

For the next six days Cyndi worked at the Hard Hat Café, talking and listening to the workers during their breaks. The Hard Hat was a giant structure that reminded Cyndi of the DakotaDome. It was open 24 hours a day for the workers and anyone else in the area of what would become known as “Ground Zero.”

Her job was to “walk around and see if (anyone) needed a napkin or a bottle of water or something,” but most of all to lend a friendly ear if someone needed to talk.

The interior of the building was kept spotless, Cyndi says partly because these men were coming from the “pits” and the Salvation Army wanted to provide them with a clean, comfortable environment.

“They told us that if we saw a clump of dirt on the ground don’t pick it up and throw it in the garbage ‘it could be the remains of somebody,’” Cyndi adds.

Cyndi says she was touched by the dedication that drove these workers to do what they did day after day — if they could maybe find a badge, a billfold or a wedding ring that could take it back to a loved one.

Cyndi had met a lady from Ireland who came to work with the Salvation Army. The day before Cyndi met her, this lady’s job was to sort body parts.

“I couldn’t have done it. Maybe I would have at the time, but if you ask me now I couldn’t,” she said.

In the days after 9/11, Cyndi said everyone on the streets would stop and watch any passing fire truck in reverence of their hard work and dedication.

“Even (now), when tourists see a fire truck (in New York City), they stop and give it such respect,” Cyndi said.

She was amazed at the people, especially police officers, that would stop and thank her when they saw her Salvation Army badge.

“Any body... the people in the area that worked there, just on a normal basis or near the World Trade Center, when they saw the Salvation Army badges they just said ‘Thanks for coming,’ ‘Where are you from?’ and ‘Thanks for your support.’

“We were respected so much it was remarkable.”

Cyndi has some amazing stories of people she met while working. Stories of inspiration and dedication to helping find something, even the smallest personal belonging that could be returned to the loved ones.

Cyndi says she could have stayed there for months because everything was amazing.

Since her first trip there Cyndi has been collecting everything related to Sept. 11.

“I can’t get enough of 9/11.”

On the 10th anniversary Cyndi admits to watching all the shows she could.

She has even made trips back to New York over the years. Most recently, Cyndi went to New York to visit her eldest daughter, Melanie, and her son-in-law.

Cyndi says before she went and even after she went the first time people would ask her “Why?”

“People thought I was crazy, but I never want to say in my life ‘I should have done it,’ because you’ll kick yourself in the teeth along the way,” she said. “So when this came up I thought about it and I’m not going to look back and say ‘I was so close in Washington D.C.’ It was the best experience.”



Before she could report for duty at the cafe, Cyndi first had to report to the national headquarters for the Salvation Army.

■ by Heidi Henson

Photos Courtesy of Cyndi Hunhoff



Some of the memorials Cyndi saw near Ground Zero in January 2002.

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