



CHIROPRACTIC (GENERAL)

Where Were You When the World Stopped Turning? Part 2

Richard Gorgo Jr., DC

One day not too long after my first day at FEMA (the Javits Center, which was FEMA's home base), one of the leading U.S. marshals approached me and told me he was having trouble maintaining the perimeter at Ground Zero. He told me many doctors of chiropractic, massage therapists and others were trying to (and sometimes succeeding at) getting into the site. He told me he was worried about their safety, so he did not want uncredentialed people at Ground Zero. With that, he put a new job on my lap.

My first priority was always my time spent adjusting patients - on The Pile, at the FEMA clinic, and in my free time (usually during my walks out of Ground Zero). I especially enjoyed treating patients in the front of Nino's restaurant, where there was good food - always free - and you could relax and show a more human side. It was now also my job, with the help of some awesome volunteers like Dr. Terry Eagle and Dr. Ellen Coyne, to reel in the chaos and begin to lay down some guidelines. I now had to credential, train, protect and many times deliver any chiropractic professional volunteering at Ground Zero. My unofficial title was chiropractic coordinator.

It was my job to arrange the arrival of volunteer doctors, orient them, explain the rules, discuss the emotions they might experience (both themselves and by people they were treating), supply them with their safety gear, and schedule them at one of our treatment centers. General rules of conduct were printed up; I have some of these documents available if you're interested. Here are a few examples: 1. Doctors must wear 3M masks at all times. 2. Gases cannot be detected by smell or sight; dust is also a problem. 3. 3M masks can cause CO poisoning, so proper mask training is required. 4. If at any time you are exposed to irritants or harmful chemicals, go directly to the medical station on the map. 5. No working on the streets. The relief workers will know where to find you. A renegade chiropractor working in a non-authorized site will be sent home.

(*Special note:* To the doctors, better known as the renegades, who did work on the streets, thank you. I hope you didn't think I was against you. I was getting flack from the marshals and the state police back at Javits Center. We were all chiropractors giving our all, selflessly.)

In addition to doing all the above, I also began coordinating care at what became the main four treatment centers for chiropractic and massage at The Pile. The locations basically chose themselves. The first clinic (in addition to the original set-up in St. Peter's Church, as discussed in part 1) I like to call Burger King, and for good reason: because it was in a Burger King. Already acting as a respite, the first floor of the Burger King had food and supplies. The second floor became a makeshift treatment area with chiropractic and massage tables scattered throughout. The third floor was a place for quiet and sleep. (This was common in the respite areas / clinics.)

By the end of the first week or so, the debris across Church Street had been cleared enough that I could walk the entire way down. The sights along the way would fill a book, but I most remember tripping over the radiator of a fire truck that was so smashed I could not even make out what it was at first.

Through the smoke I could see the Millennium Hotel with its damaged windows. It was this building that a few days earlier had caused me to run as fast as I could out of the church clinic. The reason for my mad dash was because the "unstable building alarm" - that's what I called it - had sounded. This alarm was hooked to lasers that tracked how far the buildings swayed. They were aimed at the Millennium because engineers feared the foundation had been compromised and that the building could fall at any moment. Well, on that night the alarm went off.

As I made it for the first time to the corner of Greenwich and Church Street or Trinity Place, I saw a sign, torn in the middle, damaged from the fall of tower two. This sign read, "Health Zone Chiropractic 212-233-1035." It was so inspiring to see that word - *chiropractic* - in the middle of this hell. You know, I always wanted to find out who owned that clinic and tell them how much that sign inspired me and I'm sure many other chiropractors. It was basically martial law down there, and some of the chiropractors raided the Health Zone office for tables to use in the Burger King clinic. So doctor, whomever you are, thank you.

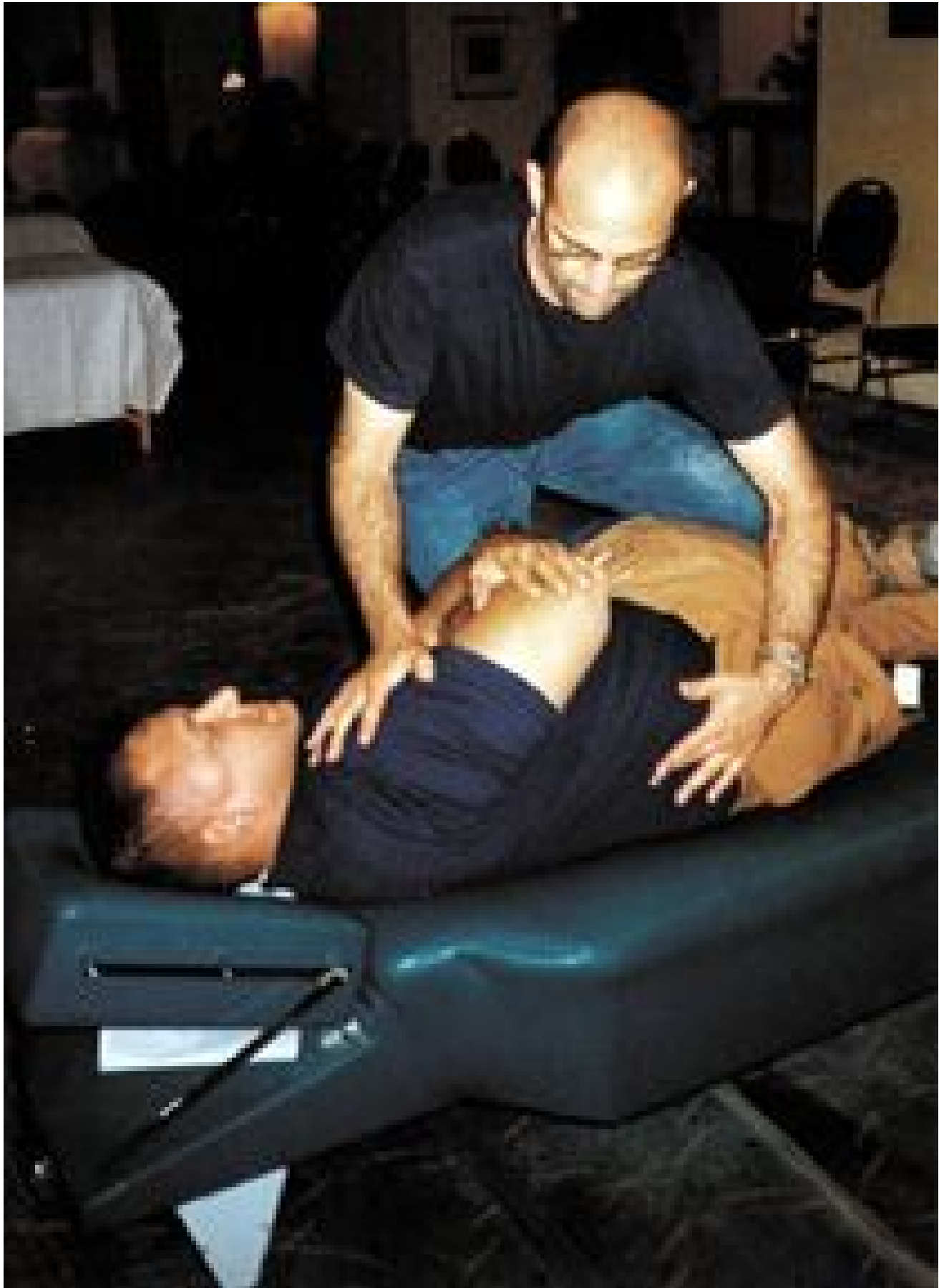
The next clinic to be set up was on the Spirit of New York ship, where many of us ate meals prepared by five-star restaurants. It was crazy; here you are covered in dust, tired out of your mind - and eating gourmet food from the Tribeca Grill courtesy of Robert DeNiro. This was an actual ship with multiple levels set up in a similar manner to the Burger King. There was a floor each for food, treatment and rest.

The last clinic was at Stuyvesant High School. Some of the first doctors to arrive on the scene had begun treating people in the American Express building, which I believe was deemed unsafe, so I think that is how the Stuyvesant clinic was started. Thanks to the extreme efforts of everyone at this location, it basically ran itself. This was on the western side of The Pile, almost directly across from where I had started at St. Peter's Church.

The cleanup site was so vast that each clinic saw different patients and heard different stories in the aftermath; but collectively, they contributed as a whole to the physical and spiritual health of all those who chose chiropractic care. It was a sad, long walk between each clinic. Along the way were letters from children, photos of missing loved ones, makeshift canteens and supply houses, people from every city, state and federal agency you could think of, and so much more.

At the entrances to The Pile were HASMAT teams that washed every vehicle before it left the site. Do you know the main sewer lines, Con Ed (electrical) lines and phone lines for most of Manhattan were underneath the trade centers? It was an engineering marvel to watch them clean and rearrange the viscera of the city as the weeks and months passed.

My office staff back home had the daunting task of verifying licensure and malpractice insurance for the doctors who desired to help at Ground Zero. At first, the doctors would call my office and fax over their credentials. Every morning my office would fax me a list of the new arriving doctors to FEMA command at the Jacob Javits Center. It was here that every morning I would check in, get briefed on safety changes and troubleshoot problems. I did my best to help our doctors stay safe and self-sufficient. I thought it best not to burden FEMA. I wanted to tread lightly, but leave behind a awesome example of the efficiency and effectiveness of chiropractic care. Later, as my office began to give up credentialing, the national chiropractic associations (both the ICA and ACA) formed hotlines that doctors could call if they wanted to help.



New York chiropractor David Levin, DC, adjusts a patient in one of the chiropractic clinics.

The utilization of chiropractic was immense. Our doctors worked on people and animals. We had patients from FDNY, NYPD, EMS, OEM (Office of Emergency Management), New York Department of Transportation, Department of Environmental Protection, Department of City Sanitation, Office of the Chief Medical Examiner, New York City Sheriff, New York State Police, Port Authority, FBI, Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms, National Transportation Safety Board, Immigration & Naturalization, U.S. Coast Guard, EPA, U.S. Public Health Service, U.S. Postal Service, veterinary teams and their dogs, physicians, medical teams, and numerous private companies.

Working in these conditions, especially in the first few weeks after the towers fell, was dangerous and even life-threatening. It was still hot and the ground below was a raging fire of dangerous fumes. Those who were there will never forget the smell. Because we were so busy many of us wore our masks on our foreheads. This made us susceptible to the harmful toxins.



Temporary NYPD headquarters - and later one of the chiropractic clinics - at Burger King. Photo courtesy of Andrea Booher/FEMA.

Inside the Javits Center, the main command center following the attacks, were the urban search-and-rescue teams, their equipment, their dogs, bomb squads, robots and much more. Also based at this location were members of the U.S. Forest Service and the Department of Environmental Protection. Each day they issued a report on air quality, and each day I was assured that my doctors and I were safe if we used the masks we'd been provided. This would later prove to be untrue. In their defense, never before had they seen such immense pressure and thus such minute particle sizes. It was those invasive toxins and particles that would later wreak havoc on those who were exposed to it - including me. (There were other physical dangers, of course; for example, more than a dozen pairs of my shoes melted from standing on or near The Pile.)

I started noticing changes in my health when I returned home. Because of my aversion emotionally to anything WTC-related, I did not pay attention and was uninformed about World Trade Center sickness, also known as Ground Zero syndrome. By 2005, I had closed my practice, made my will and was preparing for the inevitable. I wasn't sure exactly what was wrong and it wasn't until 2008 that Dr. Tyran Mincey diagnosed me while at a Pennsylvania Chiropractic Association convention. Dr. Mincey, you saved my life; please accept my sincere thanks.

Dr. Mincey referred me to the New York Rescue Workers Detoxification Program. It was here that through philanthropists, my health care was paid for and my health restored. For anyone interested in more information, I recommend visiting www.nydetox.org. It was later discovered that the particles at the site were so small that we should have worn a Tyvek suit to ensure protection. At the time, though, most of us only cared about helping others.

We were never in need. Many doctors who came to the pile later worked with the Red Cross, but it was the Salvation Army that was there and took care of us from the beginning. The basement of the Javits Center was a Salvation Army "Walmart" where I found toothpaste that was so desperately needed and where I slept for the first time, in a box filled with a brand new leather couch. There were also innumerable amounts of outside donations. One friend of mine ran a warehouse just outside Ground Zero; it was piled to the ceiling with boots, gloves and all the necessities for each type of worker at the rescue/recovery site - all donated from around the country.

Alarano, John	NY	Allen, Robert	RI	Lawrence, Peter	NY	Boss, Paul	RI
Adams, George C	RI	Amak, Thomas	OH	Lawson, David		Boushara, Andrew	CT
Ayers, Sharon	RI	Archese, Leonard	RI	Leach, David	NY	Boushara, Jeff	RI
Balsano, John		Ascarella, Terry	RI	Lee, Jay	RI	Boulos, John	RI
Bassala, Angela	RI	Astori-Davis, Simon	NY	Lengua, Joanne (DC)	RI	Bulman, Gregg	NY
Bassano, Nicholas C	NY	Ayoub, Beth	NY	Lipino, Paul	RI	Burns, Mark L	RI
Beachler, Brenden	RI	Baron, Dan	MA	Marin, Carmel Rose	RI	Castagna, Robert	NY
Bennet, Christine		Baron-Cole, Deborah	NY	Marino, Len		Chapell, Dan	NY
Berkowitz, Robert G.	RI	Barfield, Robert		Mazza, Joseph	RI	Choi, Michael	RI
Bj. Anthony	NY	Barth, J. Joseph	RI	McBain, Andy	RI	Schorf, Michael	NY
Bloom, William	RI	Bartel, Richard	MA	McClary, Joseph	RI	Schorf, Wendy	NY
Boulton, Peter	RI	Bass, Gary	MA	McMahon, Mike	RI	Sera, John	RI
Brown, Phil		Bassett, Louis		Melo, Lawrence	RI	Shapiro, Eric R.	RI
Brown, Ann	NY	Batt, Sandy	TX	Melo, Joseph	NY	Sik, Adam	NY
Buller, Dennis	NY	Batt, Joseph	NY	Mullen, Laurie	NY	Stewartson, Michael	NY
Burd, Roger	TX	Bauer, Robert	RI	Mullan, Donna	RI	Stout, Michael	NY
Calabro, Anthony J	NY	Becker, Michael	RI	Wadell, Ron W	RI	Sutton, Mark L	RI
Carl, John	RI	Benetti, Steven	MA	O'Brien, Paul	RI	Sutton, Anthony	RI
Carroll, Mike	NY	Berg, Arthur		O'Connor, Kimberly	NY	Swartz, Gary	RI
Catharucci, Kathleen	CT	Johnson, Joseph F	RI	O'Hall, Eugene F	RI	Taccata, Patricia M	RI
Catharucci, Louis	CT	Kachibrenner, Hans	RI	Pagano, John	RI	Tate, Arnold	RI
Cappola, Frank J	NY	Kasper, Terry		Panola, Tony	RI	Turley, Debbie	NY
Casari, Maria		Kelly, Thomas M	RI	Paro, Beth		Vargas, Mike	NY
Casari, Jay	RI	Klein, Neil	RI	Pelosi, Holly	TX	Varner, Leonard F	RI
Casari, Wendy	CT	Koslos, Deb	RI	Pine, Alan	RI	Vincent, Mark L	NY
Casati, Robert	RI	LaFerrera, Mike	RI	Poser, David		Vlach, Matthew J	NY
Casoria, Robert	NY	Lalorini, Vincent	RI	Rafic, Mary Ellen	RI	Wardell, Eric	RI
Cherubello, Gary	NY	Lalorini, Laurie	RI	Reed, Channon	RI	Wise, John	RI
Chen, Greg	RI	Lamb, Adam	NY	Ruffalo, Nicholas	RI	Winters, Bill	RI
Chen, Terry		Larson, Cindy		Rosen, Marty	MA	Zubizarra, Fred	NY
Christen, Scott	RI	Larson, Ron					

[Click here for the list of volunteer DCs.](#)

This story is first and foremost for the doctors who came to Ground Zero and gave their all. I would like to honor your efforts and unselfish acts. I have been saving a list of names for 10 years. (This list is not inclusive of all the DCs who volunteered; just those I worked with and/or credentialed.) Deep inside, I was longing to honor you all, but too fearful of facing the memories. I hope no one gets upset that we published this list, but I feel that you all deserve credit. I promised myself that someday, this would happen; I owe it to myself and to you.)

We had doctors of chiropractic come from everywhere. Some came quickly from New York and New Jersey, while others flew in from as far away as Texas, Ohio, Massachusetts, and even the United Kingdom. Almost all of these doctors arrived without any real plan of where to stay, how to eat, when to shower, etc. I think I speak for just about everyone when I say they didn't care about the conditions; they just wanted to help.

If you know someone on this list or someone I have forgotten who gave their time and gifts to the country during this horrific period in our nation's history, please take the time to call them, thank them, reach out to them. Many may still live with the memories and repercussions of their work there. Many may be sick or still battling the emotional stress that the Ground Zero experience created.

I would also like to mention the efforts of those who were outside of Ground Zero; those who were at St. Peter's Church and the many fire departments and armories throughout the region. Special thanks to those at Chelsea Piers and anyone else who hasn't been properly thanked. I thank you. I also want to thank the PCA for sending me much-needed radios; they saved my feet and helped keep our clinics staffed and stocked.

Chiropractic &

When workers came to the chiropractic station, the first step, after a friendly hello, was the removal of extraneous items. The glass cases which house displays of St. Paul's rich history were lined up against the wall behind the chiropractor's table and became a temporary resting place for cell phones, keys, laptops, tool boxes, hand towels, gas masks, hard hats, sweaters, even work coats, face shields, bibs and paint cans. Chiropractors, many coming from the far reaches of the United States, adjusted, massaged and many treated, often in a calm and sometimes through telegraphic tones. For many of the workers, this was their introduction to chiropractic and their first dose of physical therapy. The intimate setting of workers talking quietly over a table while another worker was having his back adjusted served to diminish the overall busyness of the relief effort.

"Thank you for your kindness. You walked the talk."

—Lt. Mike Fagan, FDNY



A testimonial in St. Paul's Church written by FDNY Lt. Mike Fagan. Photo by Dr. Gorgo in 2002.

Things I personally won't forget: the outpouring of love, people's helpfulness, the quietness of New York streets (I did not hear a horn honk for months), the smell, the fatigue, the dust, driving down the West Side Highway having to roll my windows completely up because the "cheerleaders" were always trying to shove gifts of food, water, clothing, cards and more in the windows. (A Web site was created to keep these cheering stations manned 24 hours a day, and they were still there when I left in December 2001.) The looks of exhaustion and desperation before a chiropractic adjustment, transformed into joy and thanks after receiving an adjustment. The appreciation expressed by all the rescue workers. The joy of giving seen in each treating doctor's face. The never-ending abundance of energy and love we had to give. The stories of bravery, knowing how many people lost their lives and lay dying or dead below my feet. The numbness of PTSD; the fear and anxiety that accompanies it. The inability to let go and to leave the job behind. The feelings of emptiness upon returning home to a quiet practice life. And finally, I won't forget the faces, the tireless efforts of doctors with hearts that wouldn't let them quit and who couldn't stay away. I will always remember all those who arrived day in and day out to work, care, counsel and love those in need.

One last story: I was so involved in my own world, making sure chiropractic care was properly provided and attending to what needed attention, that I did not notice the rescue beepers - attached to the uniforms of the rescue workers trapped in the debris of the towers - quietly stopping. It was Officer Gail who brought it to my attention. She stopped me and said, "Do you notice how quiet it is today, how eerie it is?" It was then that I noticed the loss of hope on the faces of the NYPD and FDNY. A dark sadness took the place of what had been a surprisingly hopeful rescue operation. It was then that the operation was renamed recovery.

As time went on, little by little human emotion and ultimately healing returned. Smiles crept in here and there photographers took their pictures, and ever so slowly, New York's hustle and bustle returned to Manhattan. For months and even years after Sept. 11, 2001, chiropractors could be found at the site, at fire houses, at respite centers and elsewhere, continuing the giving, continuing to give the gift only our hands can give.

I urge you to become involved in our nation's emergency-response programs and ensure that chiropractic has a seat at the table. I strongly urge those in leadership roles at the leading chiropractic associations to work to incorporate chiropractic (a vital and in this case, superior form of health care) into America's search-and-rescue teams, including FEMA, to ensure the protection and proper organized response. God forbid we are ever attacked again, but if it happens, chiropractic care needs to be part of the healing, as it was back in 2001.

In 2002, I returned. It was a chance to make what was surreal real. It was a chance to see old friends who, to this day, choose not to speak to one another as frequently as they should because of the memories attached to the faces. While touring the site with Dr. Heidi Yudelowitz and Officer Gail Imhauser, we stumbled across the chiropractic and podiatry prayer in St. Peter's Church. I'd like to close with that prayer:

Oh God, your healing touch is made manifest in so many ways. We pray for the ministry of the chiropractors who renewed so many with their skilled hands and their adjustments. Oh God, how blessed are those who care for our feet. Their humble ministry embodies the greatest lesson you taught us: that the one who would be greatest is the one who would be willing to serve. Amen.

Read [part 1](#) of Dr. Gorgo's 9/11 experience in the Sept. 9 issue.

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