

VIEWPOINTS

If I knew then ...

"If I knew then what I know now ..."

That thought ran through my mind as I took time Tuesday, on the 11th anniversary of the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks, to visit history.

I dug in my files to find a column I wrote three weeks after the attack, in which I pretty much compelled everyone to simply snap out of it.

We, collectively, were in a bit of a blue funk at the time. We had suffered greatly as a nation, and it showed. Candlelight vigils were held before the beginning of USD football games.

Businesses in just about every community rearranged the lettering of their roadside signs to express blessings to troops and sympathy to those who lost their lives on Sept. 11.

I reasoned that it was time to hold our chins up and press on. At the time, I believed our military operation in Afghanistan would be much like the first Gulf War. Powerful. And brief.

If I had known then what I know now – that today, 11 years later, we'd still be waging war "over there," I wouldn't have been so flippant in my discounting of the negative emotions that seemed so dominant at that time.

Maybe 11 years ago I was simply tired of the constant expressions of sadness. But my attempt to try to get people to look forward instead of back three weeks after the attack really falls flat.

I read what I wrote, and my own words can't sway me. Not now. Not after what I know today that I didn't know 11 years ago.

I didn't know we'd be there so long.

I didn't know the war would cost over a trillion dollars. And that generations of Americans would be faced with paying that bill.

I didn't know that we'd find ourselves engaged in a second war in Iraq that thankfully now appears to be over.

I didn't know it would hit so close to home. I didn't know that so many families in the Vermillion region and throughout South Dakota would be affected. I didn't think of the spouses and kids who would soon be counting the days until they would again be reunited with husbands, wives, mothers and fathers who were deployed overseas.

It simply didn't sink in at the time. I didn't realize that Sept. 11, 2001 was just the

beginning of America's sacrifice of not simply resources, but also something much more precious – the lives of our fellow citizens.

Among the 26 South Dakotans lost in battle in Afghanistan and Iraq are Army Spc. Dennis G. Jensen, 21, of Vermillion; Army Spc.

Allen D. Kokesh Jr., 21, and Army Staff Sgt. Daniel M. Cuka, 27, both of Yankton; and Army Sgt. 1st Class Richard L. Schild, 40, of Tabor.

I didn't know South Dakota Army National Guardsman Sgt. Corey Briest, who I watched happily receive his diploma when he graduated from Vermillion

High School, would have his life profoundly changed after nearly being killed while participating in Operation Iraqi Freedom.

I can only conclude that 11 years ago, I didn't know just how painful war can be. Today, I, just like you, am older. And hopefully a bit wiser, thanks to lessons learned the hard way. Stuff happens in the course of day-to-day life, some of it good, some of it horrible.

That stuff teaches you the things you now know that you wish you knew 11 years ago. Of just how painful loss and sacrifice can be. And how it lingers so. Of the incredible debt that we freedom-loving people owe to not just past generations, but also our own and those younger than us, whose long, bright futures were cut short.

And how the only normal response to all of that is a profound sense of gratitude.

Abraham Lincoln, who knew quite a bit about both the necessity and pain of war, penned letters of sympathy to the families of fallen Union troops. In May of 1861, in a letter to the grieving Ephraim D. and Phoebe Ellsworth, he wrote, "In the untimely loss of your noble son, our affliction here, is scarcely less than your own. So much of promised usefulness to one's country, and of bright hopes for one's self and friends, have rarely been so suddenly dashed, as in his fall."

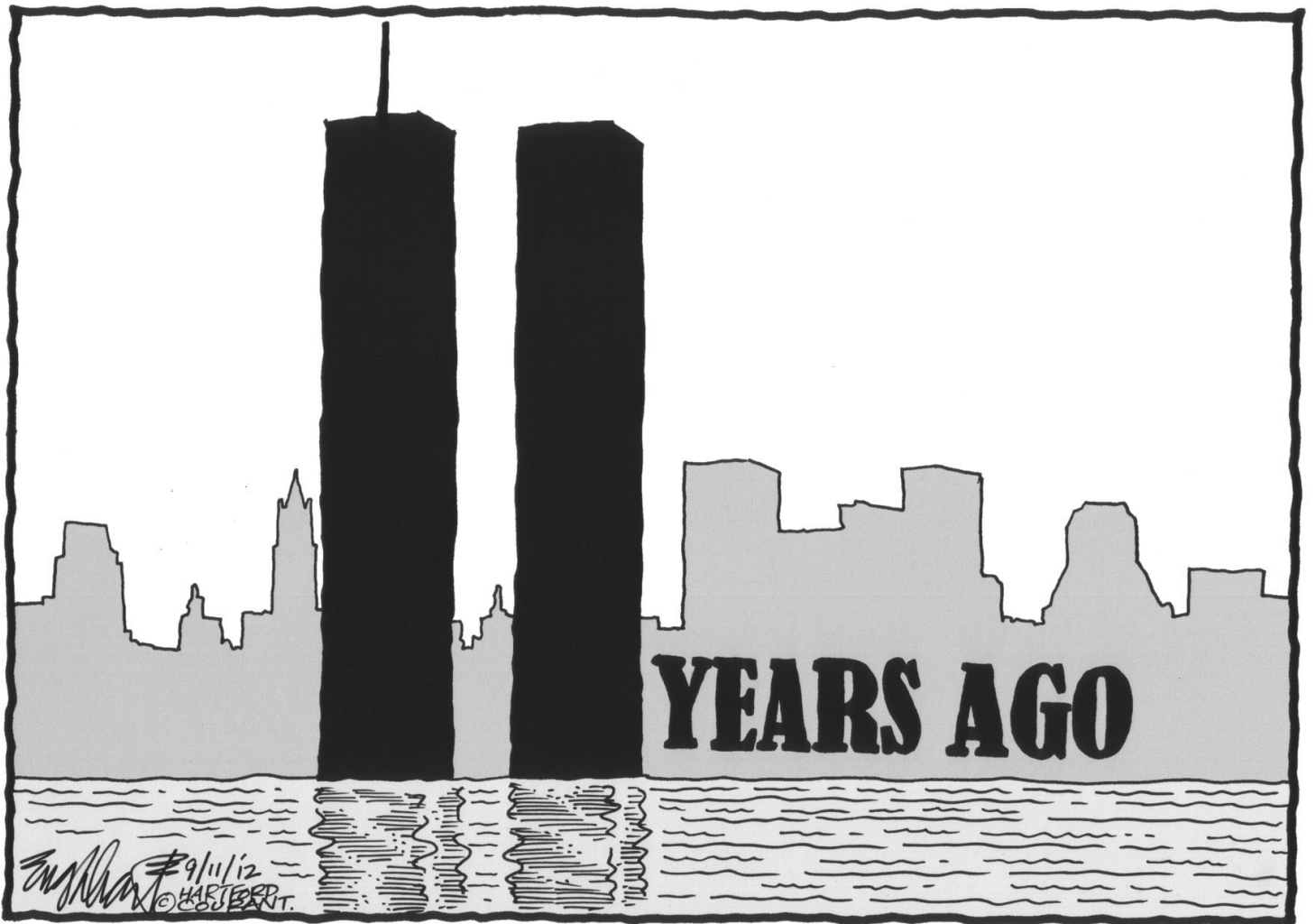
So many lives were dashed in a matter of a few short hours in the morning of Sept. 11, 2001. Why did I think there wouldn't be much American bloodshed following that?

"If I knew then what I know now ..."

BETWEEN THE LINES



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One big happy family

"Football is like life; it requires perseverance, self-denial, hard work sacrifice, dedication and respect for authority." – Vince Lombardi

These days, more women are watching NFL football and anecdotally, it's not because we like watching a bunch of grown men in tight pants. After all, the first female officiated an NFL game this season.

Even though I'm not quite there yet, I think I'm starting to get it. I still can't see myself spending three hours planted on the couch on a perfectly good Sunday afternoon.

Humor columnist Erma Bombeck once said, "If a man watches three football games in a row, he should be declared legally dead." Until now, I would have totally agreed.

To provide some perspective, I have viewed pro-football as nothing but a racket, big business gone wild.

While I still believe that the movers and shakers of the sport, AKA owners and their underlings, possess little care, if any, for faithful fans who devotedly fork out lots of hard-earned dough to purchase stadium seats, watch games live on Direct TV, gamble and purchase team-branded apparel and paraphernalia, I'm starting to see the light at the end of the huddle.

Otherwise, how else would you explain my sudden poetic visualizations of football as allegory for life in general?

For instance, the other night when my husband was flipping through the channels, he landed on the premiere game of the brand new season between the Dallas Cowboys and the New York Giants.

When seven offensive players assembled on the line of scrimmage with four more lined up behind them, all I could see was a devoted family. I don't know, maybe from Vermillion, Minn., preparing to defend, protect and advance their kindred spirits to their destination, Vermillion, S.D. Or in

football terms, by running or passing the ball over the goal line.

I can't be that far off considering George Will once said, "Football combines two of the worst things in American life: violence punctuated by committee meetings."

Take your average offensive team. The center compares to the quintessential dad. He thoughtfully puts the ball in play by snapping it to the quarterback, who could be considered like the mom, just don't tell Tim Tebow. Like most moms everywhere,

quarterbacks encourage, mentor and nurture their offense.

Let's break it down further. Offensive guards and tackles are similar to big brothers and big sisters. Irritating at time, but they always have your back. Dan Birdwell put it this way: "[They] play this game like somebody just hit your mother with a two-by-four."

Tight ends catch passes or block. Like dear aunts and uncles who open doors of opportunities for us, often splurging over their little darlings, they enhance the offense.

Wide receivers are the family mascots, catching passes and spending the entire game trying to get free from defensive backs, thieves by any other name. They're cute, fast and lovable.

Running backs resemble little brothers and sisters with attitude. Rug rats, every last one, making faces, running away and talking back. I'd say spoiled rotten.

Now the defensive team resembles my Italian family. They're so hyperactive; they make attention deficit disorder look normal. Emotional! Oh, don't get me

started.

Linebackers are my kind of people. They do more than anybody else, multitasking just like my grandmother, who raised 10 children, baked her bread, hand scrubbed clothes and floors, harvested her own food. The list is long.

Not quite family, Cornerbacks are hovering neighbors, keeping watch, knocking down passes and taking on wide receivers.

Both free and strong safeties, like distant neighbors at the far end of the block, are the final line of defense, stopping long passes and runs. Nothing gets by them.

Special teams, called in for special plays, are more like third or fourth cousins, seldom seen and you may or may not know their names.

When I consider football these days, I don't shake my head like I used to. Now, I cast empathetic glances toward all the energy in the stands and on couches, on the fields and at the sidelines.

Vince Lombardi summarized, "Individual commitment to a group effort is what makes a team work, a company work, a society work, a civilization work," and might I add a family work.

I excitedly shared my new found awareness and appreciation with my husband, an avid and lifelong football fan, who looked like a deer caught in headlights and mumbled something about "What are you trying to say? And, who's the sister?"

I think he gets it!

2012 © Copyright Paula Damon. A resident of Southeast South Dakota, Paula Bosco Damon is a national award-winning columnist. Her writing has won first-place in competitions of the National Federation of Press Women, South Dakota Press Women and Iowa Press Women. In the 2009, 2010 and 2011 South Dakota Press Women Communications Contests, her columns have earned eight first-place awards. To contact Paula, email boscodamon.paula@gmail.com, follow her blog at my-story-your-story.blogspot.com and find her on FaceBook.

Guest Commentary:

Remembering 9/11...11 years later

Thune statement on anniversary of September 11th attacks

WASHINGTON, D.C.—U.S. Senator John Thune (R-S.D.), Chairman of the Senate Republican Conference, released the following statement today regarding the 11th anniversary of the September 11, 2001, attacks on the Pentagon, the World Trade Center, and Flight 93 that crashed in Pennsylvania after heroic actions by passengers:

"Today marks 11 years since the terrorist attacks on the Pentagon, the World Trade Center, and Flight 93, and we pause to remember the lives of the nearly 3,000 men and women who were tragically taken from their loved ones by terrorists determined to destroy our nation and our way of life. In the midst of unspeakable heartbreak, our country watched as neighbors banded together in spite of tremendous loss, and everyday heroes reminded us that freedom and liberty are gifts that must always be protected. I join all Americans today in expressing my gratitude for the sacrifice of the many men and women who continue to defend these freedoms. Despite the efforts of those who try to harm us, we remain a free people united in protecting and preserving a stronger America for generations to come."

U.S. Senator Tim Johnson (D-SD)

Eleven years ago, America endured a tragedy that shook our country to its core. I remember how vulnerable we felt as a nation after the attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon. It was a challenging time for us, but we came together as a nation and supported each other.

As I think back on that day 11 years ago, I am so thankful for the collaborative work by our military and intelligence agencies since then to prevent another major attack on the United States.

I remember driving to the

office on Sept. 11, 2001, and hearing that a plane had crashed into the World Trade Center. When I arrived at the office, I learned a second plane had crashed into the World Trade Center and that a third had crashed into the Pentagon. A fourth plane was still missing. I learned later it crashed into a field in Pennsylvania before the terrorists could reach their intended target thanks to the heroism of the passengers on board.

That we were under attack by terrorists was obvious.

I remember the disbelief and the heartache. My heart and

prayers still go out to all the families of those who lost their lives in the Pentagon, in Pennsylvania and the World Trade Center.

The last 11 years have been a time of recovery and resurgence. The passage of time has revealed the strength that bonds Americans together and shows to the world the resilience of our democracy.

Since that day, the United States has worked tirelessly to combat terrorism. Last year, we achieved a significant victory in bringing Osama bin Laden to justice. Thanks to the work of our military and intelligence

community, including the more than 5,000 South Dakotans who served in Iraq and Afghanistan, our country is stronger and better protected. Our efforts have been successful, but we need to stay vigilant as the threat of terrorism remains.

If you are looking to volunteer your time to honor our heroes this Sept. 11, consider reaching out to a local charity or create your own project in your neighborhood. You can also visit www.Serve.gov to find service projects in your community.

Together, let us remember this day and all of the sacrifices that have been made to keep us safe.

Rep. Noem statement on anniversary of September 11, 2001

Washington, D.C. – Rep. Noem today issued the following statement on the anniversary of the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks:

"September 11, 2001 is a day we will never forget. Eleven years ago, nearly 3,000 Americans were killed in a devastating act of terror that left thousands of children without parents and countless Americans without a son, daughter, sister, brother, best friend or spouse. While the horror of that day remains imprinted in our minds, so too does America's response. What the terrorists didn't count on was the resilient spirit of the American people. In South Dakota, communities and families banded together to pray and offer support to our fallen fellow Americans and their loved ones. Brave men and women from South Dakota and across the country answered the call and deployed thousands of miles away to defend our way of life. Today is a day to honor the memory of those who were lost on that horrible day, and to pay a tribute to all who have fallen fighting for our country ever since. September 11th is a reminder of who we lost, but also a reminder of all we have to defend. I hope every South Dakotan will take a moment to reflect and remember today."

SEND LETTERS TO THE EDITOR TO
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