

“The life I touch for good or ill will touch another life, and that in turn another, until who knows where the trembling stops or in what far place my touch will be felt.” —Frederick Buechner

Every individual causes a ripple in the sea of humanity. That ripple may be a tremor or a wave; regardless, every action has a reaction. Michael Rothberg’s life was one full of kindness and love. I live in hopes that the ripple I create—no matter how large or small it is—will, like his, touch others and bring about positive effects in the world.

Throughout my life, I have participated in many community service activities, all of which have brought me happiness and allowed me to grow. More importantly, though, my goal has been to help others. One particularly memorable experience occurred last summer, when I volunteered as a sighted guide for the Carroll Center to teach blind teenagers how to sail. During that time, I met a girl who, born blind, initially refused to go on a boat for fear of falling into the water. As I sailed with her over the course of a few hours, however, I saw her paralyzing fear change into carefree happiness. By the end of our excursion, she was smiling and holding her head high to feel the wind on her face. I was amazed by her transformation, and I am overjoyed that I was able to add a little happiness to her life.

As Michael’s life also illustrates, a meaningful existence does not result only from participating in service activities. It comes from the day-to-day things: largely, from cultivating relationships with other people—everyone from family, friends, neighbors, and peers to passersby on the street. Michael loved and was loved, and the Michael C. Rothberg September 11th Memorial Scholarship is a testament to the strength and beauty of human relationships. Following in Michael’s example, I not only aim to help others through volunteering; I also strive to be a good daughter, friend, student, teammate, and citizen of the world.

When I first found out about the September 11th attacks, I didn't understand what happened or why it happened. All my nine-year-old brain could discern from watching the news was that something had gone terribly wrong. Over time, it sank in that the unthinkable had happened, that America had been attacked within its own borders. It was a terrible reality check: not even the world's greatest superpower was invulnerable.

From the moment I realized September 11th was an *attack*, the world outside of the United States became a more dangerous place. An aura of uncertainty replaced the security previously taken for granted, and I do not feel as free as I otherwise would have felt. My life, like all of our lives, is irrevocably changed by September 11th.

But history is meant to be learned from; it is not meant to cripple the present. Every day, I could wake up and fear for my life. Instead, I wake up and rejoice in the fact that I am alive. Every vacation, I could choose to never board another plane. But I choose to travel, because the world is a beautiful place worth seeing.

The fear of losing something often makes it more valuable. The September 11th attacks have made my life and liberties more precious to me. They do not discourage me from living my life fully; rather, they show how unexpectedly disaster can strike and encourage me to achieve what I can in the present. I am able to better appreciate the gift that is life.