



GROUND ZERO

WSCC Alumnus Assists at Ground Zero

Following is a copy of a letter that we received from Dr. Christopher Rickard (Class of 1992), which recounts his experiences as a chiropractic volunteer at Ground Zero. Our thoughts and blessings go out to Dr. Rickard for his selflessness and patriotism in our Nation's time of crisis and need. Dr. Rickard can be reached at his office at (203) 333-8645, or via email at Rigtarm@aol.com.

On the morning of September 11th, I first heard the news about a plane hitting the World Trade Center towers on the radio. I went downstairs and watched TV in horror as the second plane hit the other tower. I remember one of the newscasters speculating that the towers will probably have to be torn down due to the damage incurred. A few minutes later, the first tower buckled and came down, followed by the second. Watching in stunned disbelief, one's thoughts turn to the victims and their families — and the burning desire to do something, *anything*, to help. Over the past few years I had become familiar with lower Manhattan and I had spent a lot of time there. I felt violated, angry and helpless. As a Chiropractor, I have always felt the need to help people.

My training and experience place me in the position of helping those in pain everyday. Yet in this situation, I felt so helpless. I wanted to do something, but I didn't even know where to start.

I had heard that anyone attempting to go near the site was being arrested. I went into the city on the 13th and the 16th of September. By then, they had opened up the streets as close as Canal Street (12 blocks North of what had been the WTC towers). It was like a military state. No one was being allowed South of Canal Street unless you lived or worked there; and you had to show ID, or you were not admitted. I walked from Grand Central down 5th Ave. As I drew closer to the site of the tragedy, the debris cloud became ominous. The acrid smell of burning became stronger, and the air got heavier. Most people were wearing white surgical masks or respirators.

I walked through Washington Square Park near Greenwich Village, where the arch had become one huge memorial. There were hundreds of candles and pictures and mementos of loved ones. There were large sheets displayed on the fence, where people had scrawled messages and prayers. It felt like a Church. I shot a whole roll of film there, of the memorial, and I was drawn to one area where I took a picture of a young man and woman. They were smiling and looked so happy. I had no real reason to take a picture of this couple specifically, but I felt inexplicably drawn to it. I found out a few days later that the man in the picture was one of my therapist's best friends. He worked for Cantor Fitzgerald, and he was on the 105th floor when the first plane hit the tower. He hasn't been seen since September 11th.

I got a call the week of September 24th from a Chiropractor friend of mine. She told me that a D.C. in Connecticut was working with the New York Chiropractic Council to coordinate the scheduling of DC's in NY for relief work. After placing a few phone calls and faxing in my credentials, I was scheduled to work at St. Paul's Church on Thursday, Oct 4th, from 2:00pm to 8:00pm. The church is located on the corner of Fulton Street and East Broadway — directly behind what was the World Trade Center. St. Paul's Church and Trinity Church were completely untouched by the blast. It turns out that the DC's being scheduled at the Church were all from Connecticut. That was our site. There are other sites being coordinated by the NYCC and the Red Cross. There were four 6-hour shifts, 7 days a week for the DC's at St. Paul's to provide Chiropractic care 24/7.

I drove down on October 4th with my friend, Dr. Denny. We were told to bring a copy of our license, a business card and a photo ID, or we wouldn't be let in. We had to drive through two checkpoints, and show our ID and credentials at each. When we parked at a garage, we were asked to open the hood and trunk of the car to be searched, and security used a mirror on a long poll to look under the car. Once they knew that we were no threat, they let us park.



Dr. Christopher Rickard ('92) at Ground Zero



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We walked up a few blocks towards the Church, and we had to show our credentials two more times to armed National Guardsmen, and only then were we escorted to the Church. As we approached the entrance to the Church, we could see the devastation of some of the buildings directly behind the Church. The sight of the burned-out and gutted buildings made me weak. The level of destruction is beyond words, and how this Church survived is nothing short of a miracle.

We made our way into the Church, signed in, and found our area. There were also three massage therapists and two Podiatrists offering their services. The inside of the Church is amazing. Hundreds of cards and letters from children from all over the country adorn the walls, the pillars and along every pew. Letters to the firemen and police and those who lost someone were written in crayon and colored pencil. They contained words of sympathy and sorrow from a grade school point of view. You could spend hours reading them. There is a large banner over the balcony with words of hope and support. It is from, and signed by, the citizens of Oklahoma City. They knew the sorrow of this tragedy first-hand.

The Chiropractic area was equipped with the basics — three tables and face paper. What else do we need? As I began to work on people, that feeling of helplessness that I had a few weeks prior began to melt away. The men and women I worked on were so appreciative of our being there to help them. They were thanking me for my efforts. I told them that I was there to make their jobs easier. They are the ones working 12-14 hour shifts 6-7 days a week. If my skills as a Chiropractor can make what they were going through easier, then I was happy to assist, and that's all the thanks I needed. I must have worked on 30 or 40 people that day. Firemen, Police and National Guard, Steel workers, Clergy, FBI and Secret Service, not to mention other volunteers and the massage therapists.

The energy of the day was exhilarating. There were many first-time Chiropractic patients — at least 50% of the people I saw had never been to a chiropractor before. They were amazed at what Chiropractic could do for them, with only hands as our instrument. Every one of them was asking me for my business card because they wanted to come see me as a patient. They were a bit disappointed when they saw that I was from Connecticut, but they said that they were going to find a Chiropractor where they lived.

At one point in the shift, Dr. Denny and I went outside the Church to tell the police and other workers that we were inside and were there to provide treatment for them. There was a barricade on Dey Street, manned by five or six from the NYPD. When we introduced ourselves, one gentleman expressed his desperation to be adjusted. He wasn't able to leave his post and come inside the Church, so we found some old chairs on the side of the street and put them together to function as a make-shift table. He lay down, and I went to work. I was on the street 1/2 block from ground zero adjusting a New York City Cop. He felt great, and another officer wanted to get adjusted. It was an incredible experience.

When I finished, they asked us if we wanted to see Ground Zero. They escorted us to the edge of the site on Church Street. It was unreal. On the South end of the site, I saw a sign for a Chiropractic office. The sign was partially covered by a long screen over the high-rise building to contain the falling debris. I heard later that the office was empty on the morning of the 11th. One element of the site that is missed by many people viewing the tragedy remotely from their homes on television is the odor at Ground Zero. It was not as noticeable inside the Church, but outside the air is heavy, musty, dirty — almost tangible. It is the smell of death. At the Church, the food service is set-up on the front porch. After a while, the volunteers don't seem to really mind the smell — it's part of the job.

Most of my patients were workers whose sore backs were the result of carrying their gun belts or their vests, or from sleeping on the floor at a shelter, as the National Guard did. Most would have a grayish silver debris covering their feet and pants. Some would be completely covered in it. They were coming in from "the pile". On another shift at St. Paul's the following week, I noticed a box of recycled work boots. A lot of the workers required new footwear because the soles of their boots were melting from the heat of the pile. As I was working, my eyes were looking at a pair of boots that looked as if they had been worn while standing in fire. My thoughts went to what the wearer of those boots must have seen and experienced.

In the afternoon at St. Paul's, they would turn the lights down for the workers to rest, and a musician would perform at the front of the Church. A pianist, a viola player, a classical guitarist, a cellist, flutist and a string duet would play at different times.



Dr. Rickard with some of New York's finest



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At the end of my first shift, I didn't want to leave. I was so caught up in the feeling of helping all of these workers that I didn't want it to end.

I finally got home at 2:00am, and was back to my office on Friday at 7:00am. I had met and treated some amazing people, and listened to their stories of loss and fear on the 11th. I treated a steel worker whose Father helped to build the WTC. There was a massage therapist whose Dad was a United Airlines pilot on a flight coming through the NY area on the 11th. There were a couple of Middle Eastern men on his flight, and they kept asking the stewardess at around 9:00am "What is the exact Time?" They seemed a little uneasy. They were probably there to serve as the terrorists' "Plan B" if one of the planes didn't hit the towers. The steel worker told me of steel I-beams they found only a few inches apart with a body between them. I met an NY cop who told me that on that morning he was at home, and hearing what had happened he hurried to work. When he left home, he said good-bye to his wife and didn't know if he would ever see her again. He told me about a cop who was scheduled to retire on September 11th. He was at his precinct with papers in hand, and when the call in came about the WTC,



Dr. Rickard in front of "the pile"

he got into his car and went to work. He and the driver of the car they were in were killed when the towers came down on top of them. Last week, I worked on an NY fireman who told me that, as his ladder truck was racing to the WTC behind another ladder truck through a tunnel, the towers came down on the truck in front of them, killing everyone. Another cop talked about his experience of finding bodies still strapped into their airline seats. He said that you couldn't even identify them as human bodies. As I would work on these men and women, they were able to relax, and if they wanted to talk about their experiences, I would listen and try to understand what they were going through. Sometimes they wouldn't want to talk at all. But they were always appreciative of the work we were doing. They would always feel better.

In my second shift, I met a Chiropractor from NY. He had been working at Ground Zero since the beginning. He and other DC's had set-up tables on the street at the site and were working on people from day one. He told me of a fireman he worked on who, after a thoracic adjustment, just broke down emotionally and mentioned that he had lost some 20 men. On my 3rd shift at St. Paul's, I was working with Dr. Frank Tortora. He has been in practice for over 35 years. Late in the afternoon a policeman came in with acute left low back pain from lifting something heavy. He also had sharp pain in his left leg, which shot pain all the way down to his foot. Dr. Tortora evaluated him and decided to adjust L 5 in side posture. The adjustment went well, but a few moments after the adjustment this enormous cop lost it. He was crying like a baby. I thought it was from his back pain. It wasn't. His back and leg pain were gone, and he began to open up to all of the emotional stress he had held inside. I was astonished. I had never seen that kind of emotional cleansing after an adjustment. This policeman was unable to return to his shift. We had to call in 2 other policemen to console him. When I left an hour later, he was still crying and



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Dr. Rickard standing with Dr. Todd Sheets, DC (left) and Dr. Richard Heithaus, DC (center)

grieving over the loss of his brothers.

I have worked at St. Paul's Church five times and I am scheduled for the next 2 weeks there. I have also been certified by the Red Cross, and I have worked 2 shifts at another location. This is known as "Respit #3". It's located at the Marriott on Albany and West Street. This site requires a Red Cross photo ID badge, and it gives you clearance to all the areas and Ground Zero. I needed to go through three security checkpoints to gain access to the Marriott because it is much closer to "the pile". I worked there on the 28th of October, and also on November 4th from 2:00pm - 8:00pm. On the 28th, I was working with Todd Sheets, DC. He was from California. He had flown out to work as many shifts as possible. He was working 2-3 shifts a day. He only intended to stay for 1 week, but after getting here, he stayed for 2 weeks.

I also worked with a DC from Pittsburgh, PA, Dr. Richard Heithaus. I met a massage therapist from Alabama who came up to work a few shifts, and another massage therapist from Virginia. There was a group of therapists out from Ohio as well. I met a Red Cross volunteer on the 4th who is a professional opera singer who just wants to help out. She told me that in the first few days she worked on a bucket brigade on "the pile" at Ground Zero.

On the 28th of September, I was able to walk around the site with the other DC's. The memorial service was taking place, and the site was quiet. The experience of being in such close proximity to the site next to the blown-out buildings and peering into the pit is indescribable – no words exist to translate the emotions. We saw "The Cross" – a cross-shaped set of beams that appears to emerge from the pile to shout "God Bless America" – and offices with their walls blown-out, exposing open file cabinets and charts flapping in the wind. We had the opportunity to meet some cops on the site and have our pictures taken with them. Many of New York's finest signed our hard hats. When we got back to work at the Marriott, I worked almost nonstop until 11:30pm. I was only going to work until 8:00pm, but the 8:00pm relief shift never showed up. I stayed as long as I could, but I needed to catch the train back home. I must have worked on 50 or 60 people before I left. At the Marriott, we were on the 3rd floor in the hallway with the massage therapists.

On November 4th, I found out just how much our work was appreciated by the workers when the Red Cross announced it was discontinuing all Chiropractic and massage therapy at the respite centers as of Nov. 7th. Apparently, there was pressure from above to limit access to Ground Zero. The workers were shocked and angry that they would not have access to our services. We asked them to complete surveys to show the benefit and need for continued availability of chiropractic care on site. Not one person indicated that they did not wish to continue the service. I heard that when the workers come off "the pile" into the Marriott, the first thing they ask is "where are the chiropractors?" The level of respect and appreciation I have seen for Chiropractic in my time at Ground Zero has been invigorating, motivating and, at times, breathtaking. When you're there in the middle of such overwhelming devastation with nothing but your hands and your training to speak for you, and a fireman the size of a midsize car, gets up off the table, shakes your hand and says "Thanks Doc, I feel great", it makes me honored to be a Chiropractor.

I would like to thank WSCC for the skills and training I received while at the school, and for the knowledge and abilities I have today, which I bring with me to the workers at Ground Zero. I'll keep you updated on the relocation of our respite sites and the success of Chiropractic care on the relief workers.

Sincerely,
Dr. Christopher Rickard
WSCC Class of 1992



Ground Zero