

September 19, 2001

BUSY HANDS MEND BROKEN HEARTS. Sometimes you just want to retreat under Gram's crocheted afghan and cry.

Sometimes you just can't get enough information. Sometimes you need an escape. If you're lucky enough to find that treasured retreat or perhaps a welcomed and restful sleep, sometimes it is halted sharply with a panicky need to tune in again and see if you've missed an important update as this wretched story unfolds.

Sometimes a sleeping giant emerges right from the depths of your soul and the power to face the fear square in the eyes and be stronger, more united and more courageous than ever takes hold.

Sometimes your faith takes a beating. Sometimes it rings louder and clearer than ever before.

Sometimes you look at those you love and the boundless depth of that love reaches a point that you may have never realized before. You might even feel your heart grow.

Sometimes you just wish you could be helpful.

If we could, would we trade places with the doctors and nurses helping to heal the wounded? The firefighters and rescue teams working tirelessly and with the unfaltering hope of unearthing a miracle? The volunteers making sure those teams have food and water? The counselors offering listening ears and steady shoulders to those grasping for personal solace? I think so.

The number of men and women who have stepped forward this week with a pledge of military enlistment is a profound and telling statement of our country's pride and endurance.

Personally, I've always wanted to be Paula Zahn. Long before she was with Fox. Long before she stepped into her first week on the job at CNN to report the largest, most complicated, most heinous story of America's history. Would it be any easier to fill a role like that than to be in shoes of most of us hundreds of miles away who

are left to simply watch? Certainly not. But to feel helpful, at whatever level, is so critical.

I've made a To-Do list. I share it with you because I feel better just to have made it. As with all my To-Do lists, I expect I'll feel further strength and fortitude as I make the check marks by each listing. I would welcome you to add your own thoughts and share them with me.

To-Do: Fly the flag. On my car. In my yard. In my actions.
2. Double up on prayers. Double the quantity, but quadruple the thoughtfulness. 3. Give blood. 4. Respect others. And with sincerity like never before. 5. Keep the faith in our economy. Maybe buy stock. Definitely hang tight. 5. Say those words. You never know if you'll have the chance. 6. Reflect the unmatched dedication and awe of our country's leadership, particularly that of our forefathers who understood so fully the depths of what this country would endure. 7. Donate money. To the Red Cross. To the Salvation Army. To the help funds of individuals. 8. Maintain quiet. Get away from the television. Play cards with the kids. Take a quiet bath. 9. Make a mental note to never forget how inconsequential so many things I might have fussed over just a week ago really are. 10. Revere and never take for granted the enviable brotherhood shared by those men and women in our fire and police forces. I don't think I ever understood the depth of that dedication before. 11. Step carefully and thoughtfully in my role as parent and teacher. Search deep to find the right mixture of honesty and information, and 12. Pull back my shoulders, hold my head high and live life with courage. Because the alternative is simply unacceptable.

All of these are ways we can help. We owe it to ourselves. We owe it to our children. We owe it to one another. And I think it will help us feel better.