

Hunter Levitan

## INHERITING HISTORY

NEW YORK - A little girl wobbles on her tip-toes and tries to hoist herself tall enough to peek over the edge. Her finger traces the outline of a name carved into the smooth, cool concrete, her face somber and still. Seven-year-old Ana Sofia and her father, Eric Zamori, stand next to the south reflecting pool at the 9/11 Memorial in downtown Manhattan, New York on June 12, 2019.

"She doesn't know about terrorism," says Mr. Zamori. "I tried to explain a little, but it's hard. She's so young." It is the first visit to New York for Ana Sofia and Anihi, her five-year-old brother. Mr. Zamori and his wife brought them to the memorial before heading back home to Veracruz, Mexico. "It's important that they know about this place," says Mr. Zamori.

It has been 18 years since the attacks, so there are almost two new generations of people, like Ana Sofia and Anihi, who have no memory of them. The importance of the cross-generational education of such a pivotal moment in history for not only the United States, but also the world, grows with each passing year.

When the 9/11 Museum opened in 2014, the education department knew there was a need to educate the public, especially children who never lived through the events. But the education team acknowledges the difficulty in talking to kids about terrorism and death.

"We don't gloss over things," says Meredith Ketchmark, assistant manager for Youth and Family Programs at the 9/11 Memorial and Museum. "We just are more straightforward and selective with the different words we use." They convey the importance with simpler, expanded terms children understand, such as explaining that terrorism is designed to promote fear and that terrorists hurt others and use violence to get what they want.

"A lot of times parents will come on a family trip to New York and having lived through this experience, know this is a museum that they want to visit but they're hesitant to bring their children because they're not sure how to approach the topic," says Ketchmark.

Jill Sesplankis, from Detroit, Michigan, says that it wasn't a hard decision for her and her husband to bring their children to the memorial, but "We don't want to be too deep about what happened and the emotions my husband and I felt so many years ago."

The education department provides student workshops, school visits, and summer programs, designed to relieve parents of the difficulty of finding the right words to explain 9/11. It also offers programs outside the museum, such as the 9/11 Art Cart.

The Art Cart is free for people visiting the memorial. Ketchmark "wanted to make sure that there were programs that were going to be accessible to people," who also want to experience the memorial, but may not have the time or the budget to explore the museum. Families can participate in explorations organized by the Art Cart, to learn more about the memorial.

In one particular exploration, called Meaningful Adjacencies, families go around the memorial together and learn how the names are organized in the memorial. The names are organized not alphabetically but by relationships. If two co-workers were together in the North Tower, for example, family members could honor their close connection and request their names be adjacent. Other groupings include the crew and passengers on the flights as well as the agencies and units of the first responders.

Families "learn the story that binds them all together, come back to the Art Cart and take part in an activity," says Ketchmark, such as giving children crayons and papers to make an impression of the names they found, which they take home with them.

"All these efforts," says Ketchmark, "Are an attempt to carry out this mission of always remembering and never forgetting."