes even past dark. When I was a little older, around ten or eleven years old, I was even allowed to leave the neighborhood and walk across the main road to the convenience store with my friends. Our parents were never worried that anything would happen to any of us. The entire neighborhood was filled with families and soldiers who all worked together, and the entire post was surrounded by a fence with a few gates manned by the guards. On any day you would see the Military Police driving around the neighborhoods in their cars or bikes making sure that everyone was safe. We never had anything to worry about and I did not realize that this was not the norm until I moved off base when I was thirteen. I was scared to be living out in the open not surrounded by a guarded fence or families exactly like mine. I moved to a house that was not even in a neighborhood and was surprised to find that everyone was not just allowed to wander around wherever or whenever they wanted. For a while after I moved, I did not feel as safe as I was previously used to feeling.

In a military family, I also had to deal with my dad leaving on deployments, which those outside of military families have most likely never had to deal with. Before 9/11, my dad and his unit may have never had to deploy, or at least not as often as they did after 9/11, because the United States was not involved in a war or conflict overseas. During the four years my family lived in Kentucky, my dad deployed to Afghanistan twice: once for nine months and then for an entire year. This meant that he missed everything from birthdays to Christmas to award ceremonies or concerts at school, as well as little, everyday things like a joke my brother told or a face my sister made. We could not talk with our dad as often as when he was at a school either. My mom would occasionally get a call and he would talk to all of us for a little before we had to go to bed. One year we were able to video chat with him for a short period on Christmas Eve so he could see us open the presents he sent us. Even though I knew that nothing was going to happen and did not doubt that my dad was going to come home safe, everyone in my family still worried. We all told ourselves that he was fine and would not get hurt, but there was always a voice in the back of all of our heads asking, “what if?”. “What if he did not come home?” or “What if we got that knock on the door in the middle of the night?”. But, no matter how much we worried, he always came back safe and we each made sure to give him a little charm that he could always carry with him to remember us by and that would keep him safe while he was gone.

Whether I fully realized it or not, I was exposed to a lot more death as a child with multiple units on the post always being deployed overseas to fight in the war. I had friends when I was younger whose parent passed away overseas, as well as my cousin’s father who passed away while fighting. I was young when these deaths occurred, but have always been exposed to loss, especially with living on a base surrounded by military families, which is not something that everyone has to deal with. I have had to watch my cousins, who are my own age or younger, grow up without their father, as well as watch his mother and close family deal with the loss of a loved one. I can remember seeing his family wear buttons with his picture to family gatherings like Easter or Christmas for a while after his death so that he would be there with all of us. My dad and the base as a whole also had to deal with many losses. One of my dad’s friends in his unit was killed while serving, as well as others in his company and in the 101st Airborne Division as a whole.

Alissa and her son in *American Widow* by Alissa Torres also had to deal with loss as a direct result of 9/11. Eddie Torres, Alissa’s husband, started a new job at Cantor Fitzgerald, located in the World Trade Center, on September 10, 2001 (Torres 25). Eddie went to work the next day and jumped out of the window after the building had been hit (Torres 46). Alissa not only had to deal with the death of her husband, but also had to deal with the rest of her pregnancy and raising her son alone. Their son was born a few months following the attacks and had to grow up without ever knowing his father because of the attacks on the World Trade Center on 9/11. The only things he would know about his father are the stories he heard from Alissa. Similar to Alissa and her son, some military families have had to deal with the loss of a loved one whether it be a parent, sibling, or spouse, either from that attacks that day or while fighting in the war that followed the attacks. These families have had to cope with the death of someone so close to them at an early age and learn how to move forward, no matter how hard it may be. While death is a normal part of life and something that everyone is affected by, not everyone experiences losing a loved one at an early age while they are overseas or at home fighting for our protection and safety.

Reflecting on how I grew up, I realize that I definitely did not have a normal childhood compared to the friends I have now. I moved much more frequently and farther than most of my friends who might have moved houses but remained in the same city or state for their entire lives. My family had to deal with our dad being gone for large periods of time and had to change our daily lives while he was gone and again when he returned. I was also exposed to a lot more loss and death, whether it be someone related or close to me or in the community in general. However, despite all of these things, I am so thankful that I grew up in a military family in the way that I did. I have loved meeting so many different people in various places and being a part of the amazing communities found on every post and I would not be the person that I am today had I not been exposed to all of the events growing up. Although it was tough at times, I would never trade my normal for anything else.

Work Cited

Torres, Alissa. *American Widow*. Villard, 2008.