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CHILDHOOD OBESITY

An American Lifestyle

THE BETTY ANN ONG STORY —

Many people have heard of Sept. 11 victim Todd Beamer's courage ("Let's roll"), but relatively few know about Betty Ong's

By Steven Knipp, Pacific News Service

"I think we might have lost her."

With that heartbreaking statement, spoken by a North Carolina-based American Airlines employee, one of the greatest tragedies in U.S. history began.

It was 7:59 on a radiant September morning when American Airlines Flight 11 lifted off from Boston's Logan Airport, bound for LA. On board were 81 passengers, two pilots and a cabin crew of nine. Sitting in Business Class were Mohammed Atta and four fellow terrorists. Less than an hour after take-off, Atta deliberately flew the Boeing 767 into the World Trade Center's North Tower.

The Sept. 11, 2001 terrorist attacks killed 3,000 people in New York and Washington, DC. It was the greatest American catastrophe of modern times.

But for San Francisco's Ong family the tragedy was dreadfully personal. The "her" referred to by American employee Nydia Gonzalez, was Flight Attendant Betty Ann Ong -- their beloved sister and daughter.

Ong was a victim of the terrorists. She was also the first hero of that fateful day. Many people have heard of Todd Beamer's courage ("Let's roll"). But relatively few know about Betty Ong's.

Within minutes of the hijacking, and despite the murderous mayhem on board, Ong bravely grabbed a crew phone to call colleagues on the ground.

For the next 23 minutes, she gave authorities a detailed account of what was happening. Ong calmly told ground staff there were possibly four hijackers of Middle Eastern extraction on board.

Ong also reported on the carnage taking place -- the First Class galley attendant, stabbed; the purser, stabbed. The terrorists also slashed the throat of a passenger, who was bleeding profusely. The hijackers locked themselves in the cockpit.

Amid the mid-air horror, Ong remained cool. She identified the seats the terrorists had occupied, enabling the FBI to learn the hijackers' passport details.

Still on the line, Ong said in a composed voice: "Pray for us. Pray for us."

Seconds later the line went dead.



BORN in San Francisco's Chinatown, Betty Ong enjoyed an idyllic childhood. The youngest sibling, she was doted on by elder brother Harry and sisters Cathie and Gloria. Their parents, Harry Snr, now 84, and Yee-gum Oy, 78, owned a small grocery store where they worked long hours.

As a teenager, Ong grew to be a tall, attractive girl. Though self-conscious about her willowy 5' 9" height, it helped her excel in basketball and volleyball.

"Everyone who knew Betty really loved her," says Harry, a youthful-looking pharmacist in his early fifties.

Sister Cathie agrees: "Bee made everybody feel like they knew her right away. She loved children, going out of her way to make their flight enjoyable."

Betty Ong's family always felt she was their hero. But it wasn't till months after the attacks that they also found she was the nation's. Last January, a tape of Ong's urgent message was played before the 9/11 Commission. Hearing her poised voice relating vital information about the hijacking, commission chairman Thomas Kean declared: "Betty Ong is a true American hero."

The pain will always be there, but the Betty Ong family can be genuinely proud that their beloved daughter, and sister, was that rare person who embodied both exceptional courage and uncommon kindness. She literally made the world a better place simply by being in it.



BETTY ANN ONG 1956-2001

SEPT. 11 -- *An Angel Named Betty Ong*

Consequences of Childhood Overweight and Obesity

Over the past 30 years, the rate of obesity in the United States has more than doubled for preschoolers and adolescents, and it has more than tripled for children ages 6 to 11. Obese children get a head start on health problems such as diabetes and heart disease, often carrying these problems into an obese adulthood. If this trend continues, obesity may soon top smoking as the nation's most preventable cause of death. Overweight and obesity are major risk factors for chronic diseases, including type 2 diabetes, cardiovascular disease, hypertension, osteoporosis, and some cancers. Some children may develop sleep apnea, mature early, have increased LDL cholesterol, and run the risk of liver and gall bladder diseases.

The epidemic of childhood overweight and obesity is due to the increasing number of children that are consuming an excess of harmful calories, and getting insufficient exercise. Increased consumption of fast food, junk food and soda and decreased consumption of fruit, vegetables and milk combine with reduced physical activity lead to disastrous results.

American Cancer Society researchers recently reported that current patterns of overweight and obesity in the United States could account for 14 percent of all cancer deaths in men and 20 percent of those in women. The study, published in the April 24, 2003 issue of the *New England Journal of Medicine*, documented an association between body-mass index (BMI) and death from most forms of cancer, and concluded 50,000 cancer deaths a year are related to weight.

The vast majority of overweight children and adolescents become overweight adults. Overweight and obese children are at a higher risk for a number of chronic and degenerative diseases and other physical ailments in adulthood.

Children who are extremely obese face not only long-term health problems in adulthood, but immediate threats to their health. Children at younger ages are being diagnosed with what was once called "adult-onset" (type 2) diabetes; some have even suffered heart attacks.

In addition to the terrible physical toll, a common consequence of childhood overweight is psychosocial – many overweight children are socially stigmatized by their peers and suffer low self-esteem. As a result, they may suffer psychological disorders such as depression and eating disorders.

The good news is that the introduction of an American Life style change of a healthy diet and regular physical activity at any time, from childhood to old age, can promote health and impact cancer risk.

—adapted from American Cancer Society Fact Sheet



The SOLUTION

- To educate children to the positive benefits of outdoor activities and healthful eating habits.
- To provide opportunities for children to experience outdoor activities.

Many have heard about Betty's heroic acts, but many may not have known that she had a great love of working with children. At a young age, Betty had already towered over the heights of many of her classmates and friends. She felt awkward and shy, but it was an interest in sports where she excelled and flourished. It was her passion for team sports that had taught her how to embrace victory and to discover other essential life lessons. She learned that when people share the same vision and passion, they will be successful. She believed that hard work builds character and strength of mind that can overcome obstacles. Betty tried to instill the same positive attitude in the minds of children whose lives she touched. She believed that having a positive self-image and self-confidence at an early age was crucial to the development of a well-adjusted individual. The message Betty shared was that a "can-do" attitude will triumph over life's setbacks.

Many children in today's society do not have opportunities to experience outdoor activities either because of their life style or the workload of their parents. While the Betty Ann Ong Foundation does not expect to replace the role of the parents in their children's life, we can provide educational opportunities for life style changes.

Many parents and children do not participate in outdoor activities simply because they do not know how. Having never gone fishing they do not know the basics of fishing. Our mission is to provide opportunities with corporate help to teach parents and children the ways to the outdoors.

One of the greatest health problems facing children is childhood obesity. Having little knowledge of healthful eating habits they resort to fast foods. By developing educational programs using media presentation formats the Betty Ann Ong Foundation will undertake to readjust the American Lifestyle...We can't reach everyone but, we can reach many.

In memory of Betty, the Betty Ann Ong Foundation, a not for profit public charity, was established to continue her legacy. The advocacy of the Foundation serves to improve the quality of life for children.



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