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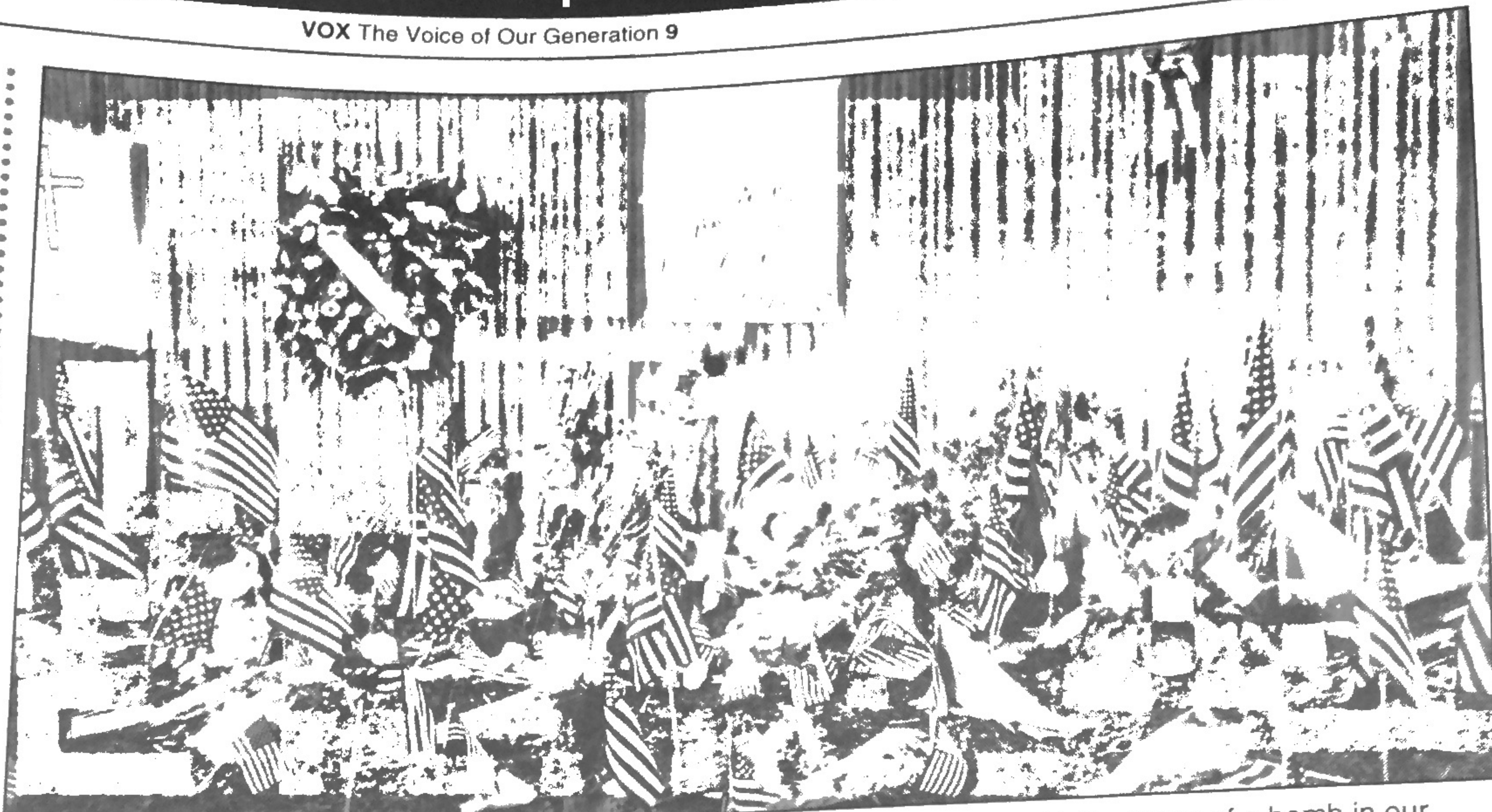
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A makeshift memorial at Centennial Olympic Park helped visitors and locals cope with the terror of a bomb in our back yard, while we were able to maintain a focus on the celebration of peace that the Olympic Games signifies.

# REALITY OF TERRORISM HITS HOME

By Dena McClurkin  
VOX staff

The night that the pipe bomb exploded in Centennial Park this summer, Joe Jennings, a senior at Mays High School, was among the 350 Randstad employees working in the park and was only 300 feet from the bomb.

"I was delivering food to one of the stands and all of a sudden people were running and security guards were trying to figure out what had happened," says Joe. "I didn't have the time to be scared. But all I could think about was how and why was this happening, and was there another bomb in located the park just waiting to explode. So I fled."

The bomb's effect did not really hit Joe until he finally reached home and saw all the hype on TV.

"The security officials at the park made it seem so minor, but when I saw how many people were injured, I then realized I could have been one of the injured or even dead," explains Joe. "And then finally all the horror of the situation hit me."

On July 28 at 1:25 a.m. when the pipe bomb exploded in Centennial Park killing two and injuring about 111 people, the reality hit that terrorism not only dampened the Olympic spirit but also left many teens with fear of their surroundings, safety and the fate of our society.

Like Joe, Paris Sims, a 17-year-old freshman at Morehouse College who left the park less than five minutes before the bomb exploded, also did not know how serious the bomb really was.

"It was all so weird because me and my friends were over by the tower and had left only seconds before the bomb went off. I was just numb as I sat there and watched TV because it could have been me," says Paris, motionless.

Even though several bomb threats were made on MARTA and at Underground Atlanta after the bomb exploded in Centennial Park, Joe says he is not fearful of his surroundings but is more aware and cautious of what can easily happen.

"The bombing happened at the park because it was a popular gathering place during the Olympics and a prime place to blow up," Joe says. "But it isn't like the nuts are coming to Southwest Atlanta and hiding bombs in my neighbor's backyard. So I am not scared, nor am I ducking behind bushes with a bullet-proof vest on. But I am aware of the fact now that foreigners are no longer the enemies but instead the guy next door or the average guy on the street."

After his close encounter, Paris disagrees and has not been back down to the park or downtown since.

"I am not really scared to go back down there, but going back downtown or even to the park just gave me creeps because I could have died there, and people actually did die there. And just too much happened there that I can't easily forget," says Paris. "The whole incident opened up my eyes and gave me a new outlook on life."

Oddly, Paris feels that there is nothing that the Atlanta Police Department or any other law enforcement agency can do to make Atlanta a safer place.

The tragedy at Centennial Park is what Sherie Henson, 16-year-old junior at North Atlanta who also was working at the park the night the bomb exploded, sees as one of our society's reality checks.

"It's like a wake-up call to America saying that the country that you are living in isn't as safe as you think it is, and that terrorism is not just a foreign problem but yours too," says Sherie.

"All I was thinking about when I heard about it was that some mad man from a foreign country had decided to seek revenge on the Americans. But when I learned that a suspect was an American, I was shocked," says Karen Langley, a 14-year-old freshman at North Springs High School who was at home asleep during the bombing. "This makes me paranoid about this country that I am living in. First the Oklahoma City incident, then the TWA incident and now Centennial Park. What's next? My school or my local grocery store?"

Because the bombing in Centennial Park is a pending investigation, the FBI would not comment on whether the Oklahoma City bombing, the TWA incident and the bombing at Centennial Park are all connected. FBI representatives also would not comment on what is being done to locate who is responsible.

The strength of the Olympic spirit was shown through the park bombing. A scary tragedy occurred, but after a thoughtful memorial at the park the party still continued. "We aren't going to let it get us down," said Neesha Gillian, 17, an Olympic visitor from Boston. "I'm here for the Olympics, I'm here to have fun, to party. I'm not going to let it get in the way of any of that."

Three days after the bombing people were as outgoing and friendly as ever. Visitors and locals brought flowers, flags and other items to create a hometown memorial for the bomb victims and lost naivete.

While many teens now realize that terror can happen at home, the feeling of people banding together helped the party continue. It also kept our focus on the Olympics' celebration of athletic ability and peace.

Dena is a senior at Banneker High School.