

The Rev. Douglas Morgan Strong
"A Strong Opinion"
Community Unitarian Universalist Church
Plano, TX
Sept. 30, 2001

The attacks of September 11th are incredibly difficult for me to process in my mind and my heart. I find myself being struck with overwhelming grief and anger; pain and sorrow; fear and agony. Sadness hits me again and again. Like most of you, I'm striving to get my life back to normal - but little things seem to trigger strong emotional reactions.

I realize this is not unusual, but I am surprised at how difficult it is to move on.

Last week I flew to Rochester New York and then drove to Boston taking back roads through the Berkshire Mountains in order to enjoy a New England autumn. I find being surrounded by nature is one way I have of centering my emotions and myself. The colors were just starting to change - an event that always brings me comfort. But in the midst of the beauty tears came - triggered by things that confused me. Hundred of American flags hanging from windows in every small town; fire fighters standing in intersections collecting money; a school bus full of kids singing "God Bless America" on their way to school never would have reduced me to tears before.

The mayor of Boston was advised that a potential attack against the city was a possible sometime while I was in Boston. The UU headquarters are immediately next door to the State House which gave me great pause during the four day meeting and frankly made it a task to stay focused on our work (planning next summer's General Assembly in Quebec City).

A high school buddy sent me an email asking me if I'd seen this week's New Yorker cover. He and I used to talk about the clever covers the magazine creates week after week -reflecting unique aspects of life in the Big Apple. This week's cover is completely black. There is no photograph, no sketch - nothings save the words "September 11, 2001" in red block letters run up the spine of the publication. I looked at the cover and again was overwhelmed with grief.

Often after a tragedy we are urged to move on in our lives - to move forward. It isn't easy this time, the loss is horrific, the pain is overwhelming, and the future frightening.

Deep in my heart I pray that our future won't be war. For a while I found myself thinking that the renewed patriotism was a way for us to justify going to war. Driving through New England helped me realize flags and songs and posters and red/white/blue ribbons aren't part of a master plan to get us to support war, but rather a way for us to process and deal with the tragedy.

We must, in my view, find ways for humanity to react without declaring war, just as we must not promote hate against any specific group of people or religion.

The sign I put outside our church "Stop Acts of Hate" was done to help remind us that one way we are going to get through the process of healing is to love and affirm and respect and support one another - especially those who look, act, speak, think, and worship differently.

In these hard times, I am reminded that we need one to help us better cope. We need one another to provide hugs and heroes. We need one another to guide us and remind us that we will heal and be strong.

We also need to let our feelings flow freely - to talk, to listen, to cry, and to love. Times of crises cry out for us to be in communion with one another, and we are such a community.

Be gentle friends - our world is bruised and so are we.

See you in church.