

Widow of Flight 93 hero speaks on life after 9/11

Deena Burnett Bailey, widow of Pepp alum Tom Burnett, tells of her last conversation with Tom before he helped take United 93 back from terrorists.

By **RACHEL MILLER**
COPY EDITOR

"Even though it's been 10 years, the conversations I had with Tom are just so strongly a part of my psyche," said Deena Burnett Bailey, widow of United Flight 93 hero Tom Burnett. "I think about them driving down the road, they come to me as I drift off to sleep at night. It's just something that never leaves me."

Burnett, an alumnus of Pepperdine's Graziadio School of Business, spoke a few words to Bailey in their last conversation together, before his plane crashed into rural Pennsylvania. "Don't worry," he said, "we're going to do something."

"Those last words, 'do something,' they were intended, not just for the people on Flight 93, but for our family specifically, and perhaps for all of us to take action — not just be passive in seeing things that are wrong and not doing anything about them," Bailey said.

"It's something that I say to my girls regularly, 'Don't be passive, stand up and do something.'"

Bailey and Burnett had three daughters together.

That fateful day 10 years ago began

as any other. Burnett was on a business trip in New York, leaving his family anticipating his return.

"My first memory of that day was the kids jumping on my bed. [My daughter] Anna Claire was going to preschool for the first time," Bailey recalled.

After turning on the television, the family became concerned because of their father's location in New York. But Deena continued to make breakfast as the family gathered around the table, watching each plane go down.

The phones started ringing, first Bailey's mother, and then Burnett's. The third call was Burnett, who explained that hijackers had already knifed a passenger and taken over the plane.

"He was putting a plan together to take back the plane and told me not to worry. There was a group of them, and he was going to do something," Bailey said. "He told me he was waiting until they were over a rural area to take back the plane, and then he asked about the kids."

After the fourth phone call, a policeman, fireman and emergency aid trucks arrived at their house. The house was full of people; all the while, Bailey was still trying to get the kids ready for school.

"It was a very chaotic morning," Bai-

ley explained. "It was a terrifying morning.

I just kept watching the clock, waiting for him to call again, waiting for him to say that he was on the ground and that he was OK."

But after going upstairs to change clothes, Bailey came back to find a police officer looking solemnly at her television.

"When I came downstairs he was standing at the bottom of the staircase looking up at me and I could tell by the look on his face that something was wrong," Bailey said.

"He said, 'I think I have bad news for you,' and I turned toward the television and saw that another plane had crashed. I said, 'Is that Tom's plane?' He said, 'I think it is.'"

Now, on the 10th anniversary of Sept. 11, Bailey

explained that Burnett's act, though heroic, was not out of character.

"After the last phone call, when all this was going on, my neighbor came over, and I told her, 'Well, Tom is taking over the plane. They're putting a plan together to take the plane back,' and she and I laughed because it was so typical, it sounded like him."

"He was a leader," Bailey said. "He always ran the show, it didn't matter what it was. He just was always in charge of

everything, whether he was assigned to it or not, he just took over, always."

But that did not make him a "hero" by his definition.

"I don't think he would have thought himself to be a hero, he just would have thought himself to be a good citizen who was taking action, because action was called for," Bailey said.

And that type of take-action behavior has largely shaped the way that the Burnett Bailey family has lived following the attacks.

"On the backs of [my daughter's] bedroom doors, [there are posters]," Bailey explained. "They say, 'Stand for something or you'll fall for anything.' And I really think that that encompasses what he meant when he said, 'We're going to do something.' You have to know what you believe and fight for it."

Over the years, the Burnett family has learned to cherish one another every day.

"[Had the attacks not occurred] I think we would probably be living in Minnesota. I think that he would still be in business," Bailey said. "Most likely, he would be head of a company somewhere. I think that the dreams and goals and hopes that we had as a family and as a wife and husband would have been fulfilled instead of changed forever.

I think that I would be a very different person than I am today."

"[Now], I think that we're much more aware of our relationships and how life can change at a moment's notice. Really, life is about not knowing what's going to happen next and being able to adapt to the changes and circumstances that occur," Bailey said.

"We have a much stronger faith in God, and have really learned to rely on the strength and the courage that are gained from our faith,"

she continued. "And we have really opened ourselves up to the blessings that come every day. I remarried after the fifth anniversary. So we've grown in number, not just in this emotional capacity."

As Bailey looked toward the flags waving on Alumni Park, she was reminded of Burnett's time at Pepperdine.

"I'm reminded of the time that Tom spent here as a graduate student, and meeting the families of the people he went through school with," Bailey reminisced. "There are very fond memories in coming back to Pepperdine, to Malibu. He loved it here; he thought it was beautiful."

"[Tom] loved it here [at Pepperdine]; he thought it was beautiful."

—Deena Burnett Bailey
Widow of Pepp Alum



Bailey
Hero's Widow