

Administration of Barack Obama, 2014

Remarks at the National September 11 Memorial & Museum Dedication Ceremony in New York City

May 15, 2014

Mayor Bloomberg, Governor Cuomo, honored guests, families of the fallen: In those awful moments after the South Tower was hit, some of the injured huddled in the wreckage of the 78th floor. The fires were spreading. The air was filled with smoke. It was dark, and they could barely see. It seemed as if there was no way out.

And then there came a voice: clear, calm, saying he had found the stairs. A young man in his twenties, strong, emerged from the smoke, and over his nose and his mouth, he wore a red handkerchief.

He called for fire extinguishers to fight back the flames. He tended to the wounded. He led those survivors down the stairs to safety and carried a woman on his shoulders down 17 flights. And then, he went back, back up all those flights, then back down again, bringing more wounded to safety. Until that moment when the tower fell.

They didn't know his name. They didn't know where he came from. But they knew their lives had been saved by the man in the red bandana.

Again, Mayor Bloomberg; distinguished guests; Mayor de Blasio; Governors Christie and Cuomo; and the families and survivors of that day; to all those who responded with such courage: On behalf of Michelle and myself and the American people, it is an honor for us to join in your memories. To recall and to reflect. But above all, to reaffirm the true spirit of 9/11—love, compassion, sacrifice—and to enshrine it forever in the heart of our Nation.

Michelle and I just had the opportunity to join with others on a visit with some of the survivors and families, men and women who inspire us all. And we had a chance to visit some of the exhibits. And I think all who come here will find it to be a profound and moving experience.

I want to express our deep gratitude to everybody who was involved in this great undertaking: for bringing us to this day, for giving us this sacred place of healing and of hope.

Here, at this memorial, this museum, we come together. We stand in the footprints of two mighty towers, graced by the rush of eternal waters. We look into the faces of nearly 3,000 innocent souls, men and women and children of every race, every creed, from every corner of the world. And we can touch their names and hear their voices and glimpse the small items that speak to the beauty of their lives: a wedding ring, a dusty helmet, a shining badge.

Here we tell their story so that generations yet unborn will never forget: of coworkers who led others to safety; passengers who stormed a cockpit; our men and women in uniform who rushed into an inferno; our first responders who charged up those stairs; a generation of servicemembers—our 9/11 generation—who have served with honor in more than a decade of war. A nation that stands tall and united and unafraid, because no act of terror can match the strength or the character of our country. Like the great wall and bedrock that embrace us today, nothing can ever break us; nothing can change who we are as Americans.

On that September morning, Alison Crowther lost her son Welles. Months later, she was reading the newspaper, an article about those final minutes in the towers. Survivors recounted

how a young man wearing a red handkerchief had led them to safety. And in that moment, Alison knew. Ever since he was a boy, her son had always carried a red handkerchief. Her son Welles was the man in the red bandana.

Welles was just 24 years old, with a broad smile and a bright future. He worked in the South Tower on the 104th floor. He had a big laugh, a joy of life, and dreams of seeing the world. He worked in finance, but he had also been a volunteer firefighter. And after the planes hit, he put on that bandana and spent his final moments saving others.

Three years ago this month, after our SEALs made sure that justice was done, I came to Ground Zero. And among the families here that day was Alison Crowther. And she told me about Welles and his fearless spirit, and she showed me a handkerchief like the one he wore that morning.

And today, as we saw on our tour, one of his red handkerchiefs is on display in this museum. And from this day forward, all those who come here will have a chance to know the sacrifice of a young man who, like so many, gave his life so others might live.

Those we lost live on in us: in the families who love them still, in the friends who remember them always, and in a nation that will honor them, now and forever.

And today it is my honor to introduce two women forever bound by that day, united in their determination to keep alive the true spirit of 9/11: Welles Crowther's mother Alison and one of those he saved, Ling Young.

NOTE: The President spoke at 10:12 a.m. in front of the World Trade Center slurry wall. In his remarks, he referred to former Mayor Michael R. Bloomberg of New York City; Gov. Andrew M. Cuomo of New York; Gov. Christopher J. Christie of New Jersey; Upper Nyack, NY, resident Alison Crowther; and Monmouth County, NJ, resident Ling Young.

Categories: Addresses and Remarks : National September 11 Memorial & Museum, dedication ceremony in New York City.

Names: Bloomberg, Michael R.; Christie, Christopher J.; Crowther, Alison; Cuomo, Andrew M.; de Blasio, Warren "Bill"; Obama, Michelle; Young, Ling.

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