

Kathy Williams, EEB Classroom Teacher

On August 28, 2001 we got the news that Emma Booker had finished the preliminary offerings for the Presidential visit. We knew that we were on the list for a visit, and the final selection would be in a week. We were informed that we would not know the exact date because of security reasons. We were advised to "keep the news close to home." What could be more exciting than this? We would need to prepare for such an important event by putting everything in order. Classrooms would have to be cleaned, students' work displayed, and grounds tidied up. The children would need to come to school bedecked in their best uniforms, wearing their nicest smiles, and displaying their finest manners. This would be a day of celebrating our successes and sharing our proud moments with the most important person in American culture, the President of the United States. George Bush was coming to Emma E. Booker!

I remember arriving at school before the first light of day. I wanted to make sure that my classroom was ready for the substitute teacher who would be with my students while I was in the media center. Much to my dismay, no one was allowed in the building until 7:30, so my plan was in vain. As we waited to go through security we chatted about the upcoming event. Anticipation accompanied intrigue and made the waiting almost unbearable. Finally, one by one, we passed through the cautious scrutiny of the secret service. We were one step closer to the big moment. Our stage passes swinging proudly to and fro from around our necks, we entered the last stretch of our journey to fame. Two hours more of standing and waiting and the President would be standing in our media center extolling our achievement in reading. This was truly a great moment in time for our school and for every member of our staff. I wondered what it would be like to shake the hand of George W. Bush, 43rd president of the United States.

While I was basking in all this mental speculation, all around the room, people quietly conversed about what was to come. Quite unexpectedly, a secret service agent slipped in and unobtrusively passed the news that there had been a terrible airplane crash in New York and the President wouldn't be addressing the audience about reading. He had a grave message to convey to the nation, and he would come in, deliver it and leave immediately. It was then that I realized that our little moment in time, our special notoriety was soon to become an historical event.

At 9:30 A.M. on September 11, 2001, President George W. Bush slipped silently behind the podium and made the announcement to the nation and the world that there had been "an apparent terrorist attack on our country." I was standing behind the President when he made this now infamous statement, but I could see the gravity of his statements reflected in the faces of the children sitting in front of him. They silently stared at him, letting the reality of what he said seep in slowly. It was like watching a movie in slow motion. After the moment of silence and the brief statement, I heard applause and I felt my hands clapping, but my mind was numb.

As I reflect on the horrible events that took place on this day, I can only hope and pray that there will be an end to violence and hatred, and that we, as a nation, will not contribute to any further wounding of the world. On this day we at Emma E. Booker became a part of history. Most of us aren't old enough to remember Pearl Harbor, and some of us can recall the assassination of JFK. But September 11th was our defining moment...an experiencing of history and a life changing event. Now, if anyone asks us, "Where were you when the terrorists toppled the twin towers?" We can proudly respond, "We were in Sarasota, Florida at Emma E. Booker, standing behind the President." Hopefully, we can all stand behind our President in the troubled times ahead. God Bless us all!