



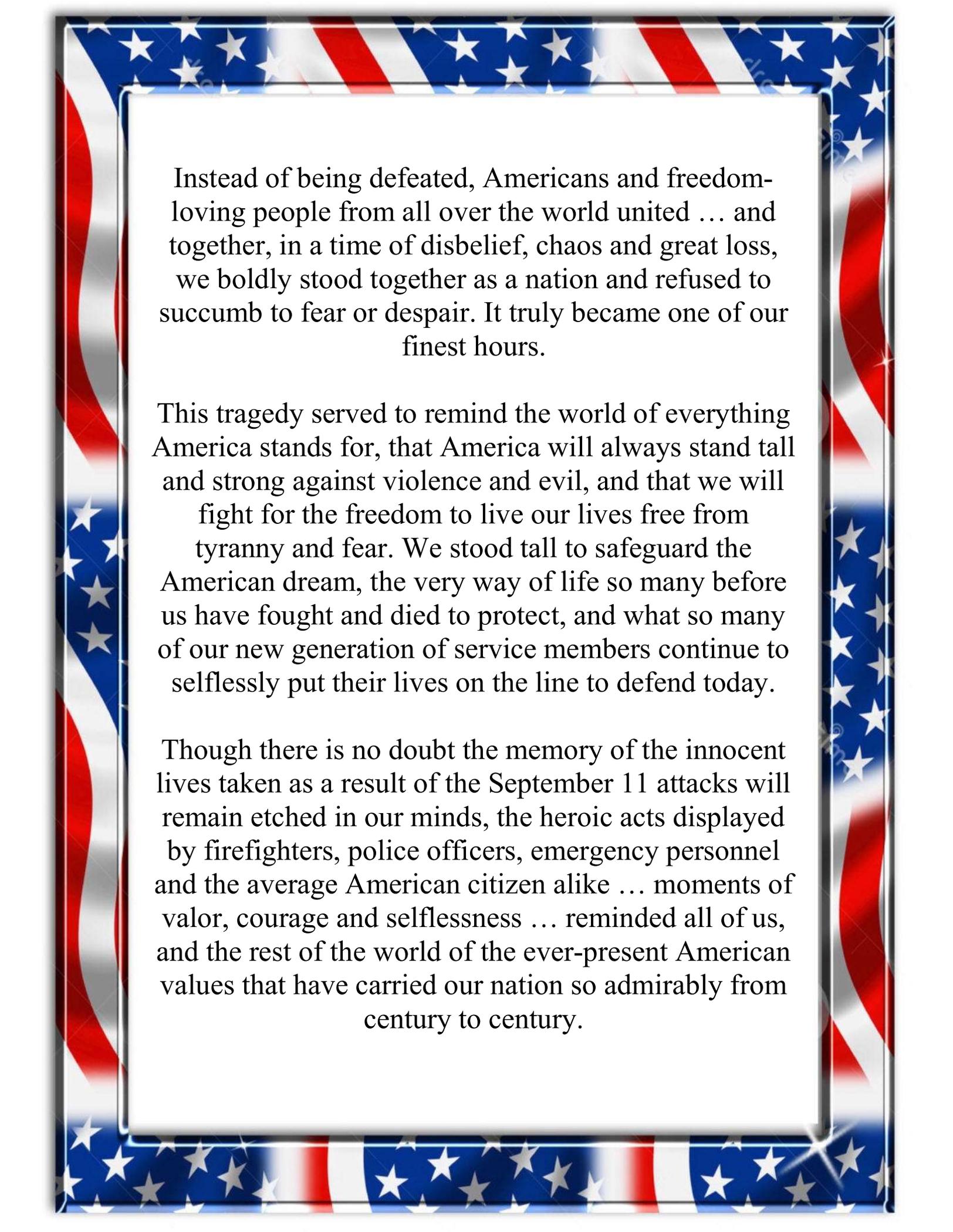
When Americans awoke the morning of September 11, 2001, no one could have imagined the day taking such a tragic turn.

September 11 is a day Americans will never forget, and today we gather together to remember and reflect on a day and the 2,977 Americans who tragically lost their lives 17 years ago.

Though the events of September 11 shocked our nation to its core, it quickly became clear the group of radical extremists had misjudged the strength of purpose and determination of the people of the United States.

More than a decade later, thousands of our nations finest have paid the ultimate price for our freedom, and thousands more have returned home bearing the physical and mental scars of battle.

The terrorist attacks 17 years ago did not weaken us or dampen our spirit. Out of the twisted steel and rubble, out of the clouds of smoke and dust and out of the scarred field in Somerset County, Pennsylvania, our sense of patriotism was reborn.

The text is framed by a decorative border featuring the stars and stripes of the United States flag. The border consists of a blue field with white stars on the left and right sides, and red and white stripes on the top and bottom sides.

Instead of being defeated, Americans and freedom-loving people from all over the world united ... and together, in a time of disbelief, chaos and great loss, we boldly stood together as a nation and refused to succumb to fear or despair. It truly became one of our finest hours.

This tragedy served to remind the world of everything America stands for, that America will always stand tall and strong against violence and evil, and that we will fight for the freedom to live our lives free from tyranny and fear. We stood tall to safeguard the American dream, the very way of life so many before us have fought and died to protect, and what so many of our new generation of service members continue to selflessly put their lives on the line to defend today.

Though there is no doubt the memory of the innocent lives taken as a result of the September 11 attacks will remain etched in our minds, the heroic acts displayed by firefighters, police officers, emergency personnel and the average American citizen alike ... moments of valor, courage and selflessness ... reminded all of us, and the rest of the world of the ever-present American values that have carried our nation so admirably from century to century.

From the outside looking in, many will never understand our way of life ... they will never comprehend, nor will they accept the basic premises upon which our great nation was built: independence, justice and sovereignty. And, there's no question that America will still face threats to our way of life, whether it be overseas or right here on American soil.

The events of 9/11 serve as an eternal reminder that freedom is never free. We must continue to act to ensure forces of ignorance and hatred never prevail, and we must always endeavor to put forth every effort and be willing to sacrifice in order to ensure our way of life prevails for future generations.

Before leaving here today, let's pause to honor the victims and those who've selflessly sacrificed to protect and defend our freedom by recommitting ourselves to our families, to our communities and to our country. For generations, America has served as a beacon of hope and light to the world. We must continue to be that inspiration ... that's the best way to honor the memory of those lost during the events of September 11.



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