

MEARA SHARMA



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

I wrapped my hands around the slippery wood beam and clung to it for dear life as I attempted to feel around for the nearest available foot grip. My muscles burning and my heart pounding, I supported my weight with one arm as I clutched a rope above my head. Completely unsure of my next move, I allowed myself to swing for a few moments and let the cool air wash over my face. Knowing that time would only bring fear, I pushed myself off of a pole and quickly used all of my strength to pull myself up onto a narrow plank. I felt a tug at my harness as I heard screams of encouragement from far below. "Almost there, Meara!" With a final foot push, arm over, and pull up, I found myself on a smooth surface, joining the cries of excitement and rejoicing in the sea breeze. I was on Thompson Island, in the middle of Boston Harbor, one hundred feet off the ground, at the top of the aptly nicknamed "Bloodcurdling Barricade" high ropes element. I was also blindfolded.

The past four years of my life have been characterized by crossing boundaries. I never imagined that I would have the power to create myself to be such an active, involved member of my school, community, and world. I have pushed myself to face challenges, to take risks, to attain seemingly unreachable goals, and to fulfill my most idealistic dreams. Never did I think

I could climb a one-hundred-foot-tall wooden structure without my eyes, act in a state champion play, sing in front of hundreds of people, lead my community's diversity group, rank at the top of my class, or write my own one-act show. But each step I have taken has been another boundary crossed, another limit broken, another wall shattered. With each step, I have collected incredibly meaningful, richly inspirational experiences that have shaped the person who I am constantly in the process of creating. Four years later, I emerge passionate, expressive, vivacious, and robustly motivated. Here I am.

However, as I embark on the next chapter in my life, I see myself continually growing and changing as an individual. The values I have gathered from my experiences thus far have prepared me to succeed in whatever direction my future leads me. I feel my ethics, skills, and passions truly exemplify the legacy of Michael C. Rothberg. Diversity of experience, opinion, upbringing, and passion, as well as ethnicity, religion, and culture is a value upon which I place high importance. I have found that the most meaningful interactions and connections occur between people who are drastically different, yet willing and motivated to share, learn, and grow. My witty, rather peculiar former AP United States history teacher gave my class a pen imprinted with this quote: "Recognize yourself in the past on the steps to the present." Very soon, I will be entering a completely new world as I find my new home in a university. Throughout this upcoming quest, I will look back on the boundaries I have crossed and realize the significance they have had in my life. I will bring with me the experiences I have gathered thus far and allow them to lead me confidently in the direction of my wildest dreams. It is my greatest hope that the boundaries I have crossed will seem like mere stepping stones in comparison to what new experiences the future will bring.

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

The face of our world has been brutally ravaged and deeply scarred by terrorism. This mere word incites immense fear, anger, and hatred: emotions that have come to rule nearly every aspect of our lives. It is sadly ironic that while we often commend ourselves for embracing differences, rejoicing in the uniqueness of others, and striving to pull communities together, today's society constantly creates an environment where fear is the dominating force. This ceaseless fear encloses us, traps us, and drives us to shut our eyes to the humanity of our fellow men. As our world rapidly progresses forward, our mindsets seem to be regressing. Terrorism has brainwashed us to hate freely. Its powerful presence blinds us from generating the necessary change needed to eliminate it.

I have taken it upon myself to reject this blindness and force my eyes to remain open to my environment. Although I can not single-handedly end terrorism, I can combat its repercussions on the human race in a personal way. I choose to observe moments. Small, perfect stretches of time that disappear before the world can notice them. In my mind, I carry around a sketchbook to which I constantly add reflections, whether I am in a familiar place or a foreign location. Whether I am watching young children wash clothing in a poor village in India, or in my hometown pausing to observe idyllic sailboats glide across the crystalline lake, recording scenes in my mind allows me to sink deeply into my surroundings.

From these moments, I derive the inspiration to create. The experiences and observations I continually gather translate into my passion for photography and writing, skills I believe I can use to impact the world. Photography, for me, is a chance. A chance to compose the world into the way I see it, to view it from my own perspective, to assume control. With the fast click of a shutter, I have the power to freeze time, freeze emotion, freeze life, and freeze truth. Words hold immense power as well, if one can effectively control them. As I have practiced the craft of writing, I have assumed power over words, learning to string them together to produce the reactions I want. The limits of language virtually disappear when writing is coupled with imagery. With my words and my photographs, I can convey the stark realities of life to the public and create a potent tool with which I can shape the world.

I often feel slighted by the media. I question the validity of what is being shown to me, because it hardly ever seems real or complete. It is as if reality is covered by a thin mist because the public is incapable of comprehending the truth. This practice is unfair to the citizens of the world, as it only creates a basis for terrorism. In shielding the public, the media attempts to pretend problems do not exist, and therefore accepts and amplifies ignorance and hatred among all types of people. As long as our global society remains enveloped and blinded, strangers continuing to hate without justification, terrorism will reign. It is only when we collectively realize that we must shed our preconceptions, invest ourselves fully in the people of our world, and communally open our eyes will we be able to break free from the chains of terrorism.