

The DAILY NEWS TRIBUNE

Brandeis students remember the events of 9/11

By Christopher Rocchio/ Daily News Staff

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WALTHAM -- Micheline Frias was a high school junior when her principal made the announcement that two planes had just crashed into the World Trade Center buildings, less than 20 blocks from where she sat in English class.

"You could see the towers from my school, so there was just complete chaos with students crying and running all over the place," she said. "It was a traumatic, surreal day. It was so eerie that it almost felt like the end of the world."

Frias, now a senior at Brandeis, was joined by several other university students and faculty members yesterday afternoon for "Students Speak: A Brown-bag Lunch Discussion," an event that focused on how the events of 9/11 changed their worldview.



Brandeis sophomore Jordan Rothman sticks an American flag in the ground yesterday in front of the university's Shapiro Campus Center in Waltham. (Christopher Rocchio photo)

The discussion was part of a series of reflections, readings, guest speakers and other events being held this week as part of "9/11: Brandeis Reflections Five Years Later," which was sponsored by more than a dozen student groups and departments at the university.

"It's nice to see a wide range of observances on campus," said Marci McPhee, associate director of Brandeis' International Center for Ethics, Justice and Public Life. "9/11 was such an important event in the history of each of our students' lives, so we felt it was important to take a moment to remember as well as look toward the future."

Frias said the events of 9/11 sparked her interest in politics, which eventually led to her decision to attend Brandeis because the university seemed so rooted in social and political activism.

"I appreciate the dialogue that's been opened since 9/11," she said. "A lot of youth became more aware citizens. We took many of our rights for granted, but when the fire was lit under our butts, many young people started to take an interest in the global environment."

Rusmir Music currently works in Brandeis' Hiatt Career Center, but he was a

first-year graduate student at New York University on the morning of Sept. 11, 2001.

“I heard it on the radio and thought it was a sick joke,” he said. “When we realized it was really happening, I had to go to all the dorms to wake people up and tell them to find their family members to make sure they were safe.”

As he stood on the rooftop of his 14th Street building on that beautiful morning, Music said he watched both towers collapse. What he remembers of that day are the personal stories and eyes staring at him from flyers of the missing plastered throughout Union Square. A native of Bosnia, the experience changed him forever.

“9/11 made me a New Yorker,” Music said. “People bonded incredibly quickly because we had to get through it together. We wouldn’t make it alone.”

Vanita Neelakanta, a graduate student at Brandeis, said she had only been on the Waltham campus for two weeks when the events of Sept. 11 occurred.

“It was my first time away from my native India,” she said. “I’ve never really known America to be anything but post 9/11.”

Without television, Internet or radio in her dorm, she watched the events of 9/11 unfold at a local pizza parlor with dozens of other international students from the university.

“It brought together a nation, as well as different countries around the world,” Neelakanta said. “India uses a different calendar than America, and people there still know what 9/11 is about. It was isolated and extracted from the stream of time.”

David Elwell, director of the International Students and Scholars office at Brandeis, was moderator for the discussion.

“College and university students are the leaders of tomorrow,” Elwell said. “They need to learn how to deal with tragedies like 9/11, but also how to help avert them in the future.”