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Voices of Linfield

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Remembering 9/11

How a simple video assignment turned into so much more

By Mike Lempner, video producer



A MOMENT IN TIME: Linfield's video producer, Mike Lempner, watches "Remembering 9/11" on the Maxwell Field video screen at halftime of the Sept. 11, 2021, football game.

From time to time, a moment sneaks up on you that you didn't see coming. For me, September 11, 2021, was one of those times.

The Linfield football team was playing its first game in almost two years. I was on the Maxwell Field sideline with a camera, basking in a warm, early fall day and listening to the excited buzz of more than 2,500 fans in the stadium. Then, in an instant, I was utterly alone.

A video I had spent weeks shooting and editing started to play on the stadium's massive new digital display. "Remembering 9/11" was created as a tribute to the 20-year anniversary of September 11, 2001, and featured members of the Linfield community recounting their memories of that tragic and historic day.

I had created the video. I knew every second, including the hours on the cutting-room floor. Honestly, I should have been the one person who wasn't moved by anything it contained.

But seeing the commemoration that way, larger than life, with the sights and sounds of 9/11 so ingrained in my head,

the game-day environment faded into the background. A light shiver ran down my spine, a lump formed in my throat, and in an instant, all the memories of where I was and what I was thinking when the events of 9/11 took place flowed through me. I watched, transfixed, as I drifted off to the words spoken by the individuals I interviewed.

Remembering the moments of Sept. 11

"We were advised by our school not to go anywhere or do anything, and if, for any reason, we had to leave our residences that we should not under any circumstances wear anything with American logos," Kitri (Culbertson) McGuire '04 remembered. "We were told to tell people that we were Australian."

McGuire was studying abroad in Austria, one of 50 Linfield students located in other countries in September 2001. When she learned of the 9/11 attacks, McGuire wondered if she would "ever be able to go home again."

"A lot of people were looking at Americans and the U.S. as a threat, or as very entitled people," remembered fellow student Donna Montoya '04, who was studying abroad in Spain. "Those were very scary moments."

Twenty years later, my job was to capture stories like these and weave them into a short video to show at the football game. After hearing these personal and emotional accounts, it quickly felt bigger than the two-minute tribute. What started as a short project and a couple of interviews rapidly expanded. I wanted to hear from those living on the East and West Coasts, those studying abroad and at Ground Zero, as well as those who were working at or attending Linfield at the time. I wanted to save these memories, in full, for future students and historians.

By game day, I had interviewed 13 people and my "quick video" had turned into an oral history project for the university's archives. Others have come forward offering their memories since then, and I expect this to continue for quite some time.

Sharing the stories of the Linfield community

As I watched "Remembering 9/11," everything that has happened in the past 20 years washed over me. Eventually, I came back to this moment and resumed my work.

But that moment on the sidelines has stayed with me, just as the unfortunate events of 9/11 are still with most of us who lived through them.

It's a day that happened before many of our current Linfield students were even born. It's something in their history books. But not for those of us who lived it. For us, it feels in some ways like it's still happening.

"Where were you when the towers went down?" is not a question any of us struggles to remember. It's the forgetting part that is hard. And I suppose, with these interviews stored forever in the Linfield archives, future generations won't forget now, either.