



Denise Honeycutt

Guidance Counselor

**Interviewed by Yael Dror
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Denise Honeycutt was born in 1953 in Fairfield, Connecticut, and attended Southern Connecticut State University earning a bachelor's degree in Spanish. She continued her studies at the Universidad de Salamanca in Spain and went on to earn a Masters Degree in Bi-lingual Education. She started her career in Westport, teaching Spanish at Long Lots Junior High School. She later decided to pursue a graduate degree in School Counseling at Fairfield University and worked as a School Counselor at both Coleytown Middle School before coming to Staples High School in 1999.

What were you doing during the time of the attacks?

I first heard about the attack moments after it happened because my husband Mr. Honeycutt happened to have had a television on in his classroom and he running down the hall to tell me what had happened. So I went down to tell the other guidance counselors what was happening and actually my mother called me, frantic. It was so news breaking and she was home watching TV so she called crying and very soon the news spread throughout the building. We were told to shut off all the TVs because we didn't want kids overreacting if they didn't need to. Our principal at the time was Gloria Rakovic, was away that day at a conference and she called us immediately and told us that she be there as soon as she can. As kids were finding out they were filtering right into the guidance office, flooded with kids and intense upset.

What did the guidance department do to help these kids?

We had some kids that were very close to the situation. I had a student that I will never ever forget him. His dad worked in the world trade center but on that day his dad had a doctors appointment but he didn't know that. So I spent a lot of time with him until he knew his dad was okay. There were a lot of cases like that, what we did as a guidance apartment was we stayed here together as a group until we knew that every one of our kids families were okay. God willing every single family here in our school at the time, their parents were okay but we waited until we heard from every last one. A lot of kids didn't hear from their parents who were in New York for a while because they couldn't get home right away and it was just really difficult.

How did this event impact your life today?

It's one of the tragedies of my lifetime. I was not alive for World War II or anything like that, but 9/11 will always be my tragedy in life. It was difficult too because my kids were younger. I think my youngest was in 7th or 8th grade and when I got home late that night she was just curled up in a ball crying because she and my oldest daughter, who was a

nurse were at the train station at Fairfield, actually there to help people getting off the train who were upset or injured. People were just trying to help people from the longest time and it really impacted all their lives.

So what did you think of terrorism before the attack and how do you think about it now?

I look at it completely different now. I think the latest attacks, the whole ISIS thing, is just horrible. I think we are all vulnerable. I don't think I thought that way before 9/11. I always felt safe on United States soil. I don't think that way anymore.

Do you remember the government's reaction and how they handled it?

I remember Mayor Giuliani and how he handled it and how our president handled it. I think it was handled as well as we could possibly handle it. I think more recently with the school shootings and those kinds of acts of terror and violence have caused us as a schools system to again realize we are all vulnerable. I think more measures have been taken to secure buildings to make us safer.

Is there anything else you would like to say?

When I visited the World Trade Center Memorial, how powerful it was, and I encourage everyone to go. We did lose the Coleman brothers, who were Staples High School graduates. It was very sad, moving, and powerful to see their names engraved in granite at that site. You still hear now and again about someone who lost a family member. I still think of 9/11, but I'm also reminded of it every once in a while very strongly. The other day I met a student who never met his dad because he was born several days after 9/11 and his dad died as a result of 9/11. My heart just went out for him. It's just such a sad situation and it does impact us.

As a guidance counselor, what did you say to the kids that day?

That day we really had no words except, "Let's sit and wait." We helped kids call home and get assurance that their family members were okay. It was just so devastating for any kid whose parents worked in the city and in those days not everyone had a cell phone, so we were inundated with kids trying to call their parents. A lot of parents rushed to guidance just to hug their kids or be with their kids. It was very emotional.