



COURTESY OF MICHAEL NORTH

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Michael North of the Hawaii Forgiveness Project took dozens of photos of the area around Trinity Church next to Ground Zero a month after the Sept. 11, 2001, terrorist attack on the World Trade Center in New York. The iron fence around Trinity and the makeshift barricades around the work site were covered with thousands of mementos sent from every country and in every language, and "they grew like a forest every day," he said. This photo shows a tribute from the staff and crew of Aloha Airlines.

Learning to embrace forgiveness helps many move forward after 9/11

Pat Gee,
Honolulu Star-Advertiser
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Michael North was flying to New York for a meeting at the World Trade Center when Islamic terrorists slammed two planes into the Twin Towers.

"The effect on all our lives, and our families, was and is profound," said North, an international business executive and member of the Hawaii Forgiveness Project. "Yet resolution, some healing and gratitude has come with time. Even forgiveness."

The group's mission is to embrace forgiveness as a life skill necessary to a meaningful existence.

In a recent interview, North reflected on the healing of wounds that once again feel raw in anticipation of the 10th anniversary of the terrorist attacks.

"For many people, forgiveness means forgetting or excusing a wrong, but true forgiveness is the opposite of forgetting: it's truly remembering it," he said.

"It is possible to condemn the profound evil that al-Qaida leader Osama Bin Laden brought forth," says North, "without that condemnation becoming corrosive."

"We don't have to carry a negative feeling, such as hatred and bitterness, which holds us back from our own future," he said. "The most profound forgiveness begins with freeing yourself."

North, who assists the Forgiveness Project with its website, is president and co-founder of Greenstar Corp., a technology company, as well as president of the Iona Contemporary Dance Theatre in Honolulu. He describes himself as a "radical Christian" who tries to live as Christ would.

Killed on 9/11 were a friend at the Pentagon and another friend



Michael North:
Business executive and member of the Hawaii Forgiveness Project

and three acquaintances who worked for a firm on the 83rd floor of the South Tower. He was scheduled to meet with the latter group on Sept. 12, 2001.

"All the people know from that day reached acceptance, understanding and finally forgiveness," North said. "They truly needed to move forward. They were determined not to let that ideology (of Bin Laden) destroy themselves and their families, or they could be affected by the same poison for generations to come."

While it took three or four years, the victims' families finally opened themselves to learning about Islam, he said.

"They couldn't stay in that poisoned state, that dark place," he said. "Evil does not destroy if our hearts are ready to enlarge our understanding ..."

"They have forgiven the people who perpetrated the attack. They've learned some things about Islam, where these people came from: how it was possible to take the faith of Islam, which is fundamentally good, and have it be hijacked, perverted and abused: to see the people who did this as people who suffered as well as a result of the uniquely perverted ideology of al-Qaida,

FORGIVENESS DAY

The public is invited to the Hawaii Forgiveness Project's 9th Annual Hawaii International Forgiveness Day Oct. 1. A major arts festival will be held at the Shidler School of Business at the University of Hawaii at Manoa, with a presentation of Forgiveness Heroes Awards. Entries are being accepted in several arts categories.

For information, visit www.hawaiiiforgivenessproject.org.

"It was like a cancer that developed inside themselves — which isn't to absolve them," he said.

North said he visited Ground Zero three weeks after the attack, when the ruins were still steaming, and more recently two years ago.

"I've been to Auschwitz and I've been to Ground Zero," he said, referring to the German concentration camp in Poland where more than 1 million people, 90 percent of them Jews, were exterminated during World War II. "The feeling in the air is the same. You can still hear the screams, if you're sensitive."

But for North and others close to the victims of 9/11 "the joy of life has been intensified," he said. "because they know a bolt from the blue can snatch life away."

"We've learned that life does not end, that part of the person lives in the heart of everybody who knew them. They actually rejoice in their memories of the people they lost that day," he said.

The friends and family members of those who worked for the World Trade Center firm have remained close, and will commemorate 9/11 with a Skype conference call. North will take part.