

TESTIMONY: MARTIN FULLAM

INTRODUCTION: My name is Martin Fullam, a first responder to 9/11. I'm here to support any legislation that will guarantee medical care for those whose lives have been significantly altered by the events of that day. My life as well as that of my family has been significantly affected by that day and remains a struggle today.

9/11: Nothing prepared us for the scene that awaited us in lower Manhattan on 9/11. I responded that day participating in rescue efforts and subsequent days in search capacity. The hope of rescue grew grimmer with each passing day. We were covered in dust, soot, powder...you name it. We had some face masks, mostly paper types, but nothing provided could adequately equip us with the intake of dust we were subjected to. The days grew into weeks as we continued to be assigned in a search capacity. We took breaks and weren't detailed solely to Ground Zero, but rotated back there until February or so.

MEDICAL HISTORY: Some guys were immediately sick and we all went for medical monitoring. I experienced the typical cough and upset stomach that many felt, but tried to get on with life as best I could. It wasn't until early in 2005 that some signs that seemed insignificant grew to be noticed. My muscles ached horribly and my breathing became greatly compromised. My wife arranged for a specialist in NYU Hospital to see me. He phoned the next day after my appointment and lab tests and immediately admitted me. Blood counts for toxins were exponentially higher than the normal range. After several weeks of hospitalization it was confirmed I had polymyocitis, an auto-immune disease. Unfortunately what could be aching muscles for some, for me led to a loss of 60 lbs, a breathing capacity of 50% and inability to walk or even sit up in bed all within 5 weeks time. The doctor was sure of his diagnosis but had never seen it hit someone with such vengeance. When he learned of my history at Ground Zero, he was no longer surprised.

Treatment followed which allowed for my release, but weakness and compromised lung capacity have always followed. Intermittent spurts of improvement showed, but overall, my health declined. When my lung capacity suddenly dropped another 30% I became a candidate for a lung transplant which occurred in March of 2009. The hope of a better life post-transplant has faded as I face 40 pills a day, each with their own side effects and a compromised immune system that keep my body constantly fighting against attack.

PERSONAL: My life has been altered and has not been my own since I've gotten sick. I can no longer spend time with my family in the capacity I used to. There are some days I can drive in the car and go somewhere for a bit and other days where I can't leave the front porch. Plans can't be made as we never know if it's a day I can handle it or not. I'm not available for my wife or kids and I know there's nothing I can do about it. My wife has left her job to take care of our needs at home and there's not been a "normal" for us since I've taken ill. I've left a job I loved because I can no longer perform it.

Ironically, performing the job is what caused my illness in the first place...but I'd do it all again. There's not a person who will forget where they were or what they were doing on that day. The memories are especially etched in those who lost loved ones and those who battled the thick of it hoping to provide the rescue and search services for which the people of NY depend on their firefighters for . It was nothing short of a war zone. Being a firefighter put me in the thick of the scene that day and many days that followed. We never questioned our orders or our actions. We answered a call that day as we do every other day an alarm sounds for us....it's what we do. When lives are in danger, we run in when others are running out. Our training prepared us to react as we always do, but nothing could have prepared us for the day that awaited us that Tuesday morning. No one expects to witness the hell we faced. It always affects a firehouse when a rescue is not successful. The strangers we respond to leave their mark when we are too late. 9/11 had the double effect of rendering us helpless in rescuing not only the strangers, but our own. It further has left its mark in the lingering sick from that day. We didn't forget to answer our call that day . I pray that those here who have the opportunity to pass legislation to care for us, the lingering sick, will answer their call and pass the necessary legislation that will allow us to live as best we can without the additional hardship of financial worries and medical bills. We responded for those in need and are counting on you to do the same.