

Dennis Poliferno

Required Essay A:

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

In 1990, American playwright John Guare wrote a play entitled "Six Degrees of Separation," which later became a 1993 film drama of the same name. The phrase has since become a popular shorthand expression referring to the concept of human connectedness – the idea that any two individuals are more closely connected than either individual alone might imagine.

Like many of my peers, I never met Michael Rothberg and never knew him personally. For this reason, I initially found it difficult to relate to him. This all changed, however, when I read about him on the website devoted to his memory.

As I read about Michael's quality of academic promise, I briefly thought of my own solid grades in high school, my National Merit letter of recognition, my commendable standardized test scores and my early decision acceptance to Brandeis University.

As I read about Michael's quality of ethical conduct and service to community, I was reminded of my own volunteered time as a classroom assistant to my former Cottage Street School first grade teacher, Joan Wernick, helping with her "games electives," the objectives of which included teaching the students to play honestly by the rules of each game and fostering a learning environment where each student's skills, strengths, and weaknesses were respected and accepted.

When I read about Michael's athletic skill and penchant for dedicated efforts to meaningful causes, I couldn't help but smile. My own athletic path led me to pursue excellence as a baseball catcher, beginning in Little League, progressing to the competitive Amateur Athletic Union (AAU), and culminating this year with my appointment as a Sharon High School varsity baseball team captain. For the past four years, I have played in baseball tournaments as fundraising events for the Dana Farber Cancer Institute's Jimmy Fund. One such tournament, held in 2007 and 2008, honored the memory of another of Sharon's sons, Michael Kurtzer, Sharon High School Class of 1986, whose life was cut short on May 24, 2005 by Non-Hodgkin's lymphoma. In addition, I played in a wooden bat tournament to raise funds for Crohn's Disease in honor of Grace Wooster, an Easton woman who had the illness.

The more I learned about Michael Rothberg, the more I realized that, true to the concept of "six degrees of separation," his life and mine were indeed interconnected. Not by blood relatives, not by vocation, but by avocation – our mutual pursuits of excellence, love of family and friends, and the recognition that selflessness, as a means of touching and enriching others, yields rewards that reach beyond a lifetime.

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Required Essay B:

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

When I learned of the terrorist act that brought down the twin towers of the World Trade Center, I was sitting in my 5th grade classroom at Cottage Street School in Sharon, Massachusetts, with my teacher, Mrs. Hurwitz. I was 10 years old; it was a moment that will affect me for years to come. That moment was September 11, 2001.

Confusion. Apprehension. Vulnerability. These were my first reactions to the news of 9/11.

I found out later, when I arrived home from school, that my Mom's brother, my Uncle Kenny, had been at work in the second tower when the first tower was hit by the hijacked plane. He escaped from his building only minutes before the second tower was hit. Only minutes.

Weeks later, when I saw my Uncle Kenny at Thanksgiving with my aunt and cousins, I listened quietly as he recounted, with sadness in his voice, his encounter with terrorism, and I finally grasped how close we had come to losing him. Listening to him, I was better able to understand, and to empathize with, the families whose loved ones had not been as fortunate as my uncle. I understood and shared their grief.

Since 9/11, there have been many more acts of terrorism around the world. They seem more distant, more removed than the events of 9/11, yet they serve as a reminder to me that the feelings of anguish felt by my uncle and by me have been shared by all of the citizens of this country and the world.

On a personal scale, I now tend to notice my surroundings more, in both positive and negative ways. I have a heightened sensitivity to conflict between people and when I do encounter conflict on a local scale, I often wonder how we will ever be able to resolve conflict on national and international levels. Nevertheless, I am also inspired by the cooperative efforts and the many acts of compassion, commitment and tolerance that occur daily.

I am now on the verge of adulthood, preparing to attend college in the Fall of 2009. I know that my future children and grandchildren will likely share my sense of vulnerability. I feel that the future I have now may be different from the future I had before 9/11.

The future I have now is one in which I realize that, in many ways, and for many reasons, this planet is getting smaller in the sense that no one person, group or nation can be alone or act alone without affecting others. Cooperation, understanding, acceptance and respect must be practiced in the future, not only in our day-to-day lives, but also globally.

Foster cooperation, understanding and tolerance in the world.

Appreciate and support the freedoms of our country.

Love and embrace your family.

Respect yourself, striving for excellence in all that you do.

This is my outlook for the future.