

**VOICES 22<sup>nd</sup> Anniversary Always Remember Gala  
November 9, 2023**

**2023 Legacy Award  
Remarks by Alice Greenwald**

Well, that was excellent, and unexpected. And I have to say, first of all, being in a room with so many of my colleagues, and friends and people that I have come to know, over the years to receive a Legacy Award. It's never one person's achievement. And I just want to take a moment and ask everyone in the room who is on the staff of the 911 Memorial and Museum who made this happen, who allowed me to succeed beyond my wildest expectations, please stand because you deserve the accolades.

I could not have done it without any of you. And before I go to my remarks, I do want to just reflect for a moment on the moment we're in which is so deeply disheartening and tragic. I have spent the last several weeks every Friday morning at six o'clock in the morning on a call with a group of people in Israel who were from one of the kibbutzim that was attacked on October 7. And the people on this call are not just Jews, they're not just Israeli Jews, they're Israeli Arabs as well. People who, before October 7, were working diligently to create communication across the border.

And we're in conversation with Gazans on a regular basis, just to share just to support one another to build bridges. And some of these people are now living in a lot in a hotel, because they cannot go back to their kibbutz and they don't know how long they'll be there. They are in, in their own way refugees at the moment. And one of them said last week, I just want to go home. But the person who has most affected me on these calls is an Israeli Arab woman. And she wrote recently that even those of us who were not injured *are* injured.

And I think that's why VOICES is so important, because it always recognizes the injuries that perhaps you don't see, or don't expect. And you are there for the people who need to be hugged and cared for and guided, and it is a gift. And I just want to applaud everything that Mary and Frank and the entire organization does, because it's absolutely critical.

So let me first thank Mary and Frank, and the entire VOICES family for this incredibly meaningful honor. And my heartfelt congratulations to Governor Tom Kean, Congressman Lee Hamilton and his son Doug, who is here with him on his behalf, on their awards this evening, which are so deserved.

As Mary mentioned, my journey with Mary and Frank goes back a long way to when I first arrived in New York in 2006, to begin the work of planning the 9/11 Memorial Museum. It was evident from day one, that Frank was exceedingly strategic. And Mary was well, a force of nature. We became great partners and along the way, great friends.

And this gala has *always* been my favorite event of the year – not only because it provides support for an invaluable organization with a great team doing God’s work, but because in 2009, Mary invited me to speak about the evolving plans for the museum, sandwiching me in between Bill Clinton and Jon Bon Jovi. So, she had *me* open for Bon Jovi! Now who else in the world could make *that* happen?

Seriously, what brought us into each other’s orbit was a commitment to remembrance. We supported each other’s work to build out the 9/11 living memorial, and to develop the *In Memoriam* exhibition at the museum. Both projects dedicated to restoring humanity to individuals to often reduced to their involuntary status as victims, or as part of an aggregate number of casualties of an unfathomable terrorist attack.

Our goal with the memorial exhibit was to put a face to every name. But as Mary mentioned, after years of searching, there was still one photo missing for a man named Antonio Dorsey Pratt, who had worked in the Cantor Fitzgerald cafeteria, high up in the north tower.

Barely two months before my retirement, I got a call from Mary. She had found a photo of Mr. Pratt, recently donated to the Living Memorial Archive. And with that, I could leave my position knowing that our promise had been kept.

All museums invite an encounter with authenticity, whether in the form of a photographic portrait, or works of art or archaeological shards or historical documents. And that encounter provokes fundamental questions. *Who are we? What is the human experience?*

Memorial museums focus these very same questions in the context of the most horrific moments of human experience. But the encounter provided by memorial museums is not solely with the stuff. Memorial museums accentuate the void. The encounter they facilitate, is with *absence*.

Typically, memorial museums tell the stories of traumatic events involving mass loss of life. They are meant as testimony, as physical witness to the unimaginable. They are also meant to personalize the anonymity that comes with mass casualty events – to convert the abstraction of numbers into real people with lives, emotions, dreams and aspirations, hurts and frustrations, achievements and failures, families and friendships that are familiar to all of us.

When you accentuate the humanity of the people killed, as well as those most closely affected – survivors, family members, neighbors, first responders – it prompts people to think: *“These people were just like me. What happened to them could have happened to me. What happened is unacceptable.”*

And that’s the point – memorial museums are places that can activate moral conscience rooted in empathy – a recognition of what connects us, rather than what divides us.

Memorial museums also create a space to contain loss, so that we can, both individually and collectively, move forward beyond otherwise incapacitating grief.

At Ground Zero, the impulse to commemorate and the imperative to rebuild, were both appropriate responses to the devastation in lower Manhattan. But was it *possible* to realize both in the same space of profound destruction and loss? Wouldn’t commercial redevelopment be irreverent, at a place where so many had been killed? Wouldn’t an emphasis on

commemoration and on the dead, prevent the once vibrant place of commerce, residence and culture from renewing itself... from going forward?

Because of what happened at Ground Zero, the site had been transformed into, as Mary said, sacred ground. And what sacred *literally* means is set apart, separate, distinct. The sanctity of this place had to be acknowledged, and the void created by the enormity of the loss, had to be recognized. There needed to be space distinct from the rest of what would be rebuilt at the site. But precisely because it *was* a redevelopment site, renewal and remembrance would coexist. In fact, they had to.

The lesson of Ground Zero is somewhat counter intuitive. In order to achieve renewal, space has to be set aside for remembrance, because in a place of traumatic violence, you cannot ignore what happened, or the trauma remains unresolved. At Ground Zero, there had to be a designated place to acknowledge the loss, in order for redevelopment to succeed, and the 9/11 Memorial and the museum did just that. Providing that space in which to place our grief so that we – as individuals and as a family, as a city, a nation, and a global community – could move forward in our lives.

But what is the point of moving forward if we learn nothing from loss? How can these two functions of memorial museums – securing a place for grief and activating moral conscience through empathy – change the world for the better? As we've experienced recently, with the horrific and heartbreaking events in Israel and Gaza, the world lurches from one experience of atrocity or natural disaster to another – from one profound loss to another profound loss. And we move from shock, to outrage, and ultimately to numbness.

In the aftermath of 9/11, for all too brief a time, we moved from shock to empathy. And if you were in New York City at that time, you know what I'm talking about. Strangers hugged strangers. We stopped seeing the *otherness* of people. We understood we were all in this together.

Now we live in a time of extreme polarization. We are encouraged by our choice of news programs and social media to see mostly the *otherness* of people – people who don't think like us, who don't vote like us, who don't look like us who don't behave like us. It is a time of fracture exacerbated by a deficit of empathy.

And so, a few weeks ago, when I read the words of a mayor in the little village of Londorf, Germany, I took note, at one time, Jews represented 10% of the population in Londorf. By May 1945, only one Jewish woman from that village had survived the Holocaust. After the war, the community erected a monument for its residents who had died, but not a single Jewish citizen was listed. As Mayor Langecker observed and I quote, “the cloak of silence was laid over history.”

But a class photo from 1934 changed everything for him. In the picture is seven-year-old Ruth Wertheim who – a mere 11 years later – would alone return from Auschwitz to Londorf. Pictured in the same row is Mayor Langecker's grandmother. The history of the Londorf Jews he affirmed, is also part of *my own* family history.

Now, it was personal. And just as the photo of Antonio Dorsey Pratt helped us to convey the full range of humanity killed on 9/11, a school photo of his grandmother's classmate, compelled Mayor Langecker to face history as it happened, not as he and his community might have preferred to remember it – or more precisely, to forget.

Eighty years to the day, the Jewish residents of Londorf were deported on September 14, 2022. The community dedicated a memorial to the Londorf Jewish families decimated by the Holocaust. And that memorial, like VOICES 9/11 Living Memorial, and like the 9/11 Memorial and Museum – is a presence in their midst, a container of history, and acknowledgement of irretrievable loss, and a prompt to empathy... a reminder that these people were friends and neighbors and classmates... people just like us.

At its core, the Londorf Memorial – like all memorials and all memorial museums – contains a question. *How could this have happened?*

In his remarks, the mayor explains, that the German word for “responsibility” is “Verantwortung” which contains within it the word “Antwort,” which means “answer.”

“We can only give the right answer.” he tells us “if we are fully informed about what has been before.”

This truth is what makes Voices Center for Resilience, so effective and so necessary. Mary and Frank and Beverly Eckert (of blessed memory) and the other members of the Family Steering Committee who advocated forcefully and relentlessly for creation of the 9/11 Commission; my fellow honoree this evening Governor Kean, his co-chair Lee Hamilton, and the many people who contributed to the Commission report; the Coalition of 9/11 Families and the members of the Family Advisory Committee who shared their hopes and dreams, their anxieties and their wisdom in helping us shape the 9/11 Memorial Museum; VOICES continuing advocacy to secure passage of the Justice Against Sponsors of Terrorism Act, and to support legislation providing health care and compensation for 9/11 responders and survivors... *these* are case studies in what taking responsibility looks like.

The stakes could not be higher.

“Without responsibility, there is no humanity,” the mayor of Longdorf warned, adding: “Our answers determine the path to the future.”

Thank you.