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Pearl's legacy continues

By Bill Everhart, Berkshire Eagle Staff,
Posted: 09/11/2011 12:05:52 AM EDT

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Sunday September 11, 2011

Aftershocks of the tragedy of Sept. 11, 2001, shook Berkshire County five months later when Wall Street Journal reporter Daniel Pearl was murdered in Pakistan.

Pearl worked for the North Adams Transcript and The Berkshire Eagle between 1986 and 1990, and he is fondly remembered for his kindness and his good nature.

Pearl was following the tangled trail of al-Qaida, specifically the path of "shoe bomber" Richard Reid, when he went to an interview in Karachi, Pakistan, that he never returned from.

His kidnapping by terrorists, the relentless effort to find and free him, and his murder are chronicled heartbreakingly and with remarkable courage by Pearl's journalist wife, Mariane, in her 2003 book "A Mighty Heart."

Early in the book, Mariane lists the contents of a file in Daniel's computer titled "Places We Have Been." Among the locales the couple had been to were Paris, Istanbul, Hong Kong, Cuba and North Adams.

Pearl was born in New Jersey and grew up in Los Angeles, but it was in the Berkshires that he received his "human training," Mariane said in a phone interview from Barcelona, Spain, where she lives with Adam, the son Daniel never met.

"When we came to visit, I found the people there to be real, honest and true," said Pearl, a Parisian who married Daniel in 1999. "His experience there was absolutely essential to him."

Although Daniel Pearl's life was cut short on Feb. 1, 2002, at the age of 39,

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his legacy continues along several paths. The Daniel Pearl Foundation (www.danielpearl.org) -- which is managed by his mother, Ruth -- promotes "cross-cultural understanding through journalism and music."

Pearl, whose mother is from Iraq and whose father is from Israel, was a citizen of the world who saw journalism as a way to unite people who didn't know or trust each other, Mariane said.

In October 2002, the organization launched the Daniel Pearl World Music Days, a series of events that now includes more than 6,700 performances in 111 countries. Trained as a classical violinist, Pearl played in bands wherever his career took him, and he had a mandolin with him in Karachi.

His legacy continues in the Daniel Pearl Scholarship, awarded annually to a high school student in the Transcript and Eagle's circulation area who is pursuing a career in journalism or music.

Daniel lives on in Adam; Mariane was pregnant with him when Daniel was kidnapped.

"It's hard because Daniel is not here to enjoy fatherhood, but Adam is just a blessing," Ruth Pearl said in a telephone interview from California. "He's amazingly like Dan. Secure, well-adjusted and kind."

Nine years after his death, Mariane said she regularly sees evidence of the impact Daniel has had on the world.

"He achieved a lot for someone who died so young," she said. "I see it in the private messages I still get. His reporting, the life he led, have caused people to reconsider their choices, to work for the greater good. I think he would be proud and reassured."

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In separate phone conversations, Mariane and Ruth each referred to Daniel as a mentor, both in music and in journalism.

In a sense, that continues today.

The ninth winner of the Daniel Pearl Scholarship earlier this year was Zach Robarge, a Pittsfield High School graduate who will pursue music education at the University of Massachusetts.

"That's where Danny's legacy is," Mariane said when told about the latest scholarship winner. "This young man has his own talents and ambitions, but maybe he will have a little bit of Danny in him to inspire him.

"What else can you ask for?"

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