

## Reality

my reading (with Michael Nigro) at the  
9/11 Ceremony at John Jay

9-11-2017

### **Sara reads**

I wasn't in New York during the 9/11 attacks. I was on a farm in Virginia, picking grapes with my small children. But juxtaposed with the memory of that idyllic, sunny morning is always darkness and ash and death.

At that time, I didn't know Captain Michael Nigro of the Fire Department of New York, or the many others like him who responded to the crisis. But years later, I met Captain Mike when he enrolled at John Jay as a nontraditional student. In one of my writing classes, Michael began a memoir, and he completed his degree at John Jay last year with a 3.9 GPA.

Before I read my prose poem, I want Michael to share a few words about his experiences with the ongoing impacts of 9/11.

### **Michael reads**

Although the attack is 16 years in our collective past, it still has a profound, life-changing effect. For so many of us, the actual event and the after-effects have never ended.

Just a few months ago we buried Ray Pfeifer, a 9/11 firefighter who lost almost his entire company. Although he suffered from debilitating cancer, he still fought down in Washington D.C. to gain health benefits for all responders. A few years ago my firehouse lost a guy to suicide who was a 9/11 responder. And many of my coworkers are out of the job for a variety of medical problems, mostly respiratory. . . Their lives are forever changed.

The warped ideology that spewed such violence then continues to affect the world, as recent events in England, France, and the Middle East will attest to. Every subsequent attack brings back sad memories of that terrible day.

I am all for literature and poetry that offers hope. I don't know where to find those words, for I am not a poet. But, Sara, maybe I can help you to help me—and all of us—find the words that start the healing.

**Sara reads**

My Prose Poem  
titled

Reality

I am pulled from light and life—from songs that I can barely hear but long to know by heart, and stars that are alive and can speak if I could just understand the language, and trees that whisper of the glory of God if I would but listen, and galaxies that explain mysteries if only I were not too small to learn.

I am pulled from light and life back into reality—the meaninglessness of the passionless explosions of bombs that kill children, of the monotonous exercise of setting a place at the table for one who never really comes home, of the darkness of another day of deferred hope.

But the normalcy of dishes and laundry, the laughing faces of my children, the nudge of the dog wanting to be scratched between her ears—these remind me that this existence, too, is reality.

All of it is—the stars that speak, the bombs that kill, the children that laugh—climaxing, not to any comprehension—but to belief—belief that all will be well despite the ugliness and ache around me.

And I find that I must pass gracefully between the mysteries of the galaxies and the routine of the laundry. And the solidity of one superimposes on the shallowness of the other, so that the killing and the meaninglessness and the darkness all become such a minute part of my universe, that fear and anger or destroyed by joy.

And I hum snatches of that song I can barely hear as I put the plates on the table.