



Every September 11, I think about Mr. Swiney's science class at Berkeley High School.

I was fourteen years old, sitting in his classroom when the news started making its way through the school. This was before everybody carried the internet around in their pocket, so I don't remember exactly how we first heard. I just remember that at some point Mr. Swiney stopped whatever he was teaching and turned on the television.

It was one of those big, boxy TVs mounted up in the corner of the classroom on a metal bracket. Every school seemed to have them back then.

And we watched.

There are plenty of things from high school I couldn't tell you now if you paid me. I don't remember what we were studying in science that week. I certainly don't remember what homework I had that night.

But I remember that room.

I remember looking up at that television. I remember the confusion. And I remember looking around at kids I had grown up with and realizing that none of us really understood what we were watching.

I'm not sure the adults did either.

I was too young then to understand everything that September 11 would change. At fourteen, your world is still pretty small. Mine was Berkeley High School, ball fields, church, family and friends. New York City felt a long way from home.

That morning it suddenly didn't.

What I remember almost as clearly, though, is what happened afterward.

American flags seemed to appear everywhere.

They were hanging from houses, storefronts and front porches. They were attached to trucks driving down the road. People put them in places where there hadn't been one the week before.

Maybe part of that memory has grown larger with time. Twenty-five years will do that.

But I don't think I've imagined the feeling of those weeks.

People were proud of this country, and they weren't embarrassed to say so.

There was also a sense that, whatever else we disagreed about, there were some things bigger than those disagreements. For a little while, we seemed to remember that we belonged to one another.

I miss some of that.

I don't mean that nostalgically. There was nothing good about what caused it, and I hope my children

never experience a morning like the one we watched unfold from Mr. Swiney's classroom.

But I do hope they know the kind of country I saw in the days that followed.

A country capable of disagreeing without believing everyone on the other side is an enemy. A country where neighbors still matter. A country where people can be genuinely grateful for what we've inherited while understanding that it is ours to take care of for the people coming behind us.

Twenty-five years later, September 11 still takes me back to that classroom.

Fourteen years old. Sitting among people I'd known most of my life. All of us staring up at a television mounted in the corner of the room.

None of us knowing yet how much the world had just changed.

Take care,

Mason

PS: If you ever have questions or need anything, don't hesitate to reach out. I'll be glad to help.