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March marks 9/11 tragedy

Freedom Walk among ceremonies on 6th anniversary

By Anna Bakalis and John Scheibe
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Photos by James Glover II / Star staff Deena Burnett Bailey spoke to a crowd of about 850 Tuesday at the Reagan Presidential Library and Museum in Simi Valley. Her husband was one of the heroes on United Flight 93 on Sept. 11, 2001. Burnett Bailey said she appreciated "the caring and love of strangers."

Deena Burnett Bailey has possibly the most well-known story connected to the passengers of the planes used in the Sept. 11, 2001, attacks.

Her husband Tom Burnett orchestrated the group of 40 passengers that fought back against the hijackers on United Flight 93.

She's written a book, "Fighting Back," about how she has coped using faith and family; on Tuesday, her three young daughters appeared on "The Oprah Winfrey Show." She has remarried.

But the answer to one question still eludes her: How are you doing?

"I never know how to answer that," the Little Rock, Ark.,

native said Tuesday.

"I feel like putting on the Southern charm and saying: I'm fine, how are you?' But that's not what people want to hear."

Burnett Bailey, 43, was about to take the podium in the Reagan Presidential Library and Museum's courtyard to speak a crowd of about 850.

The Reagan Library and MilitaryConnection.com held the second annual 9/11 Freedom Walk to commemorate those who died in the attacks six years ago. It included a ceremony, speeches, military music and a 30-second moment of silence. An F-18 flyover concluded the ceremony before the 1.8-mile walk.

At ground zero in New York and around the country, Americans went through familiar mourning rituals as they looked back on the day when terrorists hijacked four jetliners and killed nearly 3,000 people.

President Bush attended ceremonies at the White House and the Pentagon, and the 40 passengers and crew members who died when a flight crashed into a Pennsylvania field were honored as "citizen soldiers."

Burnett Bailey took the stage and spoke about the four most defining phone calls of her life. Tom called her from the air from United Flight 93. He told her the passengers were putting a plan together to foil the terrorists' plot. He said they were waiting until the plane flew over a rural area and would try an emergency landing. The last call included questions about their children and his parents.

She asked him a final question.

"Tom, is there anything else I can do?' He said Pray, Deena. Just pray," she said.

United Flight 93 was the only missile that failed to meet its target — the White House. No passengers survived.

Marine Cpl. Megan Leavey, a Purple Heart Medal recipient, grew up in New York. She was a freshman in college the morning of Sept. 11. She was a volunteer firefighter and had close friends die in the World Trade Center.

"Sept. 11 is a day I feel very strongly about," Leavey said. "Sept. 11 was the main reason I joined the military."

This time last year, Leavey was in a hospital, recovering from a bomb that exploded under her while on foot patrol in Iraq.

The walk began, and as people snaked down Presidential Drive, they talked about the ceremony.

"The speeches were very touching," said Len Krukowski, 59, of Thousand Oaks. "We need to continue to be outspoken and continue to fight for freedom."

At the conclusion of the 1.8-mile walk, Burnett Bailey was feeling better.

"So many people approached me and thanked me and shook my hand; they told me how they remember Tom," she said. "I feel better, and it's because of the caring and love of strangers."

Earlier, elsewhere in the county, a crowd gathered in the middle of campus at Ventura College at lunch to remember those killed in the attacks six years earlier.

"Sept. 11 is a day that will never be forgotten," Juliana Hernandez told the crowd as she stood on a stage.

Hernandez, Associated Student Body president, said the only thing more tragic than the attacks would be to forget what happened six years ago. "We can't allow that to happen."

The crowd stood still for a moment of silence. "The Star-Spangled Banner" was played on the campus chimes.

Valiant Nims, a U.S. Marine Corps veteran, wiped away tears as the song played. Nims, 56, said he hopes this country did the right thing to invade Iraq.

Nims said the question is important not only for the nation but also to him personally. His two sons have served in Iraq.

"A lot of lives have been lost there," he said.

Flags were flown at half-staff at Ventura County Fire Department stations today to commemorate the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks.

— The Associated Press contributed to this report.

