

One year ago today we all watched in disbelief as the symbols of American freedom and liberty toppled at the hands of an unknown enemy. In an instant, the world as we knew had changed. We were scared, we were uncertain, and we were confused—but in the days, the weeks, and the months that followed we would learn that while our enemy was able to destroy our SYMBOLS of freedom and liberty, it was only those symbols that were vulnerable—as our freedoms and liberties were simply not up for debate.

September 11, 2001 was a dark day in our nation's history. It was a day of tremendous loss, of enormous tragedy, and a day of great sadness. We come together as a school community today, in part, to pay tribute to the innocent victims of this tragedy—and to remind ourselves that their death—while needless and senseless—is the unfortunate price of the freedom that we all share and enjoy. We also pray for the members of their families who on the first anniversary of 9-11, are undoubtedly filled with grief and sadness.

We must also remember to thank and pay tribute to our everyday heroes. In the midst our darkest hour emerged the faces of true courage and heroism, the faces of ordinary women and men going to extraordinary measures to preserve and protect our freedom. They are the faces that surround us today—they are our firefighters, our police officers, our military personnel, and, yes, our teachers—each and every one of them giving selflessly for the benefit of us all. They are members of our community—our nation's community, the Hardwick community, and the Eagle Hill community. At the heart of the word community, and in fact imbedded in its very spelling, is the word UNITY—the state of being one; singleness; the state of being in accord; harmony. Together, in unity, we made it through this difficult time, and now it is time for us to move on, in unity, and allow the horror of the reality to fade from our memories.

A century from now a new generation of school children will read about September 11th with an absence of emotion, just as we did when studying the wars and tragedies of America's past. They will learn of the bravery of the victims without feeling the emotion of the loss. They will know the outcome of the war without knowing the terror of terrorism. They will watch the video of the twin towers without having witnessed the horror of the implosions. And, thankfully, they will inherit a better world without knowing the sacrifice of enduring freedom.

God Bless America—Land of the Free and Home of the Brave!