



9/11 fatigue doesn't stop local family from taking on world's problems

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By: Noreen O'Donnell

Elizabeth and Stephen Alderman will miss the ceremony commemorating the World Trade Center attacks tomorrow morning. They will be in a television studio talking about the foundation that they established in their son's memory.

They know that some people need the very public observances that will take place in New York City, but for them grief is private. When they appear on CBS' morning show, it will not be as crying parents in the crowd but as two people dedicated to the work they are doing to honor their son Peter.

The Peter C. Alderman Foundation was among 303 not-for-profit groups created after the Sept. 11 attacks; by last year, it was one of only 28 that remained. Its mission is to help people traumatized by conflict to recover, by training doctors and other health professionals, and by building clinics in such places as Cambodia and Uganda.

The Aldermans, who live in Pound Ridge, say they do not think of their foundation as a Sept. 11 charity, though it began with a desire to maintain Peter Alderman's memory. Many of the groups that have since disbanded focused on problems arising from the attacks, whether caring for children left without a parent or building memorials. Their foundation, the Aldermans say, addresses tragedies that existed long before and, unfortunately, are only getting worse.

Elizabeth Alderman: "Originally this was done to leave a mark for Peter, but it has grown so."

Stephen Alderman, a physician: "We're engaged. The problem is not going away."

Elizabeth Alderman: "We care about these people. If our foundation stopped functioning tomorrow, we believe that we would have left so many people who need our help, need our help desperately, that they would just be left with nothing."

Six years after nearly 3,000 people were killed when two hijacked jetliners crashed into the twin towers, the horror of the terrorist attacks is dimming. The fifth anniversary was the last time the names of the dead will be read aloud in the pit of what had been the World Trade Center. WABC-TV had planned to cut away from tomorrow's observances, reversing itself only after an outcry by some relatives.

The Aldermans say they can appreciate 9/11 fatigue. They feel it themselves.

“If we were fatigued by 9/11 the event, and I think we are even to some extent, the hoopla and goings-on and floating flowers and crying and that kind of stuff, while we can be fatigued by that, we are energized by what’s happened,” Stephen Alderman said. “We feel we’re moving mountains.”

The yearly tributes are appropriate to recognize what were attacks against the U.S., the Aldermans say, but at the same time they are mindful that people across the country have lost children, parents and others whom they loved in terrible circumstances.

“They don’t get the same kind of recognition, they don’t get the same kind of fuss made,” Elizabeth Alderman said. “And so I can understand why many of these people are also tired of hearing this over and over again.”

Her comments are not conjecture, her husband said. People have told them that.

Peter Alderman was attending a conference at Windows on the World, the restaurant at the top of the north tower, when he was killed. He was 25 and an employee of Bloomberg LP.

The foundation was started with the \$1.5 million his family received from the Victim Compensation Fund. His parents; his sister, Jane; and brother, Jeffrey, are among its directors, and Jane Alderman returned to graduate school to become its executive director. Its yearly budget is about \$240,000.

The problem the Aldermans have taken on is enormous. One billion people, a sixth of the world’s population, have been subjected to torture or mass violence through civil war, ethnic cleansing or genocide, they write. The victims frequently struggle with depression and other aftereffects that keep them from working or caring for their families.

So in partnership with the Harvard Program in Refuge Trauma, the foundation has created what is called a master class. So far it has trained 35 doctors to treat victims when they return home. Two of these doctors were featured in this column at the beginning of the year - Dr. Davis Kashaka Karegeya, the executive director in Rwanda of a group called Forum of Activists Against Torture, and Dr. Yousif Talia, an Iraqi psychiatrist. Karegeya continues his work in Kigali, the capital of Rwanda; Talia had to leave Iraq because of threats against physicians and Christians. He has received asylum in the United States and hopes to bring his family here from Amman, Jordan.

A second prong of the foundation’s focus is mental-health clinics. Two in Cambodia and now the first of three planned for Uganda are operating. A second in Uganda should open in six to eight months, Elizabeth Alderman said.

The Aldermans say they will never recover from their son’s death. They are consumed by the foundation’s work. There are no days off for them.

“We are working harder and longer hours than ever,” Stephen Alderman said. “For us, yes, we were born of 9/11. But we are not a 9/11 organization. We’re no longer 9/11. We outgrew it somehow when the world became a more dangerous place.”