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Section: EDITORIAL PAGE

BEGRUDGING RAINBOW EMERGES FROM TRAGEDY

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Every so often, I awake with a phrase on my mind. I don't know why, I just do. A few weeks ago, I woke with the words, "we saw a begrudging rainbow" on my mind. Begrudging and rainbow in the same phrase intrigued me.

I checked the dictionary for begrudge and found: "to resent the pleasure or good fortune of." The definition of rainbow surprised me: "an illusory goal or hope." It still didn't make sense, but it was great to ponder. What was a begrudging rainbow and what did it mean to me?

Then came Sept. 11. An attack on America. All thoughts of a begrudging rainbow were gone.

In silence, I watched the television that day. And the night that followed. And the days and nights that followed those. Fear, uncertainty and grief consumed me. I felt numb. Sleep was essentially nonexistent. I moved through those first few days much like everyone else across America. Then, slowly, I began to see my begrudging rainbow.

The Thursday after the attack, we put an American flag up on the house. I went to work with a heavy heart and an American flag pin on my shirt. I helped coordinate a collection for the Red Cross. I lit candles. I prayed.

American flags were everywhere. They were draped over the side of the Pentagon and waved from the top of the rubble of the World Trade Center towers in silent testament to those killed or injured. They graced houses, cars and school windows.

Banners and signs appeared on Thruway passes, neighbors' front yards and in front of businesses and churches. God Bless America. Honk for the USA. Pray. Keep praying.

Within minutes of the attacks, this country rallied to the cause with blood donations, rescue workers, military and government responses and untold dollars. None of these efforts shows signs of slowing.

And therein I saw my rainbow emerging from this tragedy. My goal and hope. A renewed, stronger patriotism. Begrudging? You bet. Though it's not easy to admit, I now have to acknowledge -- to my embarrassment -- the lack of patriotism I felt before Sept. 11. I feel shame that it took these heinous events to feel the connection that I now do with this nation and the people within it.

I've exercised my right to vote. Sung our national anthem with pride. Cried at the Vietnam Memorial. Supported our stand during Desert Storm and prayed for our troops. Yet where was my strong desire to fly the flag then?

I feel a need to fly the flag now. Its beautiful red, white and blue colors are my rainbow; my support of my country and my pride to be an American. I am beginning to understand what our flag stands for. The United States of America. The unity of its people. Not just a symbol of our country, but of the unity of the people who have fought under it in the past, and who will fight for what it represents in the future.

My patriotism was watered down. I took for granted the freedoms I carried with me every day of my life, and the sense of peace and safety I felt within our borders. Thirty-eight years ago, I was born an American citizen and automatically granted the rights and freedoms that title holds. Automatically. I didn't earn them and, sadly, didn't appreciate them. Sept. 11 forged an appreciation for those rights, earned on the backs of others.

Now I must live up to this citizenship, its responsibilities and all it represents. I'll start in a small way by holding fast to my begrudging rainbow. An awareness of my country, my fellow Americans and my connection to them. My begrudging rainbow, born of the terrorism rained down on this nation, and the consequences that go with it.

AMY E. MORGAN lives and writes on Grand Island.

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COLUMN: MY VIEW

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