

5-30-2019

From RWU to Boston Common: Honoring Lost Loved Ones

Jill Rodrigues
Roger Williams University

Follow this and additional works at: https://docs.rwu.edu/weekatroger_featured_news



Part of the [Higher Education Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Rodrigues, Jill, "From RWU to Boston Common: Honoring Lost Loved Ones" (2019). *Featured News Story*. 646.
https://docs.rwu.edu/weekatroger_featured_news/646

This News Article is brought to you for free and open access by the The Week at Roger at DOCS@RWU. It has been accepted for inclusion in Featured News Story by an authorized administrator of DOCS@RWU. For more information, please contact mwu@rwu.edu.

From RWU to Boston Common: Honoring Lost Loved Ones

How the idea for Boston Common's annual Memorial Day flag garden took root on the Roger Williams University campus



Meaghan Coombs at her Commencement ceremony in 2012.

May 30, 2019 | By Jill Rodrigues '05

BRISTOL, R.I. – If you were in Boston this weekend, you might have seen the vast [flag garden on Boston Common](#), a tribute to the veterans who have served and the military members serving our country. The grand Boston display was inspired by a similar one at Roger Williams University, after making one mourning student feel supported and accepted.

In 2008, Meaghan Coombs was starting her first days on campus, adjusting to the challenges of a new independence of routine and expectations and finding a new community and support system while still coping with a deep tragedy. For the first time, she would not be with her family on the anniversary of 9/11, when she lost her father, Jeff Coombs in the attack on the North Tower of the World Trade Center.

With the weight of the anniversary looming heavy, her mother encouraged her to come home for the day. But then she saw something that touched her heart and made her feel like she wasn't alone: thousands of miniature American flags filling the Commons Quad, waving in the bayside breeze.

"I remember walking out of the library and heading towards The Commons to meet friends for lunch, and seeing this awesome sea of flags symbolizing those lives lost," she said. "I had applied to several colleges, and it was a hard decision choosing where to go. This moment felt like a little sign that I was exactly where I was meant to be."

For the first anniversary, the College Republicans at RWU began planting the flags in tribute to the lives lost on 9/11 and they've continued the tradition for most years.

"It was nice to see that the RWU community put forth the effort to honor the lives lost after so many years had passed," Coombs said.

But how did the concept grow from RWU to nearby Boston? From Coombs, although she didn't even know it.

"I actually had no idea my story inspired the flag garden in the Boston Common until many years in! My family was chatting one day about how cool the flag garden was, and my mom said 'thanks to you.' I had no clue what she was talking about," Coombs said. "She told me that she shared my story of calling her from RWU on 9/11 after seeing the flags planted in the ground during her board meeting for the Massachusetts Military Heroes Fund, and it sparked the idea."

That year, the [Massachusetts Military Heroes Fund](#), an organization that provides support to families who lost loved ones on 9/11 and while serving in the military since the attack, was brainstorming ways to mark Memorial Day in Boston and found inspiration in Coombs's solace. For this year's Memorial Day, volunteers placed 37,000 American flags on Boston Common, honoring the Massachusetts residents who have died in service dating back to the Revolutionary War.

Coombs, who grew up in Abington, Mass., now works just a short drive away from Boston Common as marketing manager at New England's largest retail and lifestyle center developer [WS Development](#), where she develops and executes marketing plans and oversees public relations and brand management. She graduated from RWU in 2012 with a bachelor's degree in public relations with a minor in anthropology + sociology.

"I hope people walking by the flag garden this weekend will take a moment to stop and remember to honor those who have given the ultimate sacrifice," Coombs said. "I hope those who have personally lost someone, will walk by and find some peace knowing that family, friends, and even strangers, will always remember and honor the lives lost."

[ACADEMICS](#) [ALUMNI](#) [LIFE@RWU](#) [FEINSTEIN SCHOOL OF HUMANITIES, ART AND EDUCATION](#)
[FEINSTEIN SCHOOL OF SOCIAL AND NATURAL SCIENCES](#)