

Trying to Understand

Olivia Melendez

The horrible tragedy that occurred on September 11, 2001, has affected me in ways that I still don't understand. So many innocent people lost their lives; so many lost loved ones. Many hearts were broken that day, including mine.

I was at school when the terrorist attacks happened. I was terrified that my school would be the next to be hit. All I could think about was how to get out of school and get home. I asked to be excused so I could get

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in touch with my mother; I found myself crying as I left the room. I asked my mom to pick me up but she told me to stay in school because she was at her job which was located on 14th Street in lower Manhattan. I was worried, but I agreed. I told her, "I hope you get home safe." Thinking about my mother helped me relax. It felt like all the muscles that surrounded my heart had let go of their tight grip. I could breathe again. It made me feel so free.

However, that feeling did not last. I had difficulty sleeping. I kept waking up in the

middle of the night from images of the towers falling and people jumping out of the smoky, burning windows. It felt so real that I didn't want to fall back asleep, which meant I was tired in the mornings. The devastating days turned into weeks. Eventually I slept. Other behaviors changed too. I remember riding the bus

more frequently; it just felt safer than the subway. I wanted to be above ground not underground.

Ten years ago, I was 14 years old. I was a freshman at South Bronx High School. I couldn't believe the things I was hearing about my country. I remember trying to believe all the trouble was over; the terrorists came and left; enough was enough. But as my days went on and I continued with my regular routine as a child, I could see and feel that the events of 9-11 weren't quite over. I realized they might not ever be over. As a child, I wanted to believe that it was all over, but I was quickly becoming an adult. I want to understand how the events affected me and my world, but I haven't yet.

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For Discussion

Talk about the ways the author was affected by 9/11.

How did you respond to 9/11 as a child (or however old you were 10 years ago)?

Do you agree or disagree with the author when she says, "I realized [that the events of 9/11] might not ever be over." Why?

Read more about the ripple effects of 9/11 in Issue #33 of *The Change Agent*.

Olivia Melendez is a student at the Adult Learning Center Mid-Manhattan: School 5. She was raised in the Bronx and is actively pursuing her GED. She enjoys writing in her free time. She feels that it is a way to express herself and to keep herself focused. When she was little, she used to write plays.



