

A Reflection on 9/11

On a day of beautiful autumn weather, tragedy struck, turning the day into one never to be erased from our memories.

On September 11, 2001, four planes were hijacked by the terrorist group Al-Qaeda: two set for the World Trade Center Twin Towers, one for the Pentagon, and one for either the Capitol or the White House. The North Tower was hit at 8:46 a.m.; the South Tower was hit 17 minutes later at 9:03 a.m.; 34 minutes later the third plane crashed into the Pentagon at 9:37 a.m.; and the final plane crashed in a field in Shanksville, Pennsylvania.

All 275 passengers on the hijacked planes died, 2,976 people died in New York City, and 125 people died at the Pentagon. To this day, people remember exactly where they were when the disaster was announced around the world.

Twenty-five years later, on the day of the attacks, we gather to remember the people we lost. Some go to the National September 11 Memorial & Museum in NYC where the tragedy happened, while others go back to the field in Shanksville, Pennsylvania. There, tender ceremonies of remembrance and grief culminate with the annual

name reading of the people who we
lost that day.

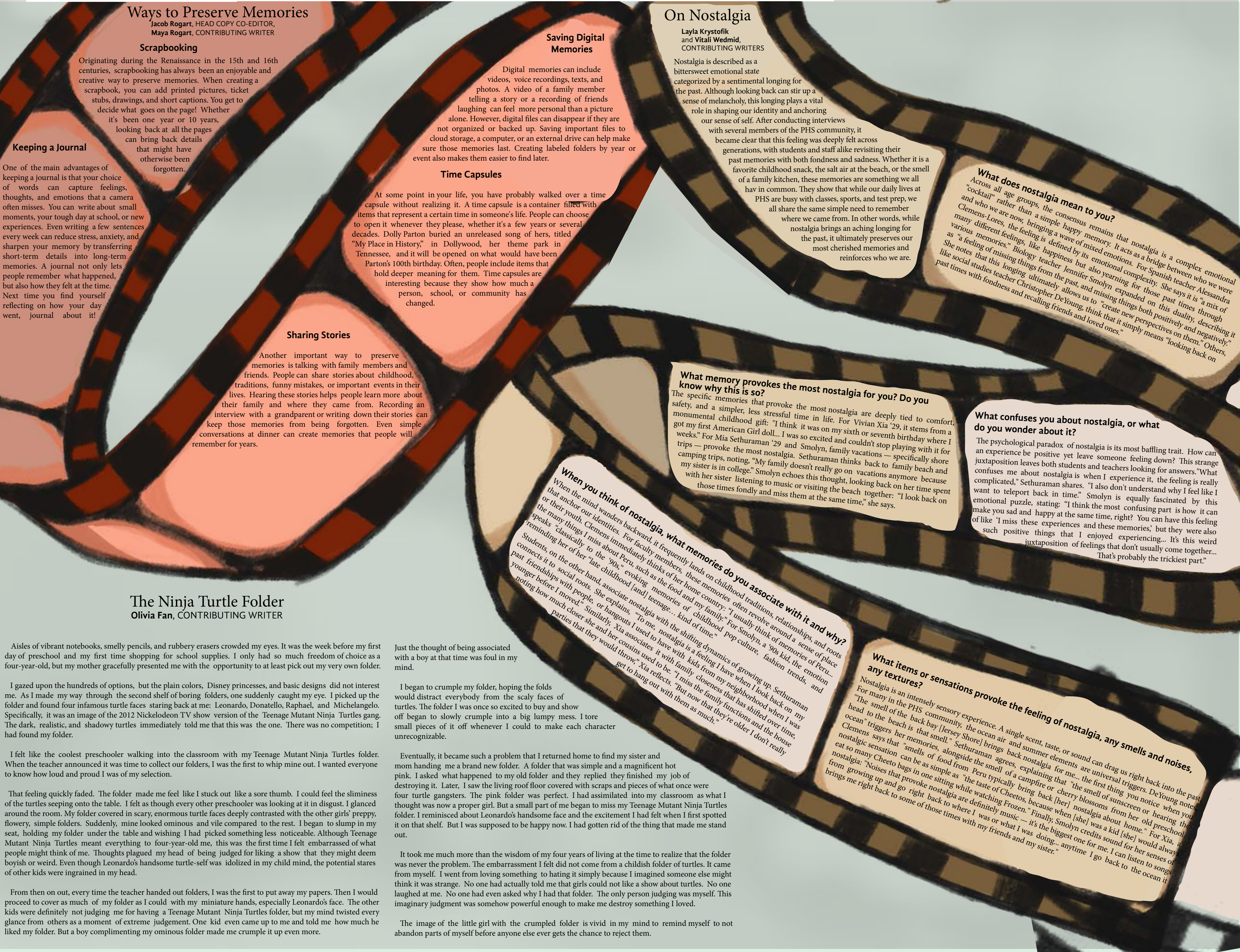
Around the world, people also participate in moments of silence throughout the day at the exact moments the planes hit. At PHS, at 8:46 a.m., the students and staff stand up in a moment of silence.

Another way NYC pays their respects is by illuminating twin beams of light into the sky from dusk until dawn. The lights are meant to represent the fallen towers, which shows the extent of “never forget.” As a society, we have vowed to remember that day and the tragedies associated with it, so that we can make sure nothing like that ever happens again.

Beyond these memorials, 9/11 is remembered as the day of Service and Remembrance. Millions of people honor the memory of those lost in 9/11 by giving back to the community. Volunteers gather to participate in events like food drives, cleaning parks, and supporting the first responders. These events turn 9/11, a day marked by tragedy, into a day for unity, contributing to the idea that serving others is a meaningful way to bring communities together.



photo illustration: **Luna Xu**
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Ways to Preserve Memories

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Scrapbooking

Originating during the Renaissance in the 15th and 16th centuries, scrapbooking has always been an enjoyable and creative way to preserve memories. When creating a scrapbook, you can add printed pictures, ticket stubs, drawings, and short captions. You get to decide what goes on the page! Whether it's been one year or 10 years, looking back at all the pages can bring back details that might have otherwise been forgotten.

Keeping a Journal

One of the main advantages of keeping a journal is that your choice of words can capture feelings, thoughts, and emotions that a camera often misses. You can write about small moments, your tough day at school, or new experiences. Even writing a few sentences every week can reduce stress, anxiety, and sharpen your memory by transferring short-term details into long-term memories. A journal not only lets people remember what happened, but also how they felt at the time. Next time you find yourself reflecting on how your day went, journal about it!

Saving Digital Memories

Digital memories can include videos, voice recordings, texts, and photos. A video of a family member telling a story or a recording of friends laughing can feel more personal than a picture alone. However, digital files can disappear if they are not organized or backed up. Saving important files to cloud storage, a computer, or an external drive can help make sure those memories last. Creating labeled folders by year or event also makes them easier to find later.

Time Capsules

At some point in your life, you have probably walked over a time capsule without realizing it. A time capsule is a container filled with items that represent a certain time in someone's life. People can choose to open it whenever they please, whether it's a few years or several decades. Dolly Parton buried an unreleased song of hers, titled "My Place in History," in Dollywood, her theme park in Tennessee, and it will be opened on what would have been Parton's 100th birthday. Often, people include items that hold deeper meaning for them. Time capsules are interesting because they show how much a person, school, or community has changed.

Sharing Stories

Another important way to preserve memories is talking with family members and friends. People can share stories about childhood, traditions, funny mistakes, or important events in their lives. Hearing these stories helps people learn more about their family and where they came from. Recording an interview with a grandparent or writing down their stories can keep those memories from being forgotten. Even simple conversations at dinner can create memories that people will remember for years.

On Nostalgia

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Nostalgia is described as a bittersweet emotional state categorized by a sentimental longing for the past. Although looking back can stir up a sense of melancholy, this longing plays a vital role in shaping our identity and anchoring our sense of self. After conducting interviews with several members of the PHS community, it became clear that this feeling was deeply felt across generations, with students and staff alike revisiting their past memories with both fondness and sadness. Whether it is a favorite childhood snack, the salt air at the beach, or the smell of a family kitchen, these memories are something we all hav in common. They show that while our daily lives at PHS are busy with classes, sports, and test prep, we all share the same simple need to remember where we came from. In other words, while nostalgia brings an aching longing for the past, it ultimately preserves our most cherished memories and reinforces who we are.

What does nostalgia mean to you?

Across all age groups, the consensus remains that nostalgia is a complex emotional "cocktail" rather than a simple happy memory. It acts as a bridge between who we were and who we are now, bringing a wave of mixed emotions. For Spanish teacher Alessandra Clemens-Lores, the feeling is defined by its emotional complexity. She says it is "a mix of many different feelings, like happiness but also yearning for those past times through various memories." Biology teacher Jennifer Smolyn expanded on this duality, describing it as "a feeling of missing things from the past, and missing things both positively and negatively." She notes that this longing ultimately allows us to "create new perspectives on them." Others, like social studies teacher Christopher DeYoung, think that it simply means "looking back on past times with fondness and recalling friends and loved ones."

What memory provokes the most nostalgia for you? Do you know why this is so?

The specific memories that provoke the most nostalgia are deeply tied to comfort, safety, and a simpler, less stressful time in life. For Vivian Xia '29, it stems from a monumental childhood gift: "I think it was on my sixth or seventh birthday where I got my first American Girl doll... I was so excited and couldn't stop playing with it for weeks." For Mia Sethuraman '29 and Smolyn, family vacations — specifically shore trips — provoke the most nostalgia. Sethuraman thinks back to family beach and camping trips, noting, "My family doesn't really go on vacations anymore because my sister is in college." Smolyn echoes this thought, looking back on her time spent with her sister listening to music or visiting the beach together: "I look back on those times fondly and miss them at the same time," she says.

When you think of nostalgia, what memories do you associate with it and why?

When the mind wanders backward, it frequently lands on childhood traditions, relationships, and roots that anchor our identities. For faculty members, these memories often revolve around a sense of place or their youth. Clemens immediately thinks of her home country: "I usually think of memories of Peru... the many things I miss about Peru, such as the food and my family." For Smolyn, a '90s kid, the emotion speaks "classically to the '90s," evoking memories of childhood pop culture, fashion trends, and reminding her of her "late childhood [and] teenage... kind of time." Students, on the other hand, associate nostalgia with the shifting dynamics of growing up. Sethuraman connects it to social roots. She explains, "To me, nostalgia is a feeling I have when I look back on my past friendships with people, or hangouts I used to have with kids from my neighborhood when I was younger before I moved." Similarly, Xia associates it with family closeness that has shifted over time, noting how much closer she and her cousins used to be. "I miss the family functions and the house parties that they would throw," Xia reflects. "But now that they're older I don't really get to hang out with them as much."

What items or sensations provoke the feeling of nostalgia, any smells and noises, any textures?

Nostalgia is an intensely sensory experience. A single scent, taste, or sound can drag us right back into the past. For many in the PHS community, the ocean air and summer elements are universal triggers. DeYoung notes, "The smell of the back bay [Jersey Shore] brings back nostalgia for me... the first thing you notice when you head to the beach is that smell." Sethuraman agrees, explaining that "the smell of sunscreen or hearing the ocean" triggers her memories, alongside the smell of a campfire or cherry blossoms from her old preschool. Clemens says that "smells of food from Peru typically bring back [her] nostalgia about home." For Xia, a nostalgic sensation can be as simple as "the taste of Cheetos, because when [she] would always eat so many Cheeto bags in one sitting while watching Frozen." Finally, Smolyn credits sound for her senses of nostalgia: "Noises that provoke nostalgia are definitely music — it's the biggest one for me. I can listen to songs from growing up and go right back to where I was or what I was doing... anytime I go back to the ocean it brings me right back to some of those times with my friends and my sister."

Aisles of vibrant notebooks, smelly pencils, and rubbery erasers crowded my eyes. It was the week before my first day of preschool and my first time shopping for school supplies. I only had so much freedom of choice as a four-year-old, but my mother gracefully presented me with the opportunity to at least pick out my very own folder.

I gazed upon the hundreds of options, but the plain colors, Disney princesses, and basic designs did not interest me. As I made my way through the second shelf of boring folders, one suddenly caught my eye. I picked up the folder and found four infamous turtle faces staring back at me: Leonardo, Donatello, Raphael, and Michelangelo. Specifically, it was an image of the 2012 Nickelodeon TV show version of the Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles gang. The dark, realistic, and shadowy turtles immediately told me that this was the one. There was no competition; I had found my folder.

I felt like the coolest preschooler walking into the classroom with my Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles folder. When the teacher announced it was time to collect our folders, I was the first to whip mine out. I wanted everyone to know how loud and proud I was of my selection.

That feeling quickly faded. The folder made me feel like I stuck out like a sore thumb. I could feel the sliminess of the turtles seeping onto the table. I felt as though every other preschooler was looking at it in disgust. I glanced around the room. My folder covered in scary, enormous turtle faces deeply contrasted with the other girls' preppy, flowery, simple folders. Suddenly, mine looked ominous and vile compared to the rest. I began to slump in my seat, holding my folder under the table and wishing I had picked something less noticeable. Although Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles meant everything to four-year-old me, this was the first time I felt embarrassed of what people might think of me. Thoughts plagued my head of being judged for liking a show that they might deem boyish or weird. Even though Leonardo's handsome turtle-self was idolized in my child mind, the potential stares of other kids were ingrained in my head.

From then on out, every time the teacher handed out folders, I was the first to put away my papers. Then I would proceed to cover as much of my folder as I could with my miniature hands, especially Leonardo's face. The other kids were definitely not judging me for having a Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles folder, but my mind twisted every glance from others as a moment of extreme judgement. One kid even came up to me and told me how much he liked my folder. But a boy complimenting my ominous folder made me crumple it up even more.

Just the thought of being associated with a boy at that time was foul in my mind.

I began to crumple my folder, hoping the folds would distract everybody from the scaly faces of turtles. The folder I was once so excited to buy and show off began to slowly crumple into a big lumpy mess. I tore small pieces of it off whenever I could to make each character unrecognizable.

Eventually, it became such a problem that I returned home to find my sister and mom handing me a brand new folder. A folder that was simple and a magnificent hot pink. I asked what happened to my old folder and they replied they finished my job of destroying it. Later, I saw the living roof floor covered with scraps and pieces of what once were four turtle gangsters. The pink folder was perfect. I had assimilated into my classroom as what I thought was now a proper girl. But a small part of me began to miss my Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles folder. I reminisced about Leonardo's handsome face and the excitement I had felt when I first spotted it on that shelf. But I was supposed to be happy now. I had gotten rid of the thing that made me stand out.

It took me much more than the wisdom of my four years of living at the time to realize that the folder was never the problem. The embarrassment I felt did not come from a childish folder of turtles. It came from myself. I went from loving something to hating it simply because I imagined someone else might think it was strange. No one had actually told me that girls could not like a show about turtles. No one laughed at me. No one had even asked why I had that folder. The only person judging was myself. This imaginary judgment was somehow powerful enough to make me destroy something I loved.

The image of the little girl with the crumpled folder is vivid in my mind to remind myself to not abandon parts of myself before anyone else ever gets the chance to reject them.