

My Recognition -- Nyla Sharif

An emotionally overwhelming experience. The Roman numerals stood strong, but the emotions were delicate. The Newton 9-11 memorial inflicts a sense of pain and remorse in its audience. When visiting the memorial I was unexpectedly overtaken by a plethora of emotions. I am sixteen years old and I was not alive during the Terrorist Attacks; I did not have first-hand experience dealing with 9-11. I have educated myself with news articles and stories from my parents. Seeing the sadness on my parent's faces while recalling their fear on September 11, 2001, was difficult. I come from a Muslim family. For many years my family and I were seen as a threat. In elementary school I was told I could be the next terrorist and how I must have similar morals as the 9-11 hijackers. Visiting the memorial allowed me to find comfort in my identity as a young Muslim woman; it allowed me to let go of the shame I felt sitting in my fifth grade classroom as the social studies teacher talked about terrorism, and I made heads turn. For me, it was not the trip to the memorial, but it was standing there as I let minutes pass by. Organically, my head formed an opinion about what the 9-11 attacks meant to me, how it affected me, and how this memorial spoke to me in a way a news article could not. The unimaginable amount of terror and pain the victims and their families had to go through are unfathomable for someone in my position. However, visiting the memorial gave me a sense of closure to what I imagined the impact of the attacks to be like.

This memorial acts as a source of information, but is an expression of art open to interpretation. On the granite are engravings of the victims' names, letting them live forever. I connect to this memorial on a personal level. While I did not have a direct relationship with Rahma Salie, I was close to many members of her family. Ironically, indirect interactions can have more meaning than direct communication; you have the ability to hear stories and anecdotes of one's life from a loving perspective. It was impactful for me to see that there were people who valued her presence. I did Rhythmic Gymnastics for ten years, and for seven of those years, my coach was Rahma Salie's sister-in-law. I had a passion for the sport and had a special relationship with my coach. Sometimes, it can be hard to self-reflect to see how much someone's death impacted us. But, being on the outside, we learn about the individual who passed through others' reactions. The way one copes and deals with death is individual, but someone's physical and emotional response can directly reflect a moment or memory shared between the victim and a loved one; this is something I, as an outsider to this situation, would not be able to have without an indirect connection.

