

My World Trade Center Experience - a Diary

September 15, 2001

After spending 3-1/2 days at home glued to the TV, I felt this urge to be involved in the relief effort at the World Trade Center. I didn't know if I would be shoveling dirt or lifting buckets, or if my skills as a chiropractor were needed. Although I was willing to help in any way, I decided that my best gift was to go with the intention of helping through chiropractic.

As soon as I got into my car and headed into the city, I felt good knowing that I was clear about my purpose, and that clarity allowed me to move and travel in an area that was secured by soldiers and police on the lookout for people that might try to violate their space.

Today, Saturday, I spent 15 hours treating several hundred people that were in need of chiropractic care. When I first ventured down to the World Trade Center vicinity Friday afternoon, I didn't know where to go or how to have the greatest effect on the most people. I roamed the streets carrying two portable tables looking for the place I could stay and a place others could send people in need back to me. I had many challenges, being that I was not officially recognized as a provider of service, yet I knew what I had to offer was in great need. I found a place that suited me, but I knew there had to be a better one.

I was joined then by my dear friend Richard Nunziata. We left the area after 2:00 a.m., and I knew today I would find the optimal location to treat a constant flow of people. Today we joined forces with a group of chiropractors. Some of them had positioned themselves on the same corner I was on; what a coincidence that was. Another group positioned themselves in Styvesant High School. Knowing where they were allowed me to venture off and find the ideal place to set up camp. I encountered the police and National Guard on multiple occasions and had to think quick of the right response to their questions. The wrong response would have gotten me an escort to a less desirable place.

My venturing around led me to "ground zero," where thousands of uniformed firemen, policemen and tradesman were waiting to enter the destruction site. I was surrounded by equipment of all types, twisted metal and vehicles, buildings I once admired, now with shattered metal and glass hanging overhead. Yet my desire to share my gift told me this was the place to set up camp.

I started treating many police, soldiers, firemen and tradesman. They told their fellow officers and friends that chiropractic was available, and more people came. Then more chiropractors joined us. By the end of the day, I received a pass from the Army that gave me the privilege to go anywhere I pleased. As the crowds of policemen, soldiers, firemen and tradesmen came out of the destruction zone after hours of digging, passing buckets and other more technical jobs, I would shout out, "Chiropractic over here, who's next for chiropractic?" Some people looked at me like I had two heads. Others would come over, so thankful we were there. Usually they came in groups, especially the firefighters. They would always stick together. If one of the group would come over and tell the others about how great they felt, most of the group would line up for their adjustment. If one guy felt like he would be put down for coming over, then the whole group would just pass me by.

The people who didn't come over for their free adjustment may have done so because of their lack of experience with chiropractic, or a fear of chiropractic that was not going to be handled at that time. They might have had a few things on their minds other than this gift a stranger was offering. They might have been thinking about their friends buried under the rubble just 50 yards in front of us. I feel we need to respect and not be so sensitive to rejection when people don't see our gift like we do. There were still several hundred people that I cared for today, and many thousands of people that were treated by all the chiropractors collectively. The people that were treated are healthier and happier for it, and that is why I did it.

September 17th: a New Day

I received phone calls from the New York Chiropractic Council, the International Chiropractors Association and Dr. Sid Williams. They all want to send down tents, showers - whatever we need. It was great to see how the word gets around in these times.

Today I headed into the city to help more people with chiropractic and to learn more about life. After going through numerous checkpoints, I made it down to ground zero. They moved our location a bit, but I met up with three buddies from the New York Chiropractic Council that were still there from the night before.

The chiropractic area was pretty well covered so I decided to venture into the highly secure and restricted area where the search and rescue operations were taking place. This area is on the Westside Highway, where the top of Tower Two crashed down on the people from the disaster and rescue departments. This is the area where the ground is covered with debris, bent metal the size of small buildings, and many cranes and heavy construction equipment.

Looking up to the pile of bent steel, men are working with torches and special saws, cutting away piece by piece of the massive pile. There are men with shovels and picks loading buckets. The buckets are passed via a brigade of 500 men and women, mostly firemen and police, to piles that can be scooped up and put in dumpsters. The firemen and police may wait hours before they are allowed into this area. There are multiple bucket brigades in different parts of the site. In this area, there are also places where orange paint is sprayed onto big pieces of debris next to locations where bodies were found. Big boom lights illuminate the entire area like a baseball stadium. As hard as I try to paint a picture for you, I can't come close to describing the scene.

I figured out how to get past the security. I then proceeded to join a bucket brigade. This was great, but I wanted more. I found a group that was working on digging a tunnel to get into the garage under the Westside Highway. I first used picks and shovels and was happy to help, but what I really wanted to do was cut steel with a torch. Then the backhoe driver asked that a section of steel be cut before he could dig further. One of the metal workers grabbed a long cutting torch, and I grabbed the other. We both went at cutting this spaghetti-like bar that was put into the concrete for strength. Sparks were flying, and thick metal was dropping to the ground. I felt that in a matter of moments, I was able to elevate my usefulness to a new level. I saw myself as an equal to all the men I treated, and even though I thought I would only stay for a hour or two, the time flew by.

Seven hours later, I emerged out of the zone of destruction to my chiropractic post. I was covered with dirt and had a very sore back. We placed ourselves in "boxes" that we or others created. I realized that I could step out of my box for a few hours, and it would still be there when I got back. The difference is that I now feel complete. I have experienced all of the things I wanted to. I will still return to the site this week. The difference is that I'll be able to know first-hand what my patients went through

September 17th - Update

Today I was able to work on many people. I found a ship that was docked nearby where I have been posted. This ship is where people go to rest and eat (the food is generously provided by restaurants). I figured this would be a great place to set up shop. I brought my portable table over to the ship and set up in the middle of the busiest area. I went up to one really large fireman and asked him if he wanted to get adjusted. I told him once everyone saw him get adjusted there would be a line, so he should be the first person adjusted. He agreed, and the whole main deck was watching this guy in a white lab coat (me) adjust this big fireman. The place got a little quiet; I made my adjustment; and the guy got up and said, "Wow. That was amazing." For the next few hours, I had a line of people from every type of law enforcement agency and fire department from here to Canada waiting on line. Many of the people had never had a chiropractic adjustment. Their first experience was a 45-second treatment that blew them away.

September 18th

Today I was fortunate enough to be with two fellow chiropractic brothers, Drs. Richard Nunziata and Art Paterson. These guys are amazing. They came into the city and worked with me today.

We treated a lot of "twisted" people today. While walking down the media-lined street to get to the first checkpoint, I was approached by a Japanese reporter, then a Brazilian, and finally an Italian. They all had microphones and TV cameras recording my answers to their questions.

When I went to the ship this morning, I found that my portable adjusting table had been broken somehow in two different pieces. I quickly found my other table and brought it to the ship, then found a screwdriver and screws to put the first table back together. Now I had two tables and a deck full of police and firemen.

I went to one of the waiters and asked him to be my first adjustment. I told him he would be doing me a big favor if he would be the first. I explained that the rest of the people would line up if they saw me adjust him first. I didn't expect his reply, but was very pleased with it. He said, "I've been getting adjusted since I was five years old and would love an adjustment." I adjusted him, and for the next four hours until the time I got some additional help from my buddies, I was busy nonstop. I must have treated over 100 people in that short time.

I learned a big lesson: Some people will see the gift you're offering as just that: a gift. I say, "Expect that as the norm and don't worry if they don't see it that way." I'd rather plan for success than to introduce negative thoughts for the exceptions.

September 19th

Today I got down to "the pile" early. Many people were on the ship, eating, relaxing and getting adjusted. The surroundings are becoming more and more bizarre. I took a picture of a sign in front of a police truck that read: "Gun Cleaning." This fell into the area of things I didn't know that I didn't know.

Two great things happened today, one of which started yesterday. I was driving to the site and got a call from Scott Stanwood, the vice president of Ideal Health, a custom nutrition company I work with. He'd heard about the volunteering I was doing, and wanted to know if his company could help. I said that the relief workers could really benefit from his Energen product, and asked if he could send some. Scott said he would send some right away.

I didn't know what to expect, but this afternoon, just 24 hours later, I saw a huge box of Energen in

my office. I looked at the invoice. Ideal Health had donated \$14,000 worth of Energen! I was so delighted that instead of going home I put the Energen in a cab, headed down to the pile and distributed some of it to the very tired volunteers. This wonderful donation will help so many people to keep going on.

I realized today that leaders can come together with a common goal. I believe we all have leadership abilities. I think most people know this, and are just waiting for the right thing to come along to make their mark on this earth.

I see that life can be too short. I believe that you should not hold back and wait to see if something is worth your leadership. I believe if you wait to be a leader, then you will certainly increase your chances of missing out. Opportunity requires you to find the leader within, and let that leader come out and shine to all you touch.

It's time to show yourself and the world that you can do what it takes, whether you like it or not.

OCTOBER 2001