

Thursday, March 22, 2068, 10:30 a.m., local time, Greenville, SC

The day was bright, and warm, and breezy. All around the town were the signs of spring. Dogwoods and cherry trees were blossoming and the azaleas threatened to burst forth into their riotous colors. Tulips were already following the long gone daffodils and croci, with daylilies putting forth tentative stalks for later blossoms. It was a perfect a day as could be for those who sat or stood near the remains of the Federal building.

Mr. Martin, as the organizer of the event, welcomed those who came, especially the government officials who were there. The Vice President, the state's two Senators, and the Representative from the district were all there. A line of local firefighters and county EMS workers sat near the front. Members of the County Council had turned out in force as well, and the head of the Council sat on the dais with the other dignitaries. The district's Federal Representative introduced the Vice President, who advanced to the podium to speak, the microphones adjusted for her lack of height.

In the audience, Tyler turned to Jeff as the Vice President's speech seemed to go on and on.

"When's it gonna be Mom's turn?" he whispered.

Jeff leaned towards his son. "Soon. Now sit still and pay attention."

"Yes, sir."

At last, the Vice President finished, and the crowd applauded. She turned and shook hands with the Representative, waved to the crowd, and was swallowed up by her Secret Service contingent.

The Representative turned to the crowd, and announced, "Now for our keynote speaker, I present Dr. Dianne Koch Tracy."

Dianne came forward to the sound of clapping, looking poised and confident as she shook the Representative's hand.

She stepped up to the podium, standing straight and tall, looking out at the audience, and making brief eye contact with individuals as she began her speech. The crowd hushed. She took a deep breath, and began.

"We gather here, as we have on this day for the past four years, as a remembrance. As a memorial of the day and all that it means to us. But we do not come here to commemorate the event. None of us want to remember what happened five years ago today. And commemorating the actual event gives it life that it does not deserve. So we do not come to remember what happened.

"We come instead to commemorate the lives that were lost here. We come to remember them, always with tears, but sometimes with laughter, as we reminisce of the happier times we shared

with them. For when all is said and done, this was only one event in the lives of those we loved, and still love, and remember with joy.

"We come also to remember those whose were injured. In many ways it is harder to survive something of this magnitude, for the survivor lives with the memory of the event in their very body, their very soul. They may be permanently scarred, sometimes in ways we cannot see. So we have come together today to show our support for them, to tell them with our presence, 'You are not forgotten. We remember what you went through on this day five years ago. And we are here for you.'

"We come together to remember and honor those who helped us. Those brave men and women who quenched the fires, who dug through the rubble to pull the living... and the dead... from the shattered remains of this building. We come to remember them and to thank them for what they did for us and ours in our hour of need." She smiled, focusing on the line of emergency workers. "There really are no words to express the depth of our gratitude to you. But we will try. Thank you."

Dianne now returned her focus to the crowd. "But most importantly, we come together as a sign. A sign to those who would try to imitate this event, those would try to inflict the same pain and sorrow on others that has been inflicted on we who are here today. A sign that no matter how hard they try, they will fail. They cannot break us. Not as individuals. Not as families. Not as a community. Not as a people. And not as a nation. We will always rise again. Not even death can conquer our spirits.

"I leave you with Holy Sonnet Number Ten, by John Donne.

"Death, be not proud, though some have called thee  
Mighty and dreadful, for thou art not so,  
For those whom thou think'st thou dost overthrow,  
Die not, poor Death, nor yet canst thou kill me  
From rest and sleep, which but thy pictures be,  
Much pleasure, then much more from thee must flow  
And soonest our best men with thee do go,  
Rest of their bones, and souls' delivery.  
Thou art slave to fate, chance, kings," She paused slightly. "...and desperate men  
And doth with poison, war and sickness dwell  
And poppy or charms can make us sleep as well  
Or better than thy stroke. Why swellst thou then?  
One short sleep past, we wake eternally  
And Death shall be no more. Death, thou shalt die."

She looked out over the audience and bowed her head slightly. "Thank you." She turned as the applause started, shook hands with those on the podium, then sat down in her seat. Her eyes met Jeff's, and he smiled widely, nodding. She smiled slightly in response.

One of the state's Senators took the podium and said somberly. "It is almost 11:08. Please join with me for a moment of silence to honor those who were lost and those who were injured in the bombing."

There was a full two minutes of silence. Nothing could be heard other than the wind chimes in a nearby garden. Then the Senator broke the silence with a simple, "Thank you." People stirred again, and focused their attention on the dais.

Mr. Martin took the podium. "Today is the fifth anniversary of the event that brings us here. And today we wish to dedicate the last memorial statue, and move it to ground zero, where it truly belongs. Today we dedicate a statue to the memory of Richard Allen Koch, who died in the service of his country as a U.S. Customs agent. We remember him this day, as we remember all of our lost loved ones." A smattering of applause greeted this statement, and the memorial service continued for another ten minutes, with music provided by a number of local choirs, instrumental groups, and soloists.

Dianne sat on the dais, not even listening to the final few moments of the service. Her mind had turned back to that day five years ago, and the fractured, crazy quilt memories of that afternoon in the emergency room where she had been working. She sighed and brought her thoughts back to the present. This day has been a long time coming. Maybe now I can put all the anger and bitterness behind me and look toward the future with a lighter heart. Her eyes suddenly focused on a head of silver hair that stood out from the crowd around it. That future lies with Jeff now. I hope you understand, Rick. I loved you, I still love you, and I will always love you. But you are gone. And now there's another man for me to love and cherish. Thank you, Rick, for the sweet years we had together and for the three beautiful children you gave me. I will see to it that they never forget you. As I never will.

The final song was sung, and Dianne found herself applauding, then waiting for the others to leave. The dignitaries shook hands with her, murmuring words of sympathy and approval, and she thanked them, smiling softly. Then she turned to leave the stage.

At the bottom of the steps stood a small crowd, a crowd of four who waited just for her. She smiled at them as she descended the steps.

"Come on, Mom. Dad's waiting for us so we can go see Dad Koch's statue," Tyler said as he slipped his hand in hers.

"Are you okay, Dianne?" Lisa asked softly.

"Yes, Ma. I'm okay now," she replied as she let her youngest son pull her towards a waiting Jeff, who stood on his crutches, a mixture of pride and love shining in his eyes.

Post by Tikatu on 30/11/2004

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