Remembering 9/11: Letters to Loved Ones Lost

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NEW YORK - The terror attacks on Sept. 11, 2001 claimed the lives of nearly 3,000 people, but touched the lives of many more. The individuals who died that day were mothers, fathers, sisters, brothers, aunts and uncles who left behind family members. The suddenness of their deaths left most without an opportunity to offer any final words.

On the pages of a book, "The Legacy Letters," they are getting that chance.

"They're inspirational. They're heartbreaking. But most importantly, they're a healing moment for these families," Sara Wingerath, director of family programming for Tuesday's Children, said.

Tuesday's Children is a nonprofit organization created to support the families who lost loved ones on the day of the attacks, which was a Tuesday.

"We provide them with opportunities to come together, whether they be weeklong programs or afternoon programs, the opportunities to collaborate with one another, support one another, share stories and share hugs," Wingerath said.

Richard was only 2 years old when he lost his father, Weibin Wang who was working on the 103rd floor of the North Tower of the World Trade Center at the time of the attacks. The loss was impossible for Richard to comprehend.

"I always thought Dad would come home," Richard said.

"It was so hard for Richard to finally grasp the idea of what happened. He struggled for so many years asking, 'What happened to my dad?' 'Why I have no dad?'" Wen Shi, Richard's mother, said.

While she struggled to deal with the loss of her husband, she tried to find a way to explain to her three children what had happened to their father.

"I mean, how do you explain to my kids what happened?" Shi said.

Tuesday's Children helped. They provided an understanding of the different ways that children grieve. They provided support to the families and brought them together.

"There are so many kids together in the same situation, so they feel like when they are there at Tuesday's Children organization, they are not alone," Shi said. "From day one, they were there for us and they have been there all along."

Tuesday's Children also provides mentors for children who lost a parent. The mentor can never replace the lost parent, but they can provide a role model, a friend, an ear to listen and in the case of Richard, a chance to remember.

"Often when I think about my dad, sometimes my mentor comes to mind. It is like a parent to me," Richard said.

Richard, who is now 12 years old, is able to put into words his feeling for his father and his loss. His letter is one of 100 that is part of "The Legacy Letters." Richard says writing his letter proved to be therapeutic.

"It helps me remember as I wrote, so it helps me write the next sentence," Richard said.

Tuesday's Children has worked with 6,000 individuals in the wake of the 9/11 attacks. It has pledged to support the children until they are at least 18 years of age. According to Tuesday's Children, it is estimated 110 women were pregnant on 9/11 and lost a spouse. Simple math tells you the organization has at least eight more years of work ahead of it.

If you are interested in getting more information about Tuesday's Children, go to their website at www.tuesdayschildren.org.

The book, "The Legacy Letters," is available at major books stores and online.