

OPINION | COMMENTARY

## *Remember Todd Beamer of United 93*

His heroism on 9/11 drew from a lifetime of faith and character.

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By Mene Ukuieberuwa

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Todd Beamer's children and wife, Lisa, sit beside his photo in their home in Cranbury, N.J., Sept. 16, 2001.

PHOTO: BRIAN BRANCH-PRICE/ASSOCIATED PRESS

*Princeton Junction, N.J.*

My hometown is on the edge of the New York City area, where dense development ends and soybean farms begin. The 9/11 memorials around here are a reminder of our proximity to the city, but some are easy to miss. The one at the post office in nearby Cranbury is particularly inconspicuous: "This Building Is Named in Honor of Todd Beamer."

There's some beauty in the humility of such a memorial. But when I learned a few years ago that Beamer had lived in the town next to mine, I was ashamed. Why hadn't I known that this hero of 9/11 was a local guy? My region, the state of New Jersey, and the country as a whole ought to know more about Todd Beamer.

A 32-year-old software salesman for Oracle, Beamer was among the passengers on United Airlines Flight 93 who attacked the hijackers and prevented them from crashing the Boeing 757 into the U.S. Capitol. His rallying cry, “Let’s roll,” rests in America’s memory. It is exalting to think of what he and his fellow passengers did on that short flight, and the people they saved on the ground.

Beamer remained poised under extreme pressure. Many passengers made phone calls during the flight, but Beamer’s call with Airfone operator Lisa Jefferson became the fullest account of what took place in the air that day. He remained on the line for 14 minutes, describing the direction of the plane, the hijackers’ behavior and, eventually, the passengers’ decision to revolt.

“His voice was devoid of any stress,” Ms. Jefferson later said. “In fact, he sounded so tranquil it made me begin to doubt the authenticity and urgency of his call.”

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Beamer was also physically confident, and courageous. As a student at Wheaton College in Illinois, he played baseball and captained the basketball team. In a memoir, Beamer’s wife Lisa relates that he once played a soccer game with a broken jaw.

It’s fortunate that Beamer and the three other passengers who spearheaded the revolt—Jeremy Glick, Mark Bingham and Tom Burnett —were athletes. The hijackers pitched the plane back and forth sharply in a failed attempt to shake their attackers off their feet. The cockpit recording, filled with slams, shattering plates, and howls, reveals that the terrorists took the plane down only after six minutes of the passengers’ sustained assault.

A strong Christian faith also carried Beamer toward his fate. Lisa recounts that their life together was founded on faith—at Wheaton, while rearing children, and teaching Sunday school at Princeton Alliance Church.

Before ending his call with Ms. Jefferson, Beamer asked, “Would you do one last thing for me?”

“Yes. What is it?” she answered.

“Would you pray with me?”

They said the Lord’s Prayer together in full, and other passengers joined in. Beamer then recited Psalm 23, concluding, “Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death I will fear no evil, for thou art with me.” Immediately after, he turned to his co-conspirators and asked, “Are you guys ready? OK, let’s roll.”

It’s a life and death that merit celebration. Amid the observances on this 20th anniversary, take a moment to remember Todd Beamer. You might also want to take a look around. An American hero might have lived in your own hometown.

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