

9/11: Stage becomes a vehicle to share experiences, feelings

Publisher's note: *This is one in a 12-part series running from Sept. 1-12 about how Lake Tahoe is tied to 9/11.*

By Susan Boulanger

On Sept. 11 at 2pm, the LTCC Theatre Arts Department will have a special theatrical presentation to commemorate the 10th anniversary of 9/11. I am excited and grateful that members of various branches of South Lake Tahoe law enforcement and fire departments, as well as several other LTCC staff members, have joined with me to present several events that will follow the play, including a panel discussion, and a special commemoration of the Victims and Heroes of 9/11 at the Ledbetter Terrace. This event will culminate in honoring our present-day heroes in Lake Tahoe – law enforcement, fire, military, and all public safety personnel.

So, the question posed to me was – “Why are you doing this?”

I don't have enough space to fully express my feelings or thoughts, or to describe my need and my joy to use my art to reach out to my community. But I will try to put some of them into words.



From Sept.

1-12, Lake
Tahoe News is
looking at
9/11.

To me, the events of 9/11 were staggeringly horrific. It's 10 years later and I still can't get my mind around it; I still feel for the victims, the heroes, the rescue workers, and all of the families; and a nation that was deeply wounded.

Like so many other people, I wanted so much to go to Ground Zero to help, but that wasn't possible. And what could I have done there to help?

So, I donated what money I could afford. I prayed. I attempted to comfort one of my students who had lost a brother in the World Trade Center. I wept for the victims and was in awe of the heroic efforts of so many people. I tried to comprehend it all. And I felt helpless.

On the 10th anniversary of 9/11 I can do something. I can use my abilities as a theater artist to help this community pay tribute, remember, and hopefully, heal a little.

Some playwrights in the world of theater wrote plays connected to the impact of 9/11. Some of the plays dealt with personal experiences; some were fictional, and some were taken from the real-life experiences of people near Ground Zero. "With Their Eyes – A View From a High School at Ground Zero," edited by Annie Thoms, is a collection of real-life accounts of students and staff members at Stuyvesant High School in the shadows of the towers.

A year after 9/11, a play called "The Guys" by Anne Nelson was performed in New York. Based on a true story, this play deals with a NYC fire captain who lost eight of his men in the towers and now must try to find the words to honor each man's memory. While the world was calling these men "heroes,"

(which, of course, they were), this play reminds us that each of those heroes – everyone who ran into the horror to help – was human, an ordinary person who selflessly gave of themselves to help others.

I had the idea to do this commemoration a number of years ago. I knew that I wanted to do something to mark the 10th anniversary and, as a theater artist, I knew it would have something to do with the stage. When I was hired as the director of theater at Lake Tahoe Community College two years ago, one of my first thoughts was “I will have a place to do this commemoration!”

I started with the idea to do the two-character play, “The Guys,” but once I was at LTCC, I wanted to include more people. That is when I decided to incorporate monologues from several different plays. I now have 18 actors involved.

Some of the play will focus on the immediate experiences of people – what happened at the moment of the attack and directly following. Some of the play will focus on the aftermath.

Most important for me, though, are the parts of the presentation that focus on the people who were the heroes – this presentation speaks directly about the firefighters who were lost, but I look at it as a representation of all of the public safety personnel who were lost that day.

Theater is such a unique medium. The immediacy of it, the live actor/audience give and take, provides an experience that is unlike any other art form. Theater provides a connection for the audience that allows a deeper experience. I am hoping that this piece of theater, and the events that follow, will provide a meaningful experience to the members of our community.

Given the scope of what happened that day – and what has happened since – this project is a small thing.

But, it's something I can do.

Susan Boulanger is director of theater arts at Lake Tahoe Community College in South Lake Tahoe.