

MOM: Brendan, we're late!

NARRATION: I'm driving with my mom from our home in suburban New Jersey. Like most of my friends, I just got my permit but in *a lot* of ways I'm different.

MOM: When you were in pre-K the one thing that you wanted to do when you were a grown up was watch the news.

NARRATION: As soon as I was old enough I started reading the newspaper.

MOM: And you didn't start with the comics like most kids do.

RADIO CLIP: Warning, the Michael Savage show contains adult language.

NARRATION: I also listened to a lot of conservative talk radio. My parents begrudgingly allowed it.

MICHAEL SAVAGE: The radical Muslim world has declared war on America. We are at war!

NARRATION: 9/11 was my introduction to politics, world diplomacy, war, the economy—it affected everything. I may have been the youngest neo-con ever.

MICHAEL SAVAGE: this is your Pearl Harbor.

9/11 COMMISSION: Members of the Commission, your staff has developed initial findings to present to the public on the nature of the enemy...

NARRATION: In 4th grade I even recorded the 9/11 Commission hearings onto cassette tapes so I could hear them when I got home from school.

At school I'm known as the walking history book. I take it as a compliment.

TEACHER: Why is this important? Brendan?

BRENDAN: He was the spiritual leader of al-Qaeda.

NARRATION: Most kids my age don't really think about how 9/11 changed our country, I wish they did. The effort they put into gossiping and sneaking out I put into researching politics and current events.

This girl Danny told me she doesn't even feel like 9/11 affected her.

DANNY: It's kind of a long time ago, can you even remember it? I can't remember it.

NARRATION: She's in the grade above me so I was like, "Wait a second, How can you not remember that?"

DANNY: The next day my dad said, "Oh by the way, yesterday a building fell over." I'm just like, "ok." I figured it was just like someone's house. He never told me anything.

BRENDAN: That's all you remember?

DANNY: No that's not all I remember, that's all I had. I learned I think a year later...

BRENDAN: You didn't like see it on the news?

DANNY: They didn't let me watch news, I watched SpongeBob.

BRENDAN: Wow

NARRATION: For the guys in my Boy Scout troop, September 11th was like the beginning of an action movie. There are good guys and there are bad guys.

SCOUT 1: What do you think of Osama being shot?

NARRATION: The day after Osama bin Laden was killed my Scout troop had a meeting. Everybody was talking a big game.

SCOUT 2: They should've tortured him!

SCOUT 1: Yeah I agree.

SCOUT 3: I would've shot him somewhere it hurts! So he would bleed out so it hurts!

NARRATION: It was the same feeling you get when your team wins.

SCOUT 1: We were like, lining up the RPG's.

SCOUT 4: We're like, you're dead!

NARRATION: Last year I started a blog, it's like a direct line into my head. I posted this question to my followers: Do you think 9-11 affected our generation?

ANNA: Like we just, we don't care as much as we should.

NARRATION: This girl I've never actually met in person responded.

ANNA: My name's Anna and I'm from Phoenix, Arizona.

BRENDAN: Can you tell me quick, like how you met me?

ANNA: Um, over a blogging site called tumblr.

NARRATION: Anna told me about one time when tumblr crashed, which it does a lot.

ANNA: When it came back up people were posting pictures of the Twin Towers saying, "Oh tumblr crashed" and they're saying it's the same thing when it's nowhere near it

BRENDAN: That's awful.

NARRATION: They were comparing the deaths of almost 3,000 people to a website crashing for a couple days.

Maybe I take the World Trade Center attacks more seriously because we talk about that kind of stuff in my family.

MOM: Please don't eat with your fingers...

NARRATION: Like one night at dinner.

MOM: There's a diff between hearing that a thousand people died and actually seeing images of people jumping to their deaths because have no hope of survival.

NARRATION: My parents always give us answers even to difficult questions. My 10-year-old sister Kathryn just learned about 9/11 from a documentary she saw on TV.

KATHRYN: Would you rather die by jumping out a window or from a fire?

MOM: I don't know, I honestly hope I'm never put in that position. But to know that the people in that building, many of them were in that position is just...heartbreaking.

NARRATION: I'm in the youngest group of people who remember 9/11. And as a 16 year old who gets it, I fear that people younger won't understand and it'll lose its importance. If we let our guard down it could happen again.

KATHRYN: [laughing]

BRENDAN: Just say "hello"

KATHRYN: Hi...

NARRATION: I'm with my little sister Kathryn in the back seat of the car.

BRENDAN: Can you tell me how old you were when 9/11 happened?

KATHRYN: Ummm? I wasn't even one I was zero.

BRENDAN: Do you think it had a pretty big effect on you?

KATHRYN: Not really...

NARRATION: The world didn't change for Kathryn on September 11th, she's never known anything else.

KATHRYN: Well it was big to other people, it was big, but not to my life.

NARRATION: My other sister Sarah thinks we talk about it too much.

BRENDAN: So you have no specific memories of that day?

SARAH: No, you think I haven't thought about this before? I've tried to remember!

BRENDAN: So you don't...

SARAH: I don't even remember having you as a brother when I was three!

BRENDAN: [laughing]

NARRATION: She's starting high school this year.

SARAH: It's like it's the past. It shouldn't be like the main event like the focus of the country.

NARRATION: I was momentarily horrified.

SARAH: I think reminding people of it once a year is enough; they don't need to be reminded of it more than that because it just brings up memories.

NARRATION: I was only 6 when 9/11 happened and I remember afterwards I started playing a new game: firefighter. My friend and I would pretend that one of us was trapped in the twin towers and we would save each other.

Maybe it's a Boy Scout thing, but I never want to be the one standing around watching. Seeing all the people that stood up and helped on that day has made me want to protect and serve my country by joining the military.

BRENDAN: Mom, could you come here for a sec?

NARRATION: I brought it up to my mom one night in the kitchen.

BRENDAN: I just wanted to let you know that um, I've been thinking a lot and either before or after or in conjunction with college I want to enlist in the military.

MOM: Well, you have time before you have to make the commitment.

BRENDAN: I know.

MOM: It is a commitment.

BRENDAN: Yeah.

NARRATION: She thinks that I'm young and don't really understand what I could be getting myself into.

MOM: I saw what war did to my dad and I was only Kathryn's age. I'm somewhat concerned about the sensitive side of you

BRENDAN: I'm not as sensitive as you think.

MOM: Can I remind you of the lobster incident?

BRENDAN: That was along time ago, mom!

NARRATION: You know, it just seems like a common courtesy not to boil things alive.

MOM: So following directions without question is not something that you've ever been very good at.

BRENDAN: I...I

MOM: You know that

BRENDAN: Yeah.

MOM: [laughing]

NARRATION: I think she's afraid of war changing who I am. But it's too late 9/11 and the wars have

already made me who I am.
For WNYC I'm Rookie Reporter Brendan Illis.