

Memorializing Newtown: Canons of Public Memory in the

My Sandy Hook Family Online Memorial

Abstract

This textual analysis of the My Sandy Hook Family (MSHF) website aims to understand how online memorials can not only serve as a place for those directly affected by a national tragedy to grieve, but also as a prescriptive model for the public and media to channel that grief into positive action. Utilizing the conceptual frameworks of public memory studies and digital rhetoric, I argue that the MSHF web memorial is a fruitful case study to extend work on digital memorializing in the communication studies field, but to also act as a prescriptive guide for families, communities, and nations of future tragedies to enact and lessen the pain of negotiating such difficult rhetorical, personal, and public spaces. I contend that the creation of such an online memorial directly following future events such as these may prevent any additional trauma that may come to those closely affected by national tragedies that may arise due to sensationalistic exposure in this hyper-mediated age.

Keywords: public memory, digital rhetoric, Newtown, My Sandy Hook Family

Memorializing Newtown: Voice, Public and Private, and Communication Activism in the
My Sandy Hook Family Online Memorial

I recall the beauty of the light, zig-zag after zig-zag, zig-zagging across the charcoal sky.

“You need to blink sometime,” Dad hums waving his mammoth hand in front of my face.

If I blink I’ll miss it. I will miss the electric imprint of the gods. No telling when the next safe storm will be, maybe a whole week, even months, until I see the lightening again. That is a lifetime! I am a fickle little girl, so I just brush my itchy bangs to their proper place and stoically watch the gray. My green windows water and burn, they mutely beg for a pause. “Close us” I can almost hear them whisper, but I resist so strongly—it is my mission to stare. My eyelids weak but far apart, they are so heavy, and with each new drop of dew, the pressure magnifies like a million little stones on tips of my lashes.

About to give in, my heart beats inside-out at the bellowing *CRACK!* Thunder shakes pépère’s iron glider, and it rocks so slightly back and forth on the porch. Like a clock it ticks, *tick, tick, tick, tick, tick*, ticking time down until the lightening comes again.

“THERE!” I yell, pointing so fast, nearly whacking my hand on the glider. “Above the church, it was huge!”

“Aw I missed that one,” Dad says. This my favorite part. My tired eyes snap together so quickly after the electricity, reminding me of the day my teacher lost her grip on the projector screen. It left the wall and crashed so loudly into the reading station bookshelf below. The imprint of the lightening dances the jive in my brain. Focusing in and out, repeating in shades of blue, red, and green, its shadow lives. Lite like a Fourth of July sparkler, behind my eyes.

One second, two seconds, pépère’s glider still ticks. Fading slightly, the zig-zig gets spotty. *Tick, tick, tick...* The lightening morphs into other shapes...*tick...tick...tick*. The color is

long gone now, leaves as fast as it arrives. My heart takes the weight my eyelids held a minute before. Eyes still shut, my lashes are cool and as light as a birds hollow bones. The world is a dark dreary reddish brown. Suddenly the rain falters, and the glider slows.....*tick*.....*tick*.....*tick*.

CRACK! A sharp pain reshapes my memory, the remote balances on my throbbing foot. *Tick..tick..tick*, the white hospital-like venetian blinds tap against the open window. No, no longer a child in New England, no longer a professional cat-petter and thunderstorm watcher. Instead I stand at the foot of my bed and watch *The Rachel Maddow Show* in the lonesome dark after class. She taps the papers on her desk, like always, and circles words upon it with the lightest hand. She looks down, like always, and furrows her brow like she often does. The subject of this hour is the controversy surrounding the release of the 9-1-1 tapes, and whether or not the news should play or post the screams of the adults and children so terrified, shot, and dead. This subject warrants a furrowed brow. Though this furrow is deeper, harsher since last December, and so are the stories on the Sandy Hook Elementary School shooting since then. What is the difference?

Is it raining? No, but my face is wet. My eyes are heavy from the hot tears now curling at my jaw. Not because of the pain in my foot, but because of the pain of my beautiful memory being twisted like the lightning across the deepening sky. The conflicting joy of remembering—something Dylan will never have. “Dylan Hockley *thought* that lightning was beautiful, and he *called* it beautiful,” Rachel says solemnly (*The Rachel Maddow Show*, 2013). A minute passes and, unbelievably, I do as Benjamin Wheeler’s father asks—I try to forget my politics (Wolf, 2013).

My Sandy Hook Family

The edition of the *The Rachel Maddow Show* cited above, which prompted my tears, recall, discomfort, and interest, also prompted this study. The “How to Help on the Sandy Hook Anniversary” segment aired on the night of Tuesday December 10, 2013, right around the time the www.MySandyHookFamily.org website went live (*My Sandy Hook Family*, 2013; Wolf, 2013). This seemingly simplistic web memorial, was created by the families, just the families, of the victims of the tragic mass shooting that occurred in 2012 in Newtown Connecticut.

On the morning of December 14, 2012 armed shooter Adam Lanza forced his entry into Sandy Hook Elementary School (SHES) and murdered 26 people, 20 of them first grade children, before taking his own life (Sendesky, 2013). Unprecedented grief, arguably the most on a national level since 9/11, was followed by an unprecedented media swarm unto the small town from which the precious educators and small students were taken. The community grief was then intensified further by the controversy over whether to release of the 9-1-1 recordings, that also fell near the anniversary of the shootings thus increasing interest even more. A pain recall so fierce, that some residents and Newtown officials claimed that the media could now only help by “staying away” (Wolf, 2013).

The interview Rachel Maddow hosted that night was with the parents of Benjamin Wheeler, one of the twenty children killed that day. One of the many purposes of their visit was to explain, in their own words, their motivation for taking part in the “My Sandy Hook Family” (MSHF) online memorial. This website, created and monitored by the families of those killed at SHES, still serves as a central controlled space to channel national grief and individual desires for action. Instead of helping the families in a way that would prove unproductive and painful, MSHF guides the user via a short letter, biography, eulogy, or tribute written by the victims’ families, with links to sanctioned foundations, charities, and other online memorials, in an effort

to circumvent corruption and attempt to convert the hurt into sanctioned action (*About*, 2013; see Appendices B & C for screen shots and transcripts).

Rationale

Since 2006, as individuals, as families, as communities, and as a nation, we have experienced a total of 237 mass shootings in the United States, the number of people dead nearing almost 1,000. The tragedy at SHES sits at silver, being the second deadliest massacre in history, behind the 32 slain at Virginia Tech in 2007 (Overberg et al., 2013). Though we require legislative and dialogic action to better curve this unsettlingly growing trend, the trauma that follows also requires attention. Given the complex systems of relational grief in situations like Newtown, a better understanding of how to memorialize victims with the least amount of burden on those directly affected is extraordinarily pertinent and time sensitive issue.

Images in the news media exacerbate grief via exposure in this hyper-mediated age (Coonfield & Huxford, 2009; Fahmy & Roedl, 2010; Thomas, 2008), perhaps increasing public awareness in sensationalistic and unproductive ways (DeFoster, 2010; Fahmy & Roedl, 2010; Kitch, 2003; Pantii & Sumiala, 2009; Thomas, 2008; Sci, 2009). Whether it derives from a pattern of ritual (Coonfield & Huxford, 2009; Pantii & Sumiala, 2009), meta-narratives (DeFoster, 2010; Kitch, 2003; Thomas, 2008) or expectations of entertainment (Fahmy & Roedl, 2010), the press' decisions about reporting mass shootings affects not only the public but those directly connected to the tragedy (Fahmy & Roedl, 2010). This is not to say that those within the public have no right to grieve, (see Marwick & Ellison (2012) for an explanation of grief tourists) or that their emotions are always inflamed by the press (Thomas, 2008). It is instead a question about "when it comes to public space, should the families' concerns be first and

foremost” (Sci, 2009, p. 55), and to what extent do families have to steer us onto the path of healing?

It seems like too much to ask, to expect, but even without expectations, families of the SHES victims began an unpaved road to easing personal, community, and national grief. Though paradoxically complex, the MSHF online memorial reinforces, contests, and occupies a limbotic space between themes prevalent in studies on public memory. The concepts examined in this study—public and private, or personal and communal tensions, and voice, either sanctioned or vernacular, illustrate a rather constructive model for managing these dialectics. I argue that the MSHF site has the potential to be a prescriptive model for future tragedies, as a relatively balanced medium to ease hyper-mediation, outreach, and interest. Extending work on the relatively young sub-field of digital rhetoric, I contend that MSHF functions as a model of a unified but diverse communicative hub that facilitates sanctioned and individual desires for directed action. Through the overarching theoretical lens of social constructionism, this article hopes to be a catalyst for more in-depth and mixed-methodological approaches to understanding this significant case.

This following review of the literature begins with a contextualization of the theoretical framework of social constructionism that this article operates within. Next are the overarching conceptual frameworks of public memory studies and public memorialization, and the array of scholarship that has begun to situate these lenses as outlines for understanding the aftermaths of national tragedy. Detailed next are the academic advancements within the growing sub-field of web memorials, and the prevalence of online memorialization as a means to remember, honor and facilitate collective communicative action. Lastly, I review the theorization of digital rhetoric, its tenets, and how it will aid in my reading of the MSHF memorial.

Literature Review

Social Constructionism

A theory with roots in the psychological discipline, the core tenets that make up the interdisciplinary framework of social constructionism emphasizes historical, cultural, and social contexts, researcher transparency, no unilateral truths, perspectives, or certainties, social constructionists contend that knowledge is communally meaning that, within their specific contexts, information can both inform and transform awareness and power for the individual and academic in direct relation to the society it lives in (Burr, 2003; Davis, Powell, & Lachlan, 2013). That knowledge then influences action immediately and longitudinally within certain cultural practices (Burr, 2003; Davis, Powell, and Lachlan, 2013; Velody & Williams, 1998). Borrowing from Marxist approaches to critical-cultural work, Burr (2003) highlights the need to consider both macro and micro powers when analyzing a text as a social construct. Macro considerations give rise to economic and state level organizational forces such as capitalism or communism, while micro refers to how those individual communicative interactions influence an individual's socially constructed view of the world they experience (Burr, 2003; Savoie, 2010).

Although Gergen (1995) explicates social constructionism initially as it applies to psychology, many of his theoretical lenses are co-opted for communication studies (Frey & Carragee, 2007). Since workings of the mind are filtered and re-filtered through a contextual sift that organizes meaning, it is "necessary for constructionists to draw from alternative repositories of cultural intelligibility. The result is a resuscitation of a family of interrelated but (until now) more marginal metaphors within culture" (p. 19), that each have strong ties to linguistic, material, visual, and digital message creation. Those sense-making metaphors are divided into life as drama, game, literature, and a cultural ritual, all of which apply to the sub-field of public

memory studies. Those themes also inform the origins of general emotional expression and suggest that humans have limited agency in determining the effects, not filtration, of the social reality which engulfs them (Gergen, 1995). Instead, a unilateral reality is a construct that only supports a one-way model of communicative sense-making. In the case of MSHF, this limitation would concern issues of interactivity and voice—from families to screen, from screen to user, without facilitating any space between for dialogic interaction.

But most social constructionists share the view of increasing agency (Davis, Powell, & Lachlan, 2013). Cromby and Nightingale (1998) acknowledge the potential for human responsibility, since all macro structures are conceptualized and perpetuated by human thought and action. Stirred by social constructionism is the debate between realism versus relativism where the tangibility of objects and signs are measured only by the physical thing they represent. However, most social constructionists acknowledge the possibility of variant meanings of signs in addition to their initial or normalized attributions (Cromby & Nightingale, 1998). Cromby and Nightingale (1998) suggest that meaning-making is embedded within a multitude of seemingly insignificant practices, a view that public memory scholars adopt for their work on the fluidity of recall (Hartelius, 2010; Sturken, 1997).

Public Memory and Memorialization

The inevitability of the intersection of the concepts of social construction, public commemoration and public memory in scholarship revolving around national tragedies like the shooting in Newtown, speaks not only to the complexities of the events academics have attempted to understand via these lenses, but about the complexities of the lenses themselves (Blair & Michel, 2007; Hess, 2007; Phillips, 2010; Sci, 2009). Public memory is centralizes around the notion of an inescapable splintered debate (Blair & Michel, 2007), where

“misrepresentations of the past lead to misrecognitions of the present” (Phillips, 2010, p. 210). These distortions manifest primarily in two acute and complex ways. The first is overestimation of what memory can actually achieve (Blair & Michel, 2007; Phillips, 2010; Sturken, 1997). To assume that public memory, and the act of memorialization, is separate from the people, communities, histories, economies, and cultures that produce them is an almost extinct misconception. Due, thankfully, in part to seminal essays like Blair, Jeppeson, and Pucci Jr. (1991) and the work of Marita Sturken (1997). This false consciousness can never be tacked onto individuals nor publics. Collective perception can feed into a series of false expectations of what public remembrance can actually accomplish, and then in cases like mass shootings, can desensitize or cause unproductive mass hysteria (Blair & Michel, 2007; Fahmy & Roedl, 2010; Phillips, 2010; Savoie, 2010; Thomas, 2008).

In addition to asking more of memory than memory can accomplish, scholars and citizens diving into the field or questioning public memory must not confuse the subject of memory with a discourse of possession. “The misconception,” that must not be made Hartelius (2010) writes, is “that people *have* memory; memory is something that we *do*” (p. 71). Memory is experience, constructed, deconstructed, critical, performative, and sometimes monstrous. It is continually in flux, depending highly on imbalances of power and mediated sponsorship (Blair, Jeppeson, & Pucci Jr, 1991; Blair & Michel, 2007; Coonfield & Huxford, 2009; Hartelius, 2010; Losh, 2009; Phillips, 2010; Savoie, 2010; Sturken, 1997). It may seem easier to determine what public memory and memorialization is not (Hess, 2007; Sturken, 1997), rather than what it actually is, and because of the evolving mediums traces of cultural meaning-making are developing and being attached to, web memorialization quiets and stirs both old and new “affordances and constraints” (Zappen, 2005, p. 321).

Web Memorials

In lieu of the binaric indication of separating the online memorialization influx into categories of progressions and limitations (Zappen, 2005), web memorials are just as complex as their physical counterparts. Firstly, Lehdonvirta (2010) stresses that despite the inclination to associate virtual realms with the concept of simulation, web memorials have not forgone their material ties. Ideologies are built into the decisions made by users, moderators, creators, and producers of virtual content (Hess, 2007; Grider, 2007; Hartelius, 2010; Haskins, 2007; Lehdonvirta, 2010; Losh, 2009; Savoie, 2010; Zappen, 2005). The experience of online memorials is physical as well. The click of the mouse, writing of a post, navigation of a site, and the claustrophobic feeling grieving alone can foster were not spontaneous to the development of this genre (Losh, 2009; Zappen, 2005)

According to Grider (2007), critics analyzing web memorials, like the MSHF site, must devote as much attention to audience, purpose and structural power considerations in order to understand the communication, then we do visuals and texts (Blair & Michel, 2007; Haskins, 2010; Hess, 2007; Marwick & Ellison, 2012; Sci, 2009; Zappen, 2005). Web memorials contain traces of struggle, pain, and cultural disagreements. Just as you would walk through a physical site, walking through, or clicking through, an online memorial, influences the construction of memory and the construction of the memorial as well (Grider, 2007; Losh, 2009; Savoie, 2010; Sci, 2009). Closure seems to be less of an issue for web memorialization, but still raises issues of desensitization and amnesiac disassociation that can counter social progress or understanding initially fostered (Haskins, 2007; Sturken, 1997).

Though online mediums offer a larger space for mourners to commune and negotiate grief with and without ideological restrictions, the romantic view of the function of web

memorials is only one part of the discussion of their potential (Hess, 2007; Marwick & Ellison, 2012). Facebook memorials offer a unique view of the possible negative aspects to widening the opportunity for discourse because they can allow for verbal vandalization and inaccurate information of those passed (Marwick & Ellison, 2012). Their culpability, much like physical commemorations, depends largely on the boundaries set by the creator of the page, their reasons for doing so, and those allowed to view and contribute to it (Hess, 2007; Marwick & Ellison, 2012).

Digital Rhetoric

Theoretical and conceptual work on web memorials, like the entire collection of terms that frequent work in public memory, overlap in significant ways. The creators of the web memorial also exert a conscious control over how the content, person, event, etc. should be remembered. Though while the majority of the scholarship on web memorials explicitly concerns itself with how memory is thematically constructed, contested, reaffirmed, and redirected, all studies implicitly consider what Losh (2009) calls “rhetorical interpretations of computer-generated media as objects of study” (p. 48). The subtleties she mentions are classical rhetorical considerations such as timing and exigence (Losh, 2009).

The subject of digital rhetoric also relates to notions of public deliberation, or the democratic act of negotiation (Hartelius, 2010). Though this then leads into the theme of communication activism, abound within the MSHF web memorial, sensitivities to speed, reach, anonymity, and interactivity reground digital rhetorical scholarship back into the theoretical and conceptual realm of public memory studies (Zappen, 2005). Challenges regarding the management of anonymity and interactivity are two of the most prevalent themes in the MSHF site. Essentially synonyms for interactivity and anonymity, considerations of vernacular

expression and public and private, complicate the capacity a site, like MSHF, possesses for setting the cultural memorial agenda and facilitating social change (Hartelius, 2010).

Research Objective

The purpose of this study is to extend the work of public memory studies, virtual memorialization, and communication activism, to further understand, through the bounded unit of the MSHF website, the communication present within web memorials. Specifically, to analyze how the manifestations and relationships of voice, public and private, and social action. To then understand how, if at all, the MSHF memorial could serve as a successful template for families of victims of future national tragedies to emulate.

Methodology

To begin to better understand the communication present within the MSHF online memorial, the method for this study was interpretive textual analysis. The ultimate purpose of the research being to use this case to add to the larger discourse on digital rhetoric, online memorialization, and reexamine the most common themes present in public memory studies (in this case voice and the tension between public and private), required complete immersion within the convenient sample size of one. Despite it being easy to access, the MSHF site was chosen purposively because of the reasons surrounding its formation. Reasons that, cursorily, were to combat media pressure on the anniversary, provide a cohesive, singular, yet individualized, place for controlled remembrance, and to serve as a portal for those compelled to act (*About*, 2013.; *The Rachel Maddow Show*, 2013).

Data Collection/Coding

The seemingly minimal amount of artifacts I analyzed, the website, very few news reports and the official report from the Connecticut State Attorney, organizing the data in

preparation for coding, was done with the utmost care. All screen shots of the site (29 in total), were taken on April 2, 2014 to ensure consistency over the next month. Each image was saved in a singular location, along with the textual transcripts of the entire site. Due to the immense linearity of broad motifs, extracted from the equally broad delineation of public memory studies, I began the initial coding process with the three nominal sensitizing concepts of vernacular and official voice (Blair & Michel, 2007; Donofrio, 2010; Hess, 2007; Jorgensen-Earp & Lanzilotti; Pantii & Sumiala, 2009; Phillips, 2010; Thomas, 2008; Sci, 2009), public and private (Blair & Michel, 2007; Donofrio, 2010; Fahmy & Roedl, 2010; Hess, 2007; Jorgensen-Earp & Lanzilotti, 1998; Marwick & Ellison, 2012; Thomas, 2008; Sci, 2009), and communication activism (Cooks & Scharrer, 2007; Frey & Carragee, 2007; Harlow & Guo, 2014; Walker & Curry, 2007).

Data Analysis

Though the MSHF site was a bounded unit (Davis, Powell, & Lachlan, 2013) Contextual information regarding the day of the shooting was taken directly from the official report filed by the Connecticut State Attorney's office, authored by Stephen Sendesky. I entered the analysis defined vernacular and official expression using Savoie's (2010) delineations. Public and private was synthesized from all studies consulted, and tenets of communication activism from Frey & Carragee,(2007). Vernacular voice was conceptualized as evidence of individual, unsanctioned expression. Operationalized in this essay, examples of vernacular or individual voice had to be derivative of a small group, always within the individual victim's pages, and not referencing the whole of the 26 families affected. Official voice, sometimes coded within individual pages but was localized mainly to the *about* page (see Figure B2 in Appendix B, para. 1 in Appendix C), and even then was scarce. To operationalize vernacular and sanctioned voices, any reference, to community or not, that contained elements of authority were flagged. Due to

the similarity between voice and public and private, public was conceptualized via the desire to retain information and was operationalized by the expression to share, heal, inform, or aid grief as a collective. Private was conceptualized as minimal to no disclosure, and was operationalized by the desire to not share or relay cursory information. Communication activism, an expansive theoretical concept in communication studies, was conceptualized as any suggestion, explicit or implicit, request or link to any charities in order to facilitate societal involvement.

Glaser (1965) in “A Constant Comparative Method of Analysis,” argues for the ongoing process of accessing and reassessing data, or simultaneous coding and preliminary analysis, in order to “delimit” the possibilities for formulating, or in this case extending, theory (p. 441). Although coding is traditionally done in two parts, qualitatively coding for both theoretical implications and content, once my variable criteria was set, marking a line between theoretical and conceptual categories was no longer useful for this area of study. I went through each slide, one variable per each pass, coding until the set was finished, then made four more collective passes in total to ensure my selections were accurate (private against vernacular) and representative of the sample.

Analysis

Before delving into a comprehensive analysis of a physical site Carole Blair and her co-authors, explain, in-depth, how that site will be read. Though the materiality and corporeality of commemorating an event digitally differs greatly, from a user’s experience of the MSHF online memorial, detailing how I read the site as I did, is just as vital as if were describing how I would move critically throughout the Vietnam Veteran’s Memorial (Blair, Jeppeson, & Pucci Jr., 1991) or In Memorium Facebook page (Marwick & Ellison, 2012). Following the example of Sci (2009), just short of adopting aesthetic negotiation as my theoretical frameworks, my first

navigation of the MSHF memorial site was completed a month or so after the anniversary of the shooting. Cleaning out my bookmarks, my cursor lands on the favorited Maddow interview from almost a month ago and the scholarly lightening cracks in my head (*The Rachel Maddow Show*, 2013; Wolf, 2013).

The Home Page

At first glance it is beautiful in its simplicity (see Figure B1 in Appendix B). The background is a rich august summer green. Too light to be hunter, but too dark to scream activism, it serves as a modest yet thought provoking color for the memory of the twenty children and six adults it memorializes. The words “Home” “About” and “Contact” are separated by hearts in-between a delicate open border. “My Sandy Hook Family” rests above the top bar, beneath the lower bar reads: “click on a name below to learn about our loved one.” It should be more somber than it is. But the heart of the site, is of course, the heart shaped names of the loved ones. Perfectly spaced in delicate cursive font, the names form the shape perfectly (or the shape forms the names perfectly) and if you squint your eyes, it resembles unified white filigree heart.

The home page is perfectly spaced, directing the eye to firstly hit the heart, the main focus of the memorial, and then to travel up to the title down to the three icons below the names. I move my cursor over the heart and one by one the names come alive. Not in distracting manner like a bouncing PowerPoint header, but very delicately. I move the arrow over the ‘D’ in Dylan’s name near the tip of the heart. It turns the same color green as the hearts in the top border, quietly, like inhaling and exhaling. Just enough life but still enough modesty, I click on Dylan’s name.

Public and Private

When discussing the dialectic of public and private in physical or online memorials, the scope and intensity of the violent event which triggers commemoration complicates and seems to “blur any concept of a boundary between what has been called the public and private spheres” (Jorgensen-Earp & Lanzilotti, 1998, p. 151). Jorgensen-Earp and Lanzilotti (1998) hinted at a pattern between the type of victims of a national tragedy and the complexity of commemoration in a public space, where child victims spark a meta-narrative of innocence lost in which the national collective then publically attempts to make meaning from with the creation of “spontaneous shrines” (p. 151). Though the individual biographies, tributes and letters are all white letters superimposed on a black background, the pictures and texts portray a sense of immediacy. You can almost hear Dylan’s parents talk about the light within their son (*Dylan Hockley*, n.d.), see Grace baking with her mom (*Grace Audrey McDonnell*, n.d.), Jesse in his Army Hat (*Jesse McCord Lewis*, n.d.), and Victoria playing with her dog Roxie (*Victoria Leigh Soto*, n.d) as they was never taken.

Except for the use of the past tense. The individual biographies each have a personality, undoubtedly the aim being to not only capture the person remembered, but simultaneously capturing those who wrote the stories as well. Half the biographies are written with doors wide open, the subject always beginning with the child and the world as the collective public: “Noah was energy in motion. His zest for life was contagious. He loved intricate, imaginative play with his legos and superhero figurines....Most of all, he loved his family” (*Noah Pozner*, n.d). But not lost, despite this dedication to create a space to “keep the spirit of unity and love alive in all we do to remember those we so dearly miss” (*About*, 2013), are the personalization within each message. Some are addressed to the user (*Josephine Gay*, n.d; *James Radley Matiol*, n.d; *Jessica Adrienne Rekos*, n.d.). Some are addressed to the victim: “Sweet Caramel Princess, your family

misses you desperately” (*Ana Grace Marquez-Greene*, n.d.). Anne Marie’s family (see Figure B8 in Appendix B), says “Thank you for respecting our privacy” (*Anne Marie Murphy*, n.d.), while Caroline and Catherine’s names remain still.

If public and private manifests as a series of complex relationships (Blair & Michel, 2007) layered with different and similar considerations of nationalism and personal ties, then garnered within the negotiation of those ties is an understanding about the impact of public mourning on the individuals that make up those spheres (Donofrio, 2010; Fahmy & Roedl, 2010; Hess, 2007; Jorgensen-Earp & Lanzilotti, 1998; Marwick & Ellison, 2012; Pantii & Sumiala, 2009; Thomas, 2008; Sci, 2009). The privatizing language deeming memorials as “therapeutic” or “healing” (Blair & Michel, 2007, p. 610) not only suggests the existence of the other as a “diseased polity” (Blair & Michel, 2007, p. 610) but can also begin to oversimplify or overcomplicate the rhetoric surrounding events like mass shootings and terrorist attacks (DeFoster, 2010; Donofrio, 2010; Kitch, 2003; Sci, 2009). Reading the pieces on Considerations between the public and private in times of confusion and sorrow are rarely balanced, but the origins of those differentials often derive as conflicts between vernacular and official expression (Donofrio, 2010; Fahmy & Roedl, 2010; Hess, 2007; Marwick & Ellison, 2012; Pantii & Sumiala, 2009; Phillips, 2010; Thomas, 2008; Sci, 2009), that is almost circumvented in this memorial.

Vernacular and Sanctioned Voice

This theme, reified as always being in a perpetual state of limbo whether or not it is overtly or covertly expressed. For the families of the MSHF memorial, the overt balance between vernacular and sanctioned voice manifests within the *About* page (see Figure B2 in Appendix B, and para. 1 in Appendix C):

We ask that you understand that each of us-each family-is unique in our own experiences following this tragedy and we each have our own voice and perspective. By creating this website, we hope to offer an opportunity to communicate with our families and honor our loved ones. While at the same time respecting each family's individual journey and unique experiences. (*About*, 2013).

Though the quote above appears to represent the delineation between public and private, the nuances of voice function as a way to establish authority over mourning, asking politely, for something that should already be owed, that should already be given. Not every family decided to participate in this memorial, making the line between inclusion and exclusion decidedly blurry.

The families express their desire to turn their authority over mourning into another sanctioned path: "This website is intended to serve as a singular place of sharing, communication, and contact with the families of those who lost their lives that day" (*About*, 2013.). This one serving as the central place for all inquiries and contact. Though they have control over the space created within the boundaries of the memorial, after a national tragedy, the families of those directly affected have less rights to their community space than the media did (Wolf, 2013). But even more covertly, vernacular and official voice work as a way to politely ask for the space that they have unluckily earned.

The contact page is the place where the collapsing spheres between sanctioned and individual voices are meant to remain binarily separate. The letters, wishes, condolences, and requests for interviews are automatically divided, assuming those requests are labeled honestly, and the families can decide whether or not to interact. This power, through a screen, I am sure if not full-proof, requests filtering in via other mediums, but the question Grider (2007)

cites as the most vital to any act of memorialization: “for whom has it been made?” is further complicated by the multiple purpose stated equally on the cite.

Communication Activism

Even though the control over the media may remove some of the individuality of voice for the victim’s families, the most powerful way they reel in control is paradoxically through the relinquishing of obligations that mourners feel across the country. Maddow describes it as an overwhelming compellation to help: “if you want to reach out to them, if you want in some small way to try to help them, is there a right way to do that that isn’t going cause more harm than you intend” (*The Rachel Maddow Show*, ’ 2013)?

The right, or sanctioned way by the families of those killed, is to use the opportunity the cite affords them and really turn it into a singular portal thus illustrating how direction can facilitate social action. Almost all of the individual dedications have links to separate foundations either dedicated to the victim, enacted in their honor, or representing a cause that they know would be further sanctioned by their loved one. Jack’s parents celebrate his memory by helping programs that help children with disabilities acquire the resources they need to play school, sports (*Jack Armistead Pinto*, n.d.). “To honor the memory of our son,” the parents of James Mattioli write, “will support programs which brought him joy and enriched his life” (*James Radley Mattioli*, n.d.) in an effort to not only keep that memory alive but to allow it to grow into something even more beautiful than before with each person it helps.

For those who do no connect with the individual charities and funds, the families provide links to two sanctioned avenues for change on the home page. The first is the “My Sandy Hook Family Fund” which has raised over \$681,000.000 to help the families directly by assigning a personal social worker. Each family received a \$40,000 dollar endowment from this charity

alone (A, R., 2013). The second is the “Sandy Hook Ground Project” that has built 17 playgrounds in the names of the victims, with 5 approved from planning and 2 set for groundbreakings this week. If nothing but an act of kindness in the names of those they lost.

Discussion

Frey and Carragee (2007) cite the difference between the theoretical boundaries of the sub-field of communication activism, and the critical cultural work that creates social change. Here, speaking in strict response to the level of communication activism in the MSHF memorial, the families of the victims subscribe to a similar method employed by Cooks & Scharrer (2007). “Learning-as-change indicates and makes conscious the assumption that learning and change are grounded in the same social processes” (p. 131) contending that despite the call for researchers to engage in activism rather than just study it, the promotion of learning and education via learning is a catalyst for social change. The MSHF online memorial illustrates that when given the choice, it is possible for people to endeavor to improve a situation, without unrealistic expectations for healing (Blair & Michel, 2007; Phillips, 2010).

But unrealistic expectations are often the crux of scholarship in public memory studies. Not specifically in regards to the inability of scholars to actually perform rather than just report on instances of communication activism (Frey & Carragee, 2007). Nor do I mean any fault directly on the part of the scholars to extend work on web memorialization, since most conceptual frameworks are outgrowing the theories that once bound them. Public memory studies is beginning to recognize that the management of binaric tensions is no longer providing the insight required to adequately explain phenomena. MSHF is a perfect demonstration of the continual negotiation between the “affordances and constraints” (Zappen, 2005, p. 321), new and old media have always carried on their backs. If Hartelius (2010) is right in her Burkean

appropriation of the concept of the terministic screen, then memories are in a constant state of negotiation and reformation, contradiction and reaffirmation (Hess, 2007; Losh, 2009; Sturken, 1997). Those continual states of flux are not, however, absent of the ideological powers that have already begun to shape cultural memory before it can be theorized.

Although I strongly believe that the MSHF web memorial can serve as a prescriptive template for the families of future tragedies of the same caliber, this argument must be qualified by the support structural power systems have supported those in Newtown. Digital rhetoric can facilitate social action, break down binaries and build them up stronger, but it is still working within the confines of an ideological system that allows for the circulation of certain memories (Sturken, 1997). The tension between official and vernacular voice for this case then becomes a greater problem when the news media are taken into account. Despite the advances of technological and virtual communication, new media systems rely heavily on mediums such as online newspapers and television (Zappen, 2005). Without the attention of the news media, the MSHF memorial, just like physical public memorials before it, may not have garnered that attention that it has. With the time lapse between tragedy and memorialization growing shorter (Savoie, 2010), media sensationalism may facilitate a far worse population than those who are violent: those who are indifferent until ignorance, in the case of Newtown, is no longer an option.

Limitations

Despite my best efforts to remain consistently transparent as a social constructionist operating within an interpretive framework, my initial experience with the case under study was already framed by a progressive anchor working for an explicitly left-leaning cable news organization. Sci (2009), notes the importance of all stages of exposure whether it is the

aesthetics of physically walking through a memorial (see Blair, Jeppeson, & Pucci Jr., 1991 for a seminal example of how the materiality of memorials shape understanding) or learning of the tragedy via breaking news and media reports thereafter (see Fahmy & Roehl, Coonfield & Huxford, 2009 for preliminary multi-level outcomes of news exposure). This study would have benefited greatly from reaching total data saturation, something even in spite of the small bounded unit, I failed to reach. Other news reports, interviews with families, and quantitative data could all be utilized in future studies to garner a deeper understanding of the quantifiable scope of the memorial instead of simply acknowledging it as a groundbreaking turn in the field of public memory studies. Peer reviews of the soundness of my argument are always the biggest help to improving the quality of research and report of the results.

Conclusion

Throughout this essay I argued that the MSHF site has the potential to be a prescriptive model for future tragedies, as a relatively balanced medium to ease hyper-mediation, outreach, and interest. With my aim to further extend the work on public memorialization, web memorials, and communication activism, I proposed that MSHF could function as an illustrative model to represent a unified but diverse communicative hub that would ultimately facilitate sanctioned and individual, and public and private desires for directed action. Though the growing literature in public memory studies would suggest the steady track towards the removal of binaric distinctions, MSHF both affirms and contests this notion in a heuristic way. I hope this essay will be a catalyst for more in-depth and mixed-methodological approaches to not only understanding this significant case, but more in the field of grief, trauma, and cultural memory in this hyper-mediated age.

References

- A, R. (2013, December 16). *My Sandy Hook Family Fund*. Ever Ribbon.
<http://www.everribbon.com/ribbon/view/10076>
- About*. (2013). *My Sandy Hook Family*. Retrieved from: <http://mysandyhookfamily.org/about>
- Ana Grace Marquez-Greene*. (n.d.). *My Sandy Hook Family*. Retrieved from:
<http://mysandyhookfamily.org/>
- Anne Marie Murphy*. (n.d.). *My Sandy Hook Family*. Retrieved from:
<http://mysandyhookfamily.org/>
- Benjamin Andrew Wheeler*. (n.d.). *My Sandy Hook Family*. Retrieved from:
<http://mysandyhookfamily.org/>
- Blair, C. & Michel, N. (2007). The AIDS memorial quilt and the contemporary culture of public commemoration. *Rhetoric & Public Affairs*, 10 (4), 595-626. Retrieved from:
<http://eds.a.ebscohost.com/ehost/detail?sid=99784936-ed0c-49f9-b54e-40e37284295b%40sessionmgr4001&vid=1&hid=4202&bdata=JnNpdGU9ZWhvc3QtG12ZSZzY29wZT1zaXRl#db=ufh&AN=29968764>
- Blair, C., Jeppeson, M. S., & Pucci, Jr., E. (1991). Public memorialization in postmodernity: The Vietnam Veterans Memorial as prototype. *Quarterly Journal of Speech*, 77, 263-288.
- Burr, V. (2003) *Social constructionism*. New York: Routledge.
- Caroline Previdi*. (n.d.). *My Sandy Hook Family*. Retrieved from: <http://mysandyhookfamily.org/>
- Cooks, L., & Schaffer, E. (2007). Communication advocacy: Learning and change in the media literacy and violence prevention project. In L.K. Frey & K. M. Carragee (Eds.),

- Communication Activism Volume Two: Communication for Social Change (345-369).
New York, NY: Hampton Press.
- Coonfield, G. & Huxford, J. (2009). News images as lived images: Media ritual, cultural performance, and public trauma. *Critical Studies in Media Communication*, 26(5), 457-479. doi: 10.1080/15295030903325324
- Cromby, J. & Nightingale, D.J. (1998). What's wrong with social constructionism? In D.J. Nightingale & J. Cromby (Eds.), *Social Constructionist Psychology: A Critical Analysis of Theory and Praxis*, (pp. 2-19). Buckingham: Open University Press
- Davis, C. S., Powell, H., & Lachlan, K. A. (2013). *Straight talk about communication research methods*. Dubuque, IA: Kendall Hunt Publishing Company.
- DeFoster, R. (2010). American gun culture, school shootings, and a "frontier mentality": An ideological analysis of British editorial pages in the decade after Columbine. *Communication, Culture & Critique*, 3(4), 466-484. doi: 10.1111/j.1753-9137.2010.01081.x
- Donofrio, T. A. (2010). Ground zero and place-making authority: The Conservative metaphors in 9/11 families' "Take Back the Memorial" rhetoric. *Western Journal of Communication*, 74(2), 150-169. doi: 10.1080/10570311003614492
- Dylan Hockley. (n.d.). *My Sandy Hook Family*. Retrieved from: <http://mysandyhookfamily.org/>
- Fahmy, S. & Roedel, S. J. (2010). Lessons from Virginia Tech: Exploring disparities & commonalities between visual coverage in U.S. newspapers & victims' families'

- perceptions. *Visual Communication Quarterly*, 17(2), 91-107. doi: 10.1080/15551391003788506
- Frey, L.R., & Carragee, K. M. (2007). Introduction: Communication as Engaged Scholarship. In L.K. Frey & K. M. Carragee (Eds.), *Communication Activism Volume Two: Communication for Social Change* (1-65). New York, NY: Hampton Press.
- Gergen, K. J. (1995). Metaphor and monophony in the 20th-century psychology of emotions. *History of the Human Sciences*, 8(1), 1-23.
- Glaser, B. G. (1965). The constant comparative method of qualitative analysis. *Social Problems*, 12(4), 436-445.
- Grace Audrey McDonnell. (n.d.). *My Sandy Hook Family*. Retrieved from: <http://mysandyhookfamily.org/>
- Grider, N. (2007). 'Faces of the Fallen' and the dematerialization of US war memorials. *Visual Communication*, 6(3), 265-279. doi: 10.1177/1470357207081000
- Harlow, S. & Guo, L. (2014). Will the revolution be tweeted or facebooked? Using digital communication tools in immigrant activism. *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication*, 19, 463-478. doi: 10.1111/jcc4.12062
- Hartelius, J. E. (2010). "Leave a message of hope or tribute": Digital memorializing as public deliberation. *Argumentation and Advocacy*, 47, 67-85.
- Haskins, E. (2007). Between archive and participation: Public memory in a digital age. *Rhetoric Society Quarterly*, 37(4), 401-422. doi: 10.1080/02773940601086794

Hess, A. (2007). In digital remembrance: Vernacular memory and the rhetorical construction of web memorials. *Media, Culture & Society*, 29(5), 812-830. doi:

10.1177/0163443707080539\

Jack Armistead Pinto. (n.d.). *My Sandy Hook Family*. Retrieved from:

<http://mysandyhookfamily.org/>

James Pradley Mattioli. (n.d.). *My Sandy Hook Family*. Retrieved from:

<http://mysandyhookfamily.org/>

Jesse McCord Lewis. (n.d.). *My Sandy Hook Family*. Retrieved from:

<http://mysandyhookfamily.org/>

Jorgensen-Earp, C.R. & Lanzilotti, L.A. (1998). Public memory and private grief: The construction of shrines at the sites of public tragedy. *Quarterly Journal of Speech*, 84, 150-170. Retrieved from: <http://eds.b.ebscohost.com/ehost/detail?vid=6&sid=02e237ed-5f49-4321-b418-59d098ff418c%40sessionmgr113&hid=101&bdata=JnNpdGU9ZWwhvc3QtbGl2ZSZzY29wZT1zaXRl#db=ufh&AN=572804>

Josephine Gay. (n.d.). *My Sandy Hook Family*. Retrieved from: <http://mysandyhookfamily.org/>

Kitch, C. (2003). "Mourning in America": Ritual, redemption, and recovery in news narrative after September 11. *Journalism Studies*, 4(2), 213-224. doi:

10.1080/14616700320000074801

Lehdonvirta, V. (2010). Online spaces have material culture: Goodbye to digital post-materialism and hello to virtual consumption. *Media, Culture, & Society*, 32(5), 883-889. doi: 10.1177/0163443710378559

- Losh, E. M. (2009). *Virtualpolitik: An electronic history of government media-making in a time of war, scandal, disaster, miscommunication, and mistakes*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
- Marwick, A. & Ellison, N. B. (2012). "There isn't WIFI in heaven!": Negotiating visibility on Facebook memorial pages. *Journal of Broadcasting & Electronic Media*, 56 (3), 378-400. doi: 10.1080/08838151.2012.705197
- My Sandy Hook Family*. (2013) Retrieved from: <http://mysandyhookfamily.org/>.
- Noah Pozner. (n.d.). *My Sandy Hook Family*. Retrieved from: <http://mysandyhookfamily.org/>
- Overberg, P., Hoyer, M., Hannan, M., Upton, J., Hansen, B., & Durkin, E. (2013, December 2). Explore the data on mass killings since 2006. *USA Today*. Retrieved from <http://www.usatoday.com/story/news/nation/2013/09/16/mass-killings-data-map/2820423/>
- Pantii, M. & Sumiala, J. (2009). Till death do us join: Media, mourning rituals and the sacred centre of the society. *Media, Culture and Society*, 31(1), 119-135. doi: 10.1177/0163443708098251
- Phillips, K. (2010). The failure of memory: Reflections on rhetoric and public remembrance. *Western Journal of Communication*, 74(2), 208-223. doi: 10.1080/1050311003680600
- Savoie, H. (2010). Memory work in the digital age: Exploring the boundary between universal and particular memory online. *Global Media Journal*, 9(16), 1-22.
- Sci, S. A. (2009). (Re)thinking the memorial as a place of aesthetic negotiation. *Culture, Theory, and Critique*, 50(1), 41-57. doi: 10.1080/14735780802696351

Sendesky, S. (2013). *Report of the States' Attorney for the Judicial District of Danbury on the Shootings at Sandy Hook Elementary School and 36 Yogananda Street, Newtown, Connecticut on December 14, 2012*. Retrieved from:

http://www.ct.gov/csao/lib/csao/Sandy_Hook_Final_Report.pdf

Sturken, M. (1997). *Tangled memories: The Vietnam War, the AIDS epidemic, and the politics of remembering*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.

'The Rachel Maddow Show' for Tuesday, December 10, 2013 (December 12, 2013). Retrieved from: http://www.nbcnews.com/id/53812453/ns/msnbc-rachel_maddow_show/t/rachel-maddow-show-tuesday-december/#.U2lsCvldVZE

Thomas, J. (2008). From people power to mass hysteria: Media and the popular reactions to the death of Princess Diana. *International Journal of Cultural Studies*, 11(3), 362-376. doi: 10.1177/1367877908092590

Velody, I. & Williams, R. (1998). Introduction. In I. Velody & R. Williams (Eds.), *The politics of constructionism*, (2-12). London: SAGE.

Victoria Leigh Soto. (n.d.). *My Sandy Hook Family*. Retrieved from:

<http://mysandyhookfamily.org/>

Walker, D. C., & Curry, E. A. (2007). Narrative as Communication Activism: Research Relationships in Social Justice Projects. In L.K. Frey & K. M. Carragee (Eds.), *Communication Activism Volume Two: Communication for Social Change* (345-369). New York, NY: Hampton Press.

Where Angels Play Foundation. (n.d.). *Our Story*.

http://www.thesandyhookgroundproject.org/our_story

Wolf, B. (Executive Producer). (December 10, 2013). "How to help on the Sandy Hook Anniversary. [television series episode segment]. In R. Maddow [host], *The Rachel Maddow Show*. New York, N. Y.: NBC Universal

Zappen, J. P. (2005). Digital rhetoric: Toward an integrated theory. *Technical Communication Quarterly*, 14(3), 319-325.

Appendix A

Below is the transcription of the *The Rachel Maddow Show* (TRMS) segment titled by NBC Universal as “How to help on the Sandy Hook Anniversary” (for full citation see Wolf, 2013 as well as ‘*The Rachel Maddow Show*,’ 2013 in references). The couple interviewed, David and Francine Wheeler, were the parents of Sandy Hook victim Benjamin Wheeler. This was their second time appearing on TRMS, the first regarding gun control legislation and overall coping with the loss of their son. This transcript was obtained via NBC News and as such, the total accuracy of it cannot be verified. To lessen the impact of this limitation, direct quotes throughout this essay from it have been kept to a minimum. Video clips played throughout the live segment were not available to the researcher.

1. MADDOW: Every time anyone calls 911, the call is recorded. And that makes sense. Not only do 911 dispatching calls need to be monitored in terms of their quality, but sometimes 911 calls end up being part of, for example, a criminal case, they end up being part of evidence.

So, those kind of calls always get recorded. And in many cases, those recorded calls, of people calling 911, those calls are subject to public records request. That’s why you can hear on local news today in Wisconsin for example -- the calls that people made to 911 during this multi-car pile-up in a snowstorm this weekend. It’s why we get to gawk at 911 call audio for celebrities end up in accidents, or involved with the police for some reason.

Calls to the emergency services in most cases end up being in the public domain. And when the mass shootings happened almost a year ago now in Newtown, Connecticut, there were two different types of 911 calls that were made that way, people calling 911 on cell phones, by and large, they had their called routed to state police. People called 911 from land lines, their calls were largely routed to the local police department, and it was those calls to the local PD that ended up being subject to public records request.

Newtown did not want the audio of those calls to be released. The state tried to change the law after the fact, to shield those calls from the media. The state prosecutor who is

investigating the shooting at Sandy Hook went to court to try to keep the sound of those calls from being publicly released.

But a lawsuit by "The Associated Press" succeeded in prying the tapes loose. And then, last week, over the objections of many of the victims` families and the town and the investigators, those tapes were released and every media outlet had its own choice to make about whether or not to air them and most organizations did not air those tapes. Some did, including incredibly the "CBS Evening News" and also FOX News, they decided to broadcast the tapes essentially because of their entertainment value, because there really was no news content to those tapes at all. There was nothing that the public learned from those tapes, that was not only already known about the incident or that could not be discerned from transcripts.

But some news organizations played them anyway, including the sounds of the gunshots that were fired at those kids and those teachers in real time. Why did we need to hear that?

We have a free press. Every news outlet gets to make its own decisions about what it wants to broadcast and what is descent, and what its anchors and its executives can live with when they wake up in the morning and look at themselves in the mirror.

But on the day the tapes were released, this sign was put up on the telephone pole in Newtown, Connecticut. "Vulture media, you got your tapes, are you happy? Please leave."

Obviously, this is nothing official and whoever put this up on the day the 911 tapes were played is not speaking for the whole town, but you do kind of get the point.

In Newtown, Connecticut, over the last year, the town has taken pretty extraordinary measures to try to take care of itself as a community, not just in terms of handling their own grief for what they went through, but also handling the additional burden, the additional pain that has

been caused however inadvertently by the intense national interest, the intense national concern for that town and for its families and its kids.

As we have been approaching December 14th, which will mark one year since the massacre at Sandy Hook Elementary, the public officials in Newtown have twice now organized events for the media to say, in essence, hey, cover us now, set up your cameras now, ask your questions now, get it over it, get whatever it is you need to be able to meet the demand for information about Newtown and this anniversary, but let us do this on our own terms so we have some control over how inundated we are with media requests and with the physical presence of the media and with the emotional toll that that presence takes on the town and its survivors. Let us have some control over the unending requests to have us interpret our grief for a national audience.

(BEGIN VIDEO CLIP)

PAT LLODRA, NEWTOWN FIRST SELECTMAN: We truly are hoping that we have provided enough opportunity with the print media and the TV media and particularly the local media, to answer questions and give the media the story that I know that the world's going to want to hear on the first anniversary.

JOHN REED: We went through this at the end of the last school year. We went through it when we reopened the Sandy Hook School last January. We went through it when we opened the school year this year. We went through it when there was an interest in the demolition of Sandy Hook School, and people we went through it after one of the reports was released that people are looking for background footage. We went through it even at Halloween, people were trying to come up to one of our schools to get pictures of the kids from Sandy Hook School in their Halloween costumes.

LLODRA: There`s many of you and not so many of us so we pay that emotional and economic toll and really we were hurt very badly last year, as you all know, we don`t need to be reminded, we don`t need to relive it. We live it every day. We carry it with us, which are fully aware of our tragedy.

So, we`re trying to say to the world, please give us a chance to grow into that really happy healthy place that loves children and families, who have great schools. We know who we are. We know that that`s our destiny. But we need you to help us get there by please staying away.

UNIDENTIFIED MALE: You realize we`re not one --

(END VIDEO CLIP)

MADDOW: Newtown, Connecticut, does not have a mayor, they have a board of selectmen and the first selectman is the highest ranking elected official in the town. That`s the woman speaking there, Pat Llodra. She`s essentially has tried to absorb the public`s interest, tried to shield the town from the media, so they can be left alone to mark one year since the shooting in their own way.

And so, as the media and all of us try to figure out how to do right by that community, which has been through so much and who we all feel so much for, there`s also the question of the families themselves. If you want to support the families of the kids in the school staff members who were killed at Sandy Hook, there`s nothing wrong with that feeling, if you want to reach out to them, if you want in some small way to try to help them, is there a right way to do that that isn`t going cause more harm than you intend?

If all you want to do is help and you don`t know how to help without hurting, is there a way to do that? On the same day that city officials in Newtown held that event for the media that

we just showed, the families who lost their kids or their mom or their sister or their wife at Sandy Hook Elementary, they also spoke that day in Newtown, Connecticut, yesterday, and they tried to answer the question of the right way to help, the right way to address your interest, and your feeling for them and your questions.

If you want to know about each individual person lost that day, if you want to help them honor their memory in a way that is meaningful and constructive for the people who love them -- well, this Web site which they unveiled yesterday is one way that the families say you can do that in a way that help and not hurt. It's called mysandyhookfamily.org.

The site is a way the families feel comfortable about for people to learn about their loved ones and their children who were killed. Like that Jessica Rekos loved killer whales or that Dylan Hockley thought that lightning was beautiful and he called it beautiful.

The family's Web site also I think crucially directs you to the foundations and the causes that the families are supporting or that they have set up themselves to honor their lost child or their lost family member.

One of the 6-year-olds lost that day last December was Benjamin Wheeler. Ben loved Beatles songs, his parents never let him skip a page when they were reading a book and he was anxiously awaiting the loss of his first tooth. Ben also loved lighthouses. And so, his family has set up a foundation in his name called Ben's Lighthouse. The goal of the foundation is simply to help the kids of Newtown heal from what happened in their town last year.

The families of the victims are doing what they can to not only mediate their own interaction with the world that is so intensively concerned and interested and full of feeling about what happened, but also to speak authoritatively with their own voice on their own terms in a

way that means that nobody else can claim to act for them because they are speaking themselves on their own terms in their own way, mysandyhookfamily.org.

(COMMECIAL BREAK)

(BEGIN VIDEO CLIP)

FRANCINE WHEELER, MOTHER OF SANDY HOOK VICTIM: My name is Francine Wheeler. My husband David is with me. We live in Sandy Hook, Connecticut. David and I had two sons. Our older son Nate, soon to be 10 years old, is a fourth grader at Sandy Hook Elementary School. Our younger son, Ben, age 6, was murdered in his first grade classroom on December 14th.

DAVID WHEELER, FATHER OF SANDY HOOK VICTIM: We`re never going to stop being Ben`s parents and that`s complemented and made difficult by being the best parents we can be for Nate, who has his own journey.

F. WHEELER: Yes, he -- Nate said right after Ben died, he said, this is tough. But he said, you promised you would protect us.

D. WHEELER: Yes.

F. WHEELER: And I did promise him that.

D. WHEELER: Sure.

F. WHEELER: You know? So what do I say to him? I can`t change what happened. I know it wasn`t our fault. We just sent him to school, but I`ll do whatever I can to help protect Nate and protect Ben`s spirit.

(END VIDEO CLIP)

MADDOW: David and Francine Wheeler, the parents of Nate and Benjamin. Ben was 6 years old when he was killed at Sandy Hook Elementary School last December.

Joining us now for the interview are David and Francine Wheeler. David and Francine, thank you both so much for being here.

D. WHEELER: Thank you, Rachel.

MADDOW: We are coming up on one year since it happened, and I can't imagine that it was an easy decision to make yourselves publicly available again to talk about this as we come up on one year. How did you make that decision and how do you feel about that one-year anniversary?

D. WHEELER: We don't exactly know how we're going to feel on that day. I am -- I'm all over the map about it. We have decided to focus on Nate and decided to spend time together as a family. We have decided to distract ourselves a little bit, see some things we might not otherwise see.

But, you know, as has happened so often in the past 11 months, we don't really know what's going to happen. So we're just going to try and stay open and be kind and be loving and do our best.

F. WHEELER: I think what David is saying is that we can't really plan, we just sort of go with our feeling in the moment, you know?

MADDOW: Yes.

F. WHEELER: So if we plan to do something special, we can always cancel that or do it later or -- so how we're feeling, like how I'm feeling right now is sad and angry, but that's a usual feeling.

MADDOW: Do you feel like looking back at the last year as time has passed there's any advice that you would have given yourselves for how to survive, how to be kind to each other, how do the best that you could in circumstances over this year?

D. WHEELER: Yes, I would tell myself certainly just take it easy and don't always, you know -- don't always believe yourself right away. You know, take a second and take a step back and see what exactly is going on and if that's a good thing or not a good thing. See how you can direct things in that way.

MADDOW: Sort of feel your instincts but not necessarily follow them always?

D. WHEELER: That's a good way to put it, sure.

F. WHEELER: Being gentle with yourself.

D. WHEELER: With everyone.

F. WHEELER: Yes.

MADDOW: The decision to be part of the mysandyhookfamily.org project, the thing that really strikes me about this is that it is on your own terms, putting out the information that you want to put out, that you want to be known, and it is speaking authoritatively in your own voice, nobody can say that they're speaking for you because you are speaking for themselves. What is valuable to you about this way of moving forward?

F. WHEELER: It's an honest way to share with the public, and if your family, for example, who's very private but you want to honor your child or your mom or your wife, this is an opportunity for you to do that in a safe place. We get all the information. We are in control of the information that is released to the public. If the public wants to know what the families are thinking about something, if there's an answer, and sometimes we don't have one, but if we have an answer, that's a very accurate place for you to find it.

Where, you know, this is a group of people who respect one another and have come to realize that we can lean on each other. Because we understand how the other people feel.

MADDOW: In a way that nobody else really does?

F. WHEELER: That`s right.

MADDOW: This is a separate initiative, this Web site, done by some of the Sandy Hook Promise.

D. WHEELER: Completely separate.

MADDOW: And Sandy Hook Promise has also been doing, some initiatives they`ve been doing. Parent together, to try to turn things in a constructive way that could help other communities. That work is also informed by some of the families at least and it seems like everybody`s sort of working together hand in hand, but doing different things going in some different directions.

D. WHEELER: Well, the creation of mysandyhookfamily.org Web site was a very healing experience for me and I think it was very healing for a number of the people involved so that`s been good. And that is, as you said, it`s a separate and completely distinct initiative from the families alone. Some of the things we talked about in January are ideas that have been put forward by the parent together program from Sandy Hook Promise.

But they certainly reason -- resonate with what I believe and some of the things we talked about. The idea being that a parent or a grandparent, their love for their children is such a strong area of common ground that we can actually put aside political division and we can actually put aside this inability to make any progress and talk about something that everyone can agree on. It`s a terrific place to start. I think it`s really important.

MADDOW: David, one of the things that you said in January, I went back and I read the full transcripts of our whole conversations that day. One of the things you said struck me in that you were talking about policy changes and if there`s going to be any policy changes in reaction

to the nation`s grief over what happened. You said at that time. Listen, the kind of policy changes we need is going to take longer than the careers of any legislators who exist right now.

We need to do things that are going to get us on course for a long time and not getting stuff done right now does not worry. You still feel that way?

D. WHEELER: I do. I absolutely do. The legislative part of it is really important. It still is, and April was a disappointment when we were in Washington and things didn`t go the way we hoped they might.

But this is a bigger matter than that. This is a matter of parents talking together and communicating together in a way that supersedes any particular ideological boundary. I mean, you know, one of the things that the promise did recently was to talk to parents of all ideologies and many, many different faiths all over the country, and it is not surprising that when they started talking about parents desire to make the country safer for their children, everyone is in agreement.

MADDOW: Yes.

D. WHEELER: It`s a very simple, common place to start.

MADDOW: Well, we`ve got links to mysandyhookfamily.org and also to the Sandy Hook Promise and some of what they`re doing, posted on our Web site tonight.

And I just want to thank you personally for having these conversations with me. Whenever you want to talk about anything, open door and I`m -- it`s an honor that you guys are willing to be here. Thanks. Good to have you here.

D. WHEELER: Thanks.

MADDOW: We`ll be right back.

(COMMERCIAL BREAK)

Appendix B

Below are the screenshots of the My Sandy Hook Family memorial website. The first pictures are of the home, about, and contact pages. The example captures are representative of the remaining victims’ pages. The first two are of the first two tips of the heart: Charlotte Helen Bacon and Josephine Gay. Next is an example of an adult tribute requiring the reader to scroll down. The final image is the tribute for adult Anne Marie Murphy to which reads “Thank you for respecting our privacy.” Out of the twenty-six names the names Caroline Previdi and Catherine V. Hubbard do not link to tributes.

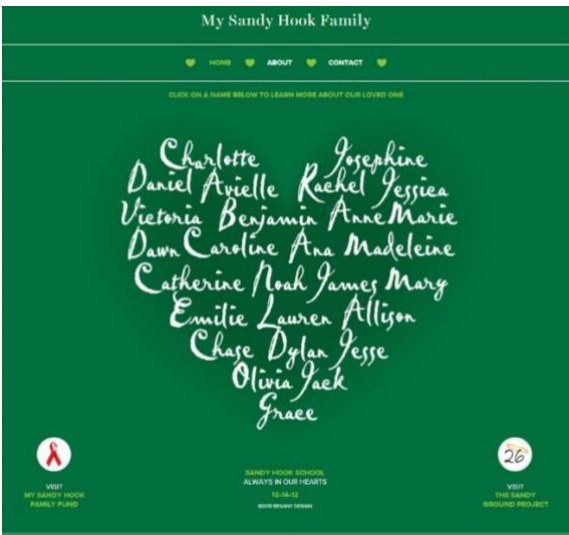


Figure B1 MSHF online memorial homepage



Figure B2 MSHF online memorial about page

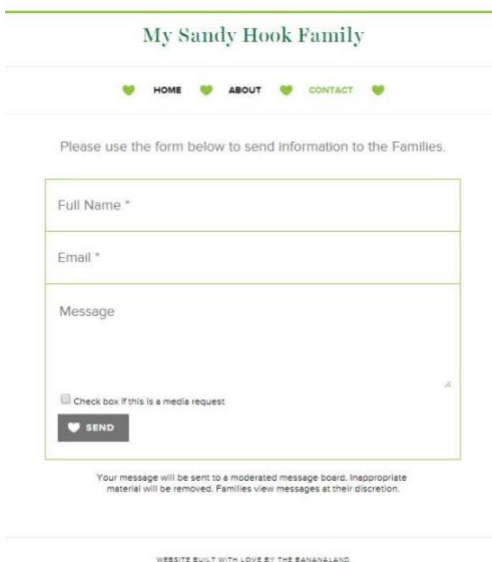


Figure B3 MSHF online memorial contact page

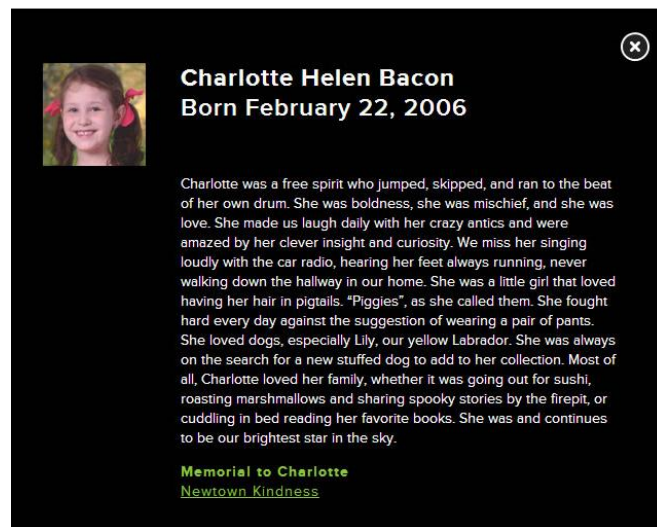



Figure B4 Charlotte Helen Bacon



Josephine Gay
Born December 11, 2005


Born in Maryland, Joey was the youngest of three girls in our family. She enjoyed many things in this life, but her favorite was being with her older sisters and playing games with them. She liked to snuggle on the couch and watch movies with us. Her favorites were The Chipmunks, Lemonade Mouth, and all of the Barbie movies. She loved to swim and went to the pool each weekend and throughout the summer. She liked art and playing outside on her playset – and all of our neighbors’. Her favorite books were the Fancy Nancy stories, and she never tired of having them read to her each night at bedtime.

Joey was loved by her family, friends, and teachers. She had a way with people, a way without words. She spoke with her eyes, her gentle hugs, her sweet spirit, and her little hands. She was a happy, affectionate, little girl who overcame many challenges in life. She laughed loudly and gave love freely and genuinely. Her smile lit up a room and captured everyone around her. Joey radiated God’s love and goodness and during our time with her she taught us how to be better people.

We will love her forever and always keep her in our hearts.

Memorial to Josephine
[Joey’s Fund with the Doug Flutie Jr. Foundation for Autism](#)
[Safe and Sound: A Sandy Hook Initiative](#)

Figure B5 Josephine Gay



Dawn Hochsprung
Born June 28, 1965

Dawn was strong, confident, inspiring and compassionate. She was always willing to fight for what she believed in and to help in any way she could. She was a dedicated educator who inspired her students to reach their fullest potential by instilling in them the importance of life-long learning. Dawn spent many summers sailing Long Island Sound with her husband George. They also enjoyed kayaking, snowshoeing and cross-country skiing, or just talking in front of the fire with a glass of wine (and, of course, a box of chocolate). She loved her dog, a black standard poodle named Bella. She carried Bella on her hip like a baby and shared her own meals with Bella (often with her own fork).

Dawn had two daughters at a young age and raised them mostly by herself, but she never wavered in her ambition. She balanced her own education with her responsibilities as a mother. She never missed her daughters’ softball games—she may have been in the bleachers doing homework, but she was always there. Her career advanced and her schedule grew hectic, but she never failed to be there for her daughters. They would often call during her workday and get her voicemail, but always got a text right back that said, “I’m in a meeting. Are you OK?”

Dawn also loved spending time with her grandchildren. She took them on sailing expeditions, trips to the Adirondacks and visits to museums and science centers. Ever the educator, she bought books as their gifts—always inscribed with a special note of how proud she was of them. She went to their sporting events and advocated for them at their schools. She often joked that she was their “mean grandma” because she wasn’t afraid to tell them “no.” She could say this in good spirit, because she knew that she was also their favorite grandma.

Dawn died as she lived: always in control, handling whatever came her way. There is nothing that could have stopped her from trying to protect the people she loved.

Figure B6 Dawn Hochsprung (1)

Long Island Sound with her husband George. They also enjoyed kayaking, snowshoeing and cross-country skiing, or just talking in front of the fire with a glass of wine (and, of course, a box of chocolate). She loved her dog, a black standard poodle named Bella. She carried Bella on her hip like a baby and shared her own meals with Bella (often with her own fork).

Dawn had two daughters at a young age and raised them mostly by herself, but she never wavered in her ambition. She balanced her own education with her responsibilities as a mother. She never missed her daughters’ softball games—she may have been in the bleachers doing homework, but she was always there. Her career advanced and her schedule grew hectic, but she never failed to be there for her daughters. They would often call during her workday and get her voicemail, but always got a text right back that said, “I’m in a meeting. Are you OK?”

Dawn also loved spending time with her grandchildren. She took them on sailing expeditions, trips to the Adirondacks and visits to museums and science centers. Ever the educator, she bought books as their gifts—always inscribed with a special note of how proud she was of them. She went to their sporting events and advocated for them at their schools. She often joked that she was their “mean grandma” because she wasn’t afraid to tell them “no.” She could say this in good spirit, because she knew that she was also their favorite grandma.

Dawn died as she lived: always in control, handling whatever came her way. There is nothing that could have stopped her from trying to protect the people she loved.

Memorial to Dawn
[Dawn Hochsprung](#)

Figure B7 Dawn Hochsprung (2)

Thank you for respecting our privacy.

Figure B8 Anne Marie Murphy

Appendix C

Due to limited space, the text of each individual memorial page dedicated to each victim are below. To see the layout of each memorial page, refer to the examples of the pages dedicated to Charlotte Helen Bacon, Josephine Gay, Dawn Hochsprung, and Anne Marie Murphy in Appendix A. The transcriptions below are of all the victims and the *About* page, in the order corresponding to their place within the heart on the home page starting in the top left corner (*Charlotte*), reading left to right, and ending with the last single name at the base (*Grace*). Catherine V. Hubbard and Caroline Previdi, whose names are simply listed within the heart, are omitted.

1. About Page:

December 14, 2012 forever and unalterably changed the lives of the 26 families whose loved ones were killed at Sandy Hook Elementary School. Since that day, we have been overwhelmed by the outpouring of kindness, love, prayers, and generosity received from the entire world. To simply say thank you is not enough to express our sincere gratitude.

In the midst of our grief we have come to realize that we want our loved ones to be remembered for the lives they lived and how they touched our hearts. We have been uplifted by the support of so many people and we would like to keep that spirit of unity and love alive in all we do to remember those we so dearly miss. It is with this in mind that we have created the MySandyHookFamily.org website.

This website is intended to serve as a singular place of sharing, communication, and contact with the families of those who lost their lives that day. MySandyHookFamily.org allows us, the 26 families, the opportunity to honor our loved ones in a way that feels right to each individual family.

We ask that you understand that each of us – each family – is unique in our own experiences following this tragedy and we each have our own voice and perspective. By creating this website, we hope to offer an opportunity to communicate with our families and honor our

loved ones, while at the same time respecting each family's individual journey and unique experiences.

On the one year mark of that horrific day, we know that many people across the country will be thinking of the children and educators so tragically taken from us, and wondering how to help. We ask that you consider performing an act of kindness or volunteering with a charitable organization in your local community. In this way, we hope that some small measure of good may be returned to the world.

2. Charlotte Helen Bacon

Born February 22, 2006

Charlotte was a free spirit who jumped, skipped, and ran to the beat of her own drum. She was boldness, she was mischief, and she was love. She made us laugh daily with her crazy antics and were amazed by her clever insight and curiosity. We miss her singing loudly with the car radio, hearing her feet always running, never walking down the hallway in our home. She was a little girl that loved having her hair in pigtails. "Piggies", as she called them. She fought hard every day against the suggestion of wearing a pair of pants. She loved dogs, especially Lily, our yellow Labrador. She was always on the search for a new stuffed dog to add to her collection. Most of all, Charlotte loved her family, whether it was going out for sushi, roasting marshmallows and sharing spooky stories by the firepit, or cuddling in bed reading her favorite books. She was and continues to be our brightest star in the sky.

Memorial to Charlotte

Newtown Kindness

3. Josephine Gay

Born December 11, 2005

Born in Maryland, Joey was the youngest of three girls in our family. She enjoyed many things in this life, but her favorite was being with her older sisters and playing games with them. She liked to snuggle on the couch and watch movies with us. Her favorites were *The Chipmunks*, *Lemonade Mouth*, and all of the *Barbie* movies. She loved to swim and went to the pool each weekend and throughout the summer. She liked art and playing outside on her playset – and all of our neighbors'. Her favorite books were the *Fancy Nancy* stories, and she never tired of having them read to her each night at bedtime.

Joey was loved by her family, friends, and teachers. She had a way with people, a way without words. She spoke with her eyes, her gentle hugs, her sweet spirit, and her little hands. She was a happy, affectionate, little girl who overcame many challenges in life. She laughed loudly and gave love freely and genuinely. Her smile lit up a room and captured everyone around her. Joey radiated God's love and goodness and during our time with her she taught us how to be better people.

We will love her forever and always keep her in our hearts.

Memorial to Josephine

Joey's Fund with the Doug Flutie Jr. Foundation for Autism

Safe and Sound: A Sandy Hook Initiative

4. Daniel Barden

Born September 27, 2005

For Daniel, kindness knew no boundaries. Daniel was a child who would hold the door open for strangers, scoop up his tiny ant friends to reunite them with their families, and befriend the classmate who always sat alone. Through his constant show of empathy towards all living

things and his effortless joy for life, Daniel taught us so much in his short stay with us. Wherever Daniel was, he served as an inspiration to others – the stories are endless.

What Would Daniel Do is our family-endorsed effort to honor Daniel’s memory by inspiring others to share his kindness, compassion, selflessness, and gratitude. Our mission is to empower every person to act with kindness in order to make a positive cultural change. By bringing awareness to these issues and by providing opportunities for interaction and acceptance, we hope to help individuals build a sense of community and reduce social isolation.

[Memorial to Daniel](#)

[What Would Daniel Do](#)

5. Avielle Rose Richman

Born October 17th, 2006

Avielle Rose Richman was born in San Diego, California on October 17th, 2006 into a family of story tellers. With a spitfire personality, and a love of laughter, Avielle was rarely without a giant grin, and was often barefoot. Like her parents, she loved stories and demanded them as she was falling asleep, taking a bath, riding in the car, and on every walk she took. She already understood that her life — her growing up — was going to be a series of stories.

[Memorial to Avielle](#)

[To learn more about Avielle](#)

[To learn more about the Avielle Foundation](#)

6. Rachel D’Avino

Born July 17, 1983

Rachel Marie D’Avino had an unrelenting determination and a clear focus on helping adults and children with Autism. She attended University of Hartford, Post University and

University of St. Joseph. On 12/12/12 she had just completed her final requirements to become a Board Certified Behavioral Analyst.

On that night Rachel wrote “It is my dream that you know my name as a leader in Behavioral Analysis for children and adults with Autism; however I will be thrilled if I make a few people have an easier more enjoyable life”. Friends and family members are carrying on “Rachel’s dream”. Team Rachel and “Rachel’s Dream” Team are walking and collecting for Autism Speaks.

At a Celebration of Rachel’s Life at the University of Hartford, Russ Ken, Director of New England Autism Speaks, compared Rachel to “The Giving Tree” a book by Shell Silverstein. He also said that their mission statement could be summed up in three words, “Be Like Rachel”. Rachel’s other passions in life were karate, photography, cooking and baking. She was working with her Nona to create recipes for an Italian family cookbook. Over the years Rachel had quite a menagerie of animals. She was drawn to dogs, bunnies, birds– anything with fur, scales, or feathers.

Rachel was a daughter to Mary (Carmody) D’Avino of Bethlehem and Ralph D’Avino of Waterbury. Rachel was an adoring big sister to Sarah and Hannah. She lived at home with her mom, sisters, and stepdad, Peter Paradis. Rachel’s best friend and soon-to-be-fiance Tony Cerritelli were to be engaged on Christmas Eve. He had just asked her parents’ permission to marry her. We all miss her so much and will continue to keep her memory alive.

7. Jessica Adrienne Rekos

Born May 10, 2006

Jessica was our beautiful little girl who brought so much happiness to our lives. She was an independent, smart, and creative little girl who was always eager to learn new things. She

spent hours “researching” Orca whales and just wanted to be “friends with an Orca”. She also spent her time watching movies about horses, and she had fallen in love with the idea of becoming a cowgirl. She took horseback riding lessons every week, and she loved going on trail rides through the woods.

Jessica made us laugh until we cried with her one-liners and funny responses. She was a natural leader, and we called her our little CEO. She was always planning, asking questions, and figuring out the details. Jess adored her little brothers and loved being with them. Weeks before she died, her horseback riding instructor asked Jess who her best friend was and she replied, “My brother, Travis”.

Memorial to Jessica

Jessica Rekos

8. Victoria Leigh Soto

Born November 4, 1985

Vicki was the loving daughter of Donna and Carlos Soto, who at 27 years of age was living her dream teaching first grade at Sandy Hook Elementary School. Vicki lived at home with her sisters Jillian, Carlee and her brother Carlos Mathew along with her favorite dog Roxie. Her family including her cousins were as important to her as her career as a teacher.

Her zest for life was evident to all who knew her, she was serious if she needed to be and silly more often than people would expect. She was beautiful with sparkling blue eyes. Vicki was the perfect daughter, loyal and loving cousin and friend as well as, the best person you would ever meet. Vicki’s mantra was to live each day as if it was your last and to always: Live, Laugh, Love

Our family has set up a foundation to provide scholarships to students going into the field of education. We also collect and donate new books to schools in need.

Memorial to Vicki

Vicki Soto

9. Benjamin Andrew Wheeler

Born September 12, 2006

Ben woke up with a smile on his face and carried it everywhere he went. The constant sparkle in his eye showed his delight with all the world and his slightly mischievous plans for it. And he was figuring it all out. We loved his inquisitive mind and his desire to have every question answered, with the utmost urgency. We loved his thirst for experience and that little bit of shyness that came out from time to time. We still hear the echo of his insistent voice, clamoring for the attention he knew he deserved and the world would give him. We followed every direction he gave as we scratched his back at bedtime, played every Beatles song he requested, and knew that if we skipped a page in that night's book we would certainly hear about it. His gap-toothed grin and his concern that he hadn't yet lost a tooth. Benny, we think about you every second of every minute of every hour of every day and now you are our lighthouse. Forever.

Memorial to Ben

Ben's Lighthouse

10. Anne Marie Murphy

Thank you for respecting our privacy.

11. Dawn Hochsprung

Born June 28, 1965

Dawn was strong, confident, inspiring and compassionate. She was always willing to fight for what she believed in and to help in any way she could. She was a dedicated educator who inspired her students to reach their fullest potential by instilling in them the importance of life-long learning. Dawn spent many summers sailing Long Island Sound with her husband George. They also enjoyed kayaking, snowshoeing and cross-country skiing, or just talking in front of the fire with a glass of wine (and, of course, a box of chocolate). She loved her dog, a black standard poodle named Bella. She carried Bella on her hip like a baby and shared her own meals with Bella (often with her own fork).

Dawn had two daughters at a young age and raised them mostly by herself, but she never wavered in her ambition. She balanced her own education with her responsibilities as a mother. She never missed her daughters' softball games—she may have been in the bleachers doing homework, but she was always there. Her career advanced and her schedule grew hectic, but she never failed to be there for her daughters. They would often call during her workday and get her voicemail, but always got a text right back that said, “I’m in a meeting. Are you OK?”

Dawn also loved spending time with her grandchildren. She took them on sailing expeditions, trips to the Adirondacks and visits to museums and science centers. Ever the educator, she bought books as their gifts—always inscribed with a special note of how proud she was of them. She went to their sporting events and advocated for them at their schools. She often joked that she was their “mean grandma” because she wasn’t afraid to tell them ‘no.’ She could say this in good spirit, because she knew that she was also their favorite grandma.

Dawn died as she lived: always in control, handling whatever came her way. There is nothing that could have stopped her from trying to protect the people she loved.

Memorial to Dawn

Dawn Hochsprung

12. Ana Grace Márquez-Greene

Ana Grace was widely known for her enthusiastic love of God, people, music, food and fun. She instituted the house rule of “seconds”. Her favorite seconds included second breakfast, second dessert and second hugs... And she could out-groove just about anyone. A budding little musician, Ana wanted to be a teacher, dancer or pop star when she grew up.

Sweet Caramel Princess, your family misses you desperately despite the comfort that comes from knowing you are wrapped safely in the arms of Jesus. We grieve your loss every minute of every day, along with the legion of friends and family in the US, Canada and Puerto Rico whose lives you have touched. We will fill our hearts with praise until reunited with you again.

Love Wins,

Daddy, Mami and Isaiah

Memorials to Ana

To Learn More About Ana

Ana Grace Project of Klingberg Family Centers

Western Connecticut State University

Artists Collective

Ana Grace Márquez-Greene Memorial Bursary

Ana's Bursary Fund

13. Madeleine Hsu

Born July 10, 2006

To our beautiful, joyful daughter, a petite princess with a big personality: We remember how life for you was a dance and a race. You loved to run ahead to the next big adventure. Always running...never walking but sometimes dancing, skipping and hopping to whatever you were going to do next. A music lover you loved to sing along with the radio and play the piano. Everything you did, you did with enthusiasm and determination, riding your bike without training wheels the day they were taken off, jumping waves at the beach, swimming at the pool. Once you set your mind to do something it was as good as done. So energetic, you ran, played and strived at 100% from the time you awoke until you fell asleep exhausted at night, only resting quietly to read books about fairies, princesses and Pinkalicious. You were an amazing little girl.

14. Noah Pozner

Born November 20, 2006

Noah was energy in motion. His zest for life was contagious. He was endlessly inquisitive, always wanting to know the why and how of things. He loved intricate, imaginative play with his Legos and superhero figurines. He loved playgrounds and the outdoors. Most of all, he loved his family and shared an unbreakable and unbroken bond with his twin sister, Arielle. He loved a good joke and was an enthusiastic story teller. We miss the music of his full-bellied laughter, the warmth of his hugs and the twinkle in his beautiful eyes with an indescribable, timeless sorrow.

15. James Radley Mattioli

Born March 22, 2006

James was six. He was all boy. He wrestled his Dad on the floor, jumped off tall objects, cuddled with his Mom and grew faster than we could believe. 'J' loved to be a part of whatever

his sister was doing; he learned so much from her and they had an amazing relationship. He loved school, his friends and being outside. James was an avid swimmer and had a keen interest in Math. He had boundless energy, love, happiness and curiosity. James is greatly missed by everyone whose life he touched. We were blessed to have him in our lives.

James R. Mattioli Memorial Fund C/O Newtown Savings Bank; 39 Main Street
Newtown, CT 06470

To honor the memory of our son, we will support programs which brought him joy and enriched his life.

16. Mary Sherlach

Born February 11, 1956

Mary's Fund was established in 2013 following the mass shooting at Sandy Hook Elementary School. Named after Mary Sherlach, the school psychologist at Sandy Hook, Mary was one of the first educators killed that morning. Established by her family and friends, Mary's Fund is dedicated to continuing her work of providing mental health services to children and teens.

The mission of Mary's Fund is to provide access to mental health services for children and teens, throughout Fairfield County, Connecticut, who might otherwise find such services un-accessible. The goal of Mary's Fund is to continue Mary's work, in perpetuity, providing the highest quality of care that Mary sought to deliver each day at Sandy Hook.

Memorial to Mary

Mary's Fund

17. Emilie Parker

Born May 12, 2006

As Emilie's parents, we are striving to honor our daughter by continuing to support the things that she loved. Emilie was an exceptional artist, and we enjoyed watching her as she expressed her creativity, love, excitement and her true self through art. We want to celebrate Emilie's passion by supporting the arts with funding for programs in the community and schools.

Memorial to Emilie

Emilie Parker Fund

18. Lauren Gabrielle Rousseau

Born June 8, 1982

Lauren was a sensitive and focused young woman. As a child she played school and always kept her desire to become a professional educator as she grew. She recently worked three jobs to cover her expenses, including the most recent at SHES as a building substitute. She was so happy to finally get a position in educating young children. Memories of her love of family, friends, customers at Starbucks and her cat Layla will always keep her alive. Two scholarships have been set up in her name to help defray expenses for students desiring to become elementary school teachers. The first is The Lauren Rousseau Memorial Scholarship / Danbury High School Scholarship Fund / 43 Clapboard Ridge Rd / Danbury, CT 06811 and the Lauren Rousseau Memorial Scholarship / University of Bridgeport Graduate School of Education / 126 Park Ave / Bridgeport, CT 06604. Contributions to these causes would make Lauren extremely proud.

19. Allison Wyatt

Born July 3, 2006

Allison was a kind-hearted little girl who had a lot of love to give, and she formed special bonds with most people who spent any amount of time with her. She loved her family and

teachers especially, but would often surprise us with random acts of kindness – once even offering her Goldfish crackers to a complete stranger on a cross-country flight.

Allison loved drawing and wanted to be an artist, often turning parts of our house into an “art studio” with rows of pictures taped to the walls. She often drew pictures for her teachers, her school bus driver, school friends, relatives and anyone else she adored. We found a final picture that Allie had drawn for her first grade teacher, Miss Soto, complete with “I love you, Love Allie”.

Memorial to Allie

Allison Wyatt Memorial Fund

20. Chase Michael Anthony Kowalski

Born October 31, 2005

Chase was an amazing son, brother, and grandson whose heart was only filled with love for all the people he touched. He was a fun-loving, energetic boy who had a true love of life. He completed his first triathlon at the age of six and ran in many community road races. Chase had a deep love for the game of baseball and enjoyed practicing with his father and teammates. Joining the Cub Scouts was just one of his many interests. He could often be found in the yard playing ball, riding his bike or quad. Chase’s love will continue to live on and touch many more lives through the work of our foundation in his memory.

Memorial to Chase

CMAK Sandy Hook Memorial Foundation Inc.

21. Dylan Christopher Hockley

Born March 8, 2006

We remember his smile. His laugh. His love of bouncing on trampolines and eating chocolate. His beautiful eyes and mischievous grin. His deep empathy in reacting to the feelings of others. His favorite books. The giant purple dots he made almost every day at school. His sensitivity to loud noises and his love of routine. His computer games and his most loved movies. The way he would lie in the warm sand at the beach, or take joy in finding the moon in the sky. How he called lightning “beautiful”, even while he was scared by the thunder. How he would ride a rollercoaster time after time and still not want to get off. The way other children were drawn to him, and how he wanted to play with them so much, even though he didn’t always know how. The way he loved to cuddle, have his back stroked, be tickled, or use other people as pillows when he snuggled against them.

Memorials to Dylan

Dylan’s Wings of Change Foundation

Dylan Hockley

22. Jesse McCord Lewis

Born June 30, 2006

Jesse McCord Lewis was a remarkable child, full of light and love that radiated in his presence. He brought joy to the world with his infectious and ever ready smile and was wise beyond his years. Jesse used his last few minutes on earth yelling to his friends to run, saving many lives. His bravery has inspired many all over the world. His actions were consistent with the way he lived his life; passionately embracing everything, a perfect combination of courage and faith, like a little soldier, his favorite toy. The true love his family shared was abundant and all encompassing.

If you met Jesse once, he would leave an indelible mark on your heart. The picture that remains etched in our souls is one of him in his boots, no socks, ripped jeans and a t-shirt, an army helmet strapped to his head, a smudge of dirt on his cheek, tromping through the pasture on his way from one adventure to another.

Memorial to Jesse

Jesse Lewis Choose Love

23. Olivia Rose Engel

Born July 18, 2006

Olivia's zest for life began early. With help from her adoring parents, she quickly developed an affinity for all things fun. On any given afternoon, one could just as easily find Olivia twirling in a pink tutu in dance class, developing her swing on the tennis court, kicking the winning soccer goal, drawing, painting and gluing things in art class, or honing her inner songstress in her community musical theater class. The budding swimmer also loved to join her dad or grandpa on their boats, so she could explore the world from the water.

As Olivia continued to grow, she developed a love and affinity for math and reading, arts and crafts, and her parish. Participating in her church's CCD program and leading the family's Grace each evening were sources of great pride for Olivia, as was being a big sister. Ever patient, Olivia took joy in helping her three-year-old brother Brayden explore the world she'd grown to love. This smart, bubbly NY Yankee fan and Daisy Girl Scout would instantly light up a room with her humor, charm, and wit. She was a sweet and appreciative six-year-old with a lot to live for. Her physical loss will deeply be felt every day by those who loved her most, but her sparkly spirit will live on forever.

Memorials to Olivia

Olivia Engel

Newtown Park and Bark

24. Jack Armistead Pinto

Born May 6, 2006

Jack was a happy, inquisitive and energetic boy. He loved being with his friends, going to school, playing sports and most of all he loved being with his big brother. He was a son, brother, grandson, nephew, cousin and friend. He was the heart of our family.

We miss his huge smile, his giggles, and the excitement he brought to our life each and every day. We miss the mischievous grin on his face when he was caught eating snacks before dinner and the laughter in his voice while having a football pass in the driveway. We miss him more than words can say.

Jack lived a full and joyful life and his light shines bright in the hearts of those who knew and loved him.

We are celebrating Jack's life by providing support to organizations that assist children and families. We have made a donation in Jack's honor to "KIDS in the GAME", a non-profit organization dedicated to providing underprivileged children with the resources they need to play team sports.

Memorials to Jack

KIDS in the GAME

Jack A. Pinto Charitable Gift Fund

25. Grace Audrey McDonnell

Born November 4, 2005

Grace was beautiful, kind and loving. She was full of life, imagination and sparkle. She loved her family, and her big brother Jack was her best friend. They were inseparable, and she took great pride in keeping up with him as they shared adventures big and small. Grace enjoyed running with her Dad and baking with her Mom.

Grace was an artist. She saw beauty in everything and was fortunate to have found her passion early in life. She took art classes since the age of three and was truly gifted. We hope to honor her life and dreams by supporting young artists and youth art programs through scholarships and grants.

Memorial to Grace

The Grace McDonnell Memorial Fund