

ALUMNI SPOTLIGHT

Ken Feinberg on his acclaimed career, his connection to Judaism and his new movie



Ken Feinberg (class of '67), is one of the renowned figures in the field of dispute resolution. He has served as Special Master to some of the most high-profile, sensitive -- and sometimes contentious -- mediation cases in the U.S., including the September 11th Victim Compensation Fund, the TARP Executive Compensation Initiative, the Agent Orange Veteran Payment Program and the BP Deepwater Horizon Disaster Victim Compensation Fund. He also served as the administrator for One Fund Boston, which aided the victims of the Boston Marathon bombings.

His book, "What Is Life Worth," details the painstaking efforts -- both monetarily and emotionally -- to compensate the victims and survivors of the 9/11 attacks.

Feinberg took a few minutes out his busy schedule to talk with us about his unparalleled career, his connection to Judaism, and about the recent release of his Netflix movie "Worth."

Q: Your accomplishments are many. Where do you feel your "greatest impact" is and what are you most proud of?

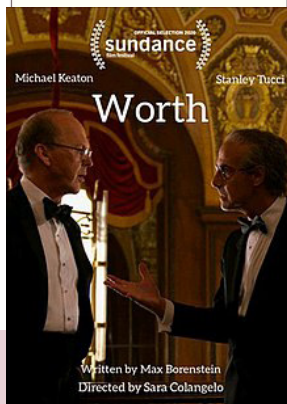
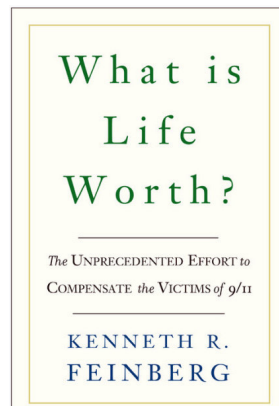
KF: Clearly, I'm most proud of the 9/11 Compensation Fund because it was of such historical importance to the country and was created in a very short period of time, just 13 days after the tragedy.

Q: Is there any aspect of your Jewish upbringing that helped guide your work?

KF: I think there are aspects of Jewish ritual having grown up in Brockton that have really helped me. Don't forget that when death or tragedy impacts a Jewish person, the Jewish community surrounds the victim and provides solace and help -- the shiva, the graveside service. And I found that our nation and these [victim compensation] programs are designed to administer aid to the victims' survivors much the way the Jewish faith [cares for those facing loss].

Q: In your book "What Is Life Worth," you explain you navigated a vast and complex "mosaic of human emotions" as you administered the 9/11 fund. Did you draw on any Judaic values or principles in creating a case for equitable compensation?

KF: First of all, the mathematics of compensating value -- the formulas that are being used to try and distinguish family survivors of a stockbroker versus families of survivors of the waiter -- were built into the statute of the fund, much the way that judges and juries value lives every day. So that aspect of it was not particularly difficult. The tough part -- that wasn't referenced at all in the statute and where my Jewish values kicked in -- was in dealing with the families themselves: the emotion, the solace, the pathos, the tragic nature of families of survivors coming to see me one on one. How I worked with those families, over time, how I



met them in private and empathized with their plight, I learned in part from my Jewish heritage in terms of being there for them, listening to them, offering solace and advice. The statute didn't require any of that. And yet I thought it was critically important, and it turned out to be extremely important in helping the families commit to the fund.

Q: The movie "Worth" shares this story more broadly with the world. Is there something you want people to take away from it?

KF: Oh, yes! Remember that the 9/11 attacks, and the resulting 9/11 Victim Compensation Fund, happened only 20 years ago. And the great story that comes out of the fund is how completely apolitical it was and how the country stood as one in coming to the aid of the victims. There was no red state-blue state, liberal-conservative, Republican-Democrat, Trump-Anti-Trump, nothing like that. Everybody rallied around the victims. Everybody supported me in my efforts. And I think that is the great lesson: that in times of tragedy and crisis, the American people do come together and they really can demonstrate a common definition of a national community.

Q: In "Worth", you are played by the actor Michael Keaton, who has also starred as Batman. In portraying you, do you think he captured your superpower?

KF: Well, you'll have to ask others about that... [laughing] My children saw the film at the Sundance Film Festival, they said, "Dad, Michael Keaton is a great actor, but he's better as Batman." Others say he did a pretty good job mastering the Boston-Brockton dialect. I think he got inside the character pretty well and figured out some of the stress points and some of the challenges that I confronted. I spent a lot of time with him and he is a great actor, and I think he captured the overall challenge pretty well.

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