

Dana Weinstein

Describe how your personal goals, challenges, or commitments exemplify or have been inspired by Michael Rothberg's legacy.

When I was little I declared to anyone who would listen that when I grew up I was going to do two things: attend Harvard and be a princess. The Harvard part didn't quite work out, but the princess part did in its own way. Two years ago I discovered the Fairy Godmother Project, an organization that collects prom dresses and accoutrements for financially disadvantaged girls in Massachusetts so that they can attend their formal occasions in style. Last year I decided to bring the project to Sharon, knowing that many girls in this town have attended multiple proms or semi-formals and wear their dresses only once. I placed notices in the local papers and posted fliers around school and the town. I fielded phone calls and emails and drove all over Sharon to collect the dresses and drop them off at a local collection site. I brought groups of girls to volunteer for the "Princess Boutique Days," where the girls and the dresses were united with the help of "fairy godmothers." Last year I collected sixty dresses for the Project. This year I collected over one hundred and am still arranging donations. My commitment to the Fairy Godmother Project exemplifies Michael's legacy because I contribute not only my money but also my time and energy to a cause I deeply believe in. Some people are dedicated to global campaigns, ones that affect millions of people across hundreds of countries. Others are feverous about a local park. Though Michael supported causes on a much larger scale than the Fairy Godmother Project, he and I both share a passion for giving back, and giving back in a way that effects meaningful change in our communities.

Michael's legacy has also inspired my personal goals for the future as I go off to college next year. Just as Michael was innovative and creative on Wall Street, I hope to be so in my studies on neuroscience. I want to pursue neuroscience next year not only because I think it is fascinating, but also because I feel that research into the human mind will benefit both those with disorders and those without. Unlike many physical conditions which have known causes and treatments, mental illness is still a largely unexplored area,

one that levies an enormous toll on the U.S., both monetarily and in the stress it puts on families. I believe that studying neuroscience will simultaneously help find cures for the worst disorders and help humans understand ourselves and our societies better.

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How have acts of terrorism around the world affected your own life and your outlook on the future?

I was fortunate enough not to lose anyone to the World Trade Center attacks on September 11, 2001, but I almost did. My uncle Bruce who lives and works in New York City was in the subway system, right under the Twin Towers, when the first tower was struck. I don't remember much about how I felt or what I was thinking at the time, but I do know how those acts of terrorism have affected my outlook on the future. Simply stated, 9/11 has grounded me, but it has also strengthened my resolve to never give up on hope. An analogy I use was inspired by a friend of mine who attends school in Chicago. When I asked her if the winters were really as bad as everyone made them out to be, she said that they were, but that if you dressed appropriately and took all necessary precautions, they were manageable. Then she added that one could tell just how dedicated and driven Chicago students were because going to class or an extracurricular activity was a major ordeal from November to April. For me, the future is the same way. Americans can never go back to the naïve perception that being a world superpower or having the greatest army in the world will insulate us from harm. The threat of danger, however, does not mean that we should hole up inside our borders or seal ourselves off from the rest of the world, like a student never leaving their dorm room so as to avoid a bitter winter. Like in Chicago, just because the environment we now live in is harsh and hazardous does not mean that it is not viable with the right precautions. Having to take my shoes off for security at the airport or subjecting my pocketbook to search at a concert is certainly annoying, but deep down I know that these minor inconveniences pale in comparison to traveling the globe or hearing my favorite composer. Similarly, a student would be foolish to give up cancer-curing research or forgo a life-changing class just because it is too cold outside. Additionally, the September 11th attacks have made me appreciate my opportunities and dreams even more. Like those students in Chicago who must *really* want to go to class in order to show up, I am even more determined to remain optimistic. Before September 11th, it was easy to assume that each generation would be

happier and healthier and would live longer than the previous. Now, it is all too easy to give in to pessimism and cynicism and declare the world is going to pot. I refuse to give in. I refuse to let terrorists win by restricting my mobility or giving up my civil liberties. September 11, 2001 caused enough pain and suffering for many innocent people already. I may be aware of the realities of the world much earlier than I would have liked, but I refuse to let those realities stop me from hoping and dreaming.