



The monsters among us

By SARAKAY SMULLENS

THE HORROR of Sept. 11 forces us to ask: What makes a terrorist capable of such deeds? How do such monsters develop?

It has nothing to do with wealth or native intelligence and everything to do with opportunities for healthy growth and expression offered by family and society. Those without the opportunity to learn to think rationally and to accept and express themselves do not develop the confidence necessary to navigate the contradiction and confusion of life.

Frequently, they turn to a form of fanaticism as a source energy, purpose and direction. Though such people may mask it brilliantly, they are overwhelmed by feelings of inadequacy, jealousy and envy. The only way they know how to live is through skillful, often charismatic, domination of others.

Projecting their impotent rage on scapegoats, they teach their followers, usually the poor and hopeless, to do the same.

Unable to fathom this perversion, Americans ask what we have done to elicit such wrath. But there are no rational answers. The hatred isn't about our limitations or our mistakes, which are many and plentiful. Rather it is about our capacity for compassion, love, productive work and success. It is about our ability to think for ourselves and speak our minds. Terrorists hate us because they feel unable to build their own physical or emotional homes.

Desperate for ways to release their rage, they do all in their power to destroy the homes and lives of others.

Before Sept. 11, when terror occurred out-

side our borders, even to Americans, we gasped but soon pushed the horrors from our consciousness, thankful they happened to others elsewhere. Such delusions are now impossible. The mad genie has emerged from the bottle. Just after human beings from 80 countries jumped to their deaths, were blown to bits, or were burned and buried alive at the World Trade Center, TV showed the followers of madness, adults and children alike, dancing and celebrating.

Those who became human bombs, and their supporters who live on, must have laughed at our naivete and our idealism, as they studied — at our very own schools and institutions — how to destroy us. How they must have roared in glee at our banal TV shows, our version of "survival," during our final summer of illusion. They were about to show us what reality was really like.

Never again will America believe we are invincible or that all who live here are capable of cherishing democracy. It took mass carnage on our soil — and its unforgettable stench — to force us out of LaLa Land forever. We are saddened, enraged, violated. Our depression and heartache are overwhelming. But we will recover.

Those who face the truth, no matter how painful or horrifying, emerge stronger, more resilient, more determined. The price we have paid has been — and will continue to be — brutal.

But without our dreadful awakening, the price we and our world would have paid would have been our destruction. ★

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