

Heroes Lost – 11 September 2001

The tragic events of 11 September 2001 not only shocked and saddened us all but also brought to our consciousness the many heroic deeds by police, firefighters, rescue workers, and passengers on those ill-fated planes. The discipline of family medicine lost two of its brightest stars on that day. As I learned about their lives and accomplishments, it was clear that they, too, are heroes.

The following tributes to Dr. Paul Ambrose and Dr. Fred Rimmele bring to light the spectacular accomplishments of these two young family physicians and recognize their caring attitudes and commitment to making this world a better place in which to live. Both were only 32 years old, yet each had accomplished so much in such a short time. We hope their families will find pride and some comfort in knowing that these two family physicians are role models whose standards are those to which all of us aspire.

*Robert F. Avant, MD
ABFP Executive Director*

Paul Ambrose



Paul W. Ambrose, MD, MPH, aged 32 years, was aboard the American Airlines flight 77 from Washington, DC, to Los Angeles that crashed into the Pentagon on 11 September 2001. He was en route to a medical conference on preventing youth obesity.

Paul was born in Charleston, WV, and grew up in East Pea Ridge, Huntington, WV. His mother, Sharon Ambrose, fondly remembers that at an early age he showed a willingness to lead and bring about change for the better. She stated, "He was involved in everything from the beginning. He was just that kind of person, president of his class in high school, treasurer of his class in college, on and on. He just loved people and life, and had a million friends."

He attended Marshall University, graduating magna cum laude with a dual major in zoology and Spanish. He continued his studies at Marshall University Joan C. Edwards School of Medicine. His fluency in Spanish gave him the opportunity to attend the University of Salamanca School of Medicine in Spain between his third and fourth year to broaden his knowledge base.

After graduating from the School of Medicine at Marshall, Paul spent a year in Washington, DC, as the national director of legislative affairs for the 30,000 members of the American Medical Student Associations.

He spent his residency at Dartmouth Medical School, Dartmouth-Hitchcock Medical Center from 1996–1999. During this time, Secretary of Health and Human Services, Donna Shalala, appointed him as the only resident to the Congressional Advisory Committee for Graduate and Medical Education. While at Dartmouth he formed a friendship with former US Surgeon General C. Everett Koop. Dr. Koop remembers that "Paul Ambrose soon became as close to a son as anyone I knew in his age bracket. And up to the time of his tragic death, of all the people I know, he, I believe, was most blessed with skills and competencies that would take him to great heights in public service. He had the ability to put as much effort into four or five projects simultaneously with the same zeal you and I would put into one. He was sensitive, self-giving, the very model of what a physician should be to his patients, but his vision extended to the public health community, whether local or global. I have never talked with anyone about Paul without that person having words of extravagant appreciation for Paul the man and Paul the public servant. There's no doubt in my mind that if he wanted, he could have become the youngest surgeon general in the history of our country."

In 1999 he was awarded a fellowship in cancer prevention at Harvard University, Dana-Farber Cancer Institute. In June 2000 he received his master's degree in public health from Harvard.

After his graduation from Harvard, he was awarded the Luther Terry Fellowship. In this senior advisory position he worked closely with the Assistant Secretary for Health, the Deputy Assistant Secretary for Health, and the current United States Surgeon General, David Satcher, MD, PhD. During the last year, Paul collaborated with Dr. Satcher to write the surgeon general's call to action on obesity, the most important health problem in the United States today. This publication will be dedicated in Paul's memory.

Robert Walker, MD, chairman of Family and Community Medicine at Marshall University, recalls a recent conversation in which he had complimented Paul on his achievements. Dr. Walker said to him, "You have all these impressive degrees and great experiences, . . . now you can do anything you want. Paul looked at me and said, 'You know, when I'm in Washington, when I'm at Harvard, when I'm at the surgeon general's office, I am a family doctor first.' "

Paul was always inquisitive, especially during his residency. Michael Zubkoff, PhD, chairman of Community and Family Medicine at Dartmouth Medical School, fondly recalls, "Paul and I would have many discussions. He would continually push me to share with him lessons learned on how to bring about change from my experiences in the 1960s. He would ask questions like, 'How did you folks ever mobilize all those docs and nurses under the medical committee for human rights umbrella to provide medical coverage at the civil rights marches being led by Rev. King?' 'How did you keep health workers showing up at the Medgar Evers Health Center in Mississippi with Klansmen surrounding your motel every night?' 'How did you ever collect and document the evidence needed to rally OSHA and public opinion to force mine owners to improve safety and health conditions in the mines?' You could see from the look on his face that he was always trying to figure out how he could use these lessons from the old days to make a better world of today – particularly for the underserved population and health professionals in training."

Another example of Paul's quest to make a difference was the Preventive Medicine Residency/Leadership Program that he and a colleague submitted during their internship in 1996. Both Dr. Koop and Dr. Zubkoff were equally impressed. According to Dr. Koop, "There are very few residents that go through their school, rewrite the

curriculum, and have it accepted! I was continually amazed at him and his unbounded energy." Dr. Zubkoff added, "When Paul and I spoke last on September 10th, I shared with him that the Preventive Medicine Residency/Leadership Program is about to become a reality. I reminded Paul once again of our desire for him to rejoin us at Dartmouth once he finishes up his work with the surgeon general. He responded, 'That would be a dream come true,' and immediately began discussing this option, once again, with his fiancée, Bianca. There was then a pause, followed by laughter – shortly after which he asked, 'Mike, do you really think Dartmouth is ready for someone as impatient as I?'"

Paul had an innate ability to understand the important role leadership plays in family practice. With this understanding he developed a resident physician leadership conference and secured the Koop Institute to help launch it. Dr. Koop stated, "Without discussing it with me until the last minute, he called this endeavor The C. Everett Koop Resident Physician Leadership Symposium. The third annual conference is scheduled for April 2002. It is my desire and plan to rename Paul's brainchild The Paul Ambrose Resident Physician Leadership Symposium and do all in my power to see that it is perpetuated."

Anyone who was associated with Paul commented on his generosity and his willingness to help others not so fortunate. While he was working with the surgeon general, he was also the program director of the Resident Physician Leadership Symposium at the C. Everett Koop Institute. In addition, he had a part-time private practice in Arlington, Va, consisting of 2 half-days during the week and Saturdays, which offered a full range of ambulatory primary care services to a predominantly Spanish-speaking El Salvadoran population.

During every interview many stories were shared that gave proof of the love and personal interest Paul had for everyone. These characteristics were echoed time and again at Paul's memorial service. He believed every person he met was an equal, regardless of that person's position in life. Dr. Walker shared one example that involved a casual conversation with a custodian at the Dartmouth health club Paul attended. In typical Paul fashion, he worked into the conversation the question, "What do you really want to do with your life?" The custodian was surprised that this stranger would ask but answered, "I want to be a

personal trainer.” The next day Paul came in armed with research and said, “These are the criteria you need to meet in order to be a qualified personal trainer in New Hampshire.” The following day Paul came in and presented him with a schedule of classes available at a local community college. At Paul’s memorial service in Huntington, WV, this young man, who is now a successful personal trainer, drove from New Hampshire to share his story of this chance life-changing meeting he had with Paul.

Paul Ambrose the physician and public health advocate describes only half of who he was. He loved outdoor sports and spending time with his family, friends, and Chomski, his English mastiff puppy. Paul had been engaged for 2 months to his fiancée, Bianca Angelino, with plans to marry in September 2002. He is also survived by his mother and father, Dr. Kenneth and Sharon Ambrose of Huntington, WV. Mrs. Ambrose reflected on Paul’s memory, “People need to know about the men and women who were lost. They really do. Each one is very special. My husband and I lost a son; that’s tragic enough. But the world has lost someone who dedicated his whole life to getting ready to do good things and doing good things. He was just beginning.”

In addition to the scholarships and memorials mentioned earlier, the Marshall University School of Medicine has established a scholarship in Paul’s name. Checks may be sent to: The Marshall University Foundation, Dr. Paul W. Ambrose Memorial Scholarship, c/o Linda Holmes, Director of Development and Alumni Affairs, Marshall University Joan C. Edwards School of Medicine, 100 Medical Center Drive, Huntington, WV 25701.

Fred Rimmele



“Caring family physician, demanding teacher, passionate naturalist, great wit, loving husband, wonderful son, and friend to all.” These comments echo throughout the many interviews that were conducted with the colleagues, teachers, family, and friends of Frederick C. Rimmele III, MD, of Marblehead,

Mass. At the age of 32 years, he died in New York on 11 September 2001 aboard United Airlines flight 175 from Boston while en route to a medical conference on geriatrics in Monterey, Calif.

Fred Rimmele’s life as a physician and teacher is exactly what we all want to find in the next generation of family physicians. He had an unquenchable thirst for knowledge and a love of the specialty. He was keenly aware that family practice was an evolving specialty and was not afraid of new challenges that confronted him. He knew that every situation he encountered would become part of a knowledge base from which he would draw for both his practice and teaching. At the time of his death, Dr. Rimmele was the medical director of the Family Practice Residency at Beverly and Hunt Hospitals in Danvers, Mass.

Fred was born and raised in Clifton, NJ. A member of Phi Beta Kappa, he was graduated from Amherst College with a double major in chemistry and medieval literature. His parents, Marilyn and Fred Rimmele, fondly recall, “He loved Amherst. His 4 years at Amherst were shining. They brought out all of his good points including his self-confidence.” During this time he began to exhibit his outstanding intellect and his enjoyment of broad-based learning that would serve him throughout his career. He knew then that the specialty of family practice would best fit his personality and ideals. In his residency application letter, in 1994, he said, “My goal is to become a family physician, practicing a wide range of medicine in a semi-rural community. I thoroughly enjoyed a broad liberal arts education that I acquired in high school and college and found that knowledge and the ability to utilize it were very important and gratifying to me. Family practice, with its wide variety of patients and broad range of medicine, struck me as an ideal way to continue to gain this type of satisfaction from my work. I believe that family practice would be a wonderful way not only to work in a community, but to become an integral part of that community.”

The irony was not lost on Fred when he chose to attend Medical School at Duke University, a tertiary care center and a large research center. In his residency application letter, he wrote, “At Duke, I not only amassed a solid base of medical knowledge, but emerged with an even stronger desire to practice primary care.” During Fred’s time at Duke, he proudly pointed out that he was able to raise that community’s awareness of family medi-

cine on campus. As a direct result of Fred's leadership and dedication to the specialty, 5 students from his class declared their intent to go into family practice.

After graduating from Duke, he sought a residency program that matched his goals. He found it with the Maine-Dartmouth Family Practice Residency program in Augusta, Me. Fred's intellect and wit served him well in his interview. He is remembered by Cathy Morrow, MD, the associate director for the residency, for his follow-up letter in which he wrote, "I understand you have this policy of not letting residents know the status of their interview. I, however, have no such policy, and I want you to know you are my top pick." Dr. Morrow added, "We were impressed by how certain he felt about us as the place for him, because we knew he could go anywhere he wanted."

Fred was considered a "straight-through," a student so intelligent that he went through high school, college, and medical school with honors. He began to mature in his quest to become a physician when he started working with patients at the Maine-Dartmouth Family Practice Residency. He was not above taking on any role. He would volunteer for the most difficult ones because he knew that someday he would be asking his residents to perform certain tasks that they would view as impossible. Fred was an intellectually demanding resident who worked hard to acquire the skills and knowledge to be a good family physician. He expected a lot from his peers, his faculty, and himself – but he never demanded more than he was willing to give.

Dr. Morrow recalls one important event in Fred's growth that every family physician has encountered. A cancer patient with whom he had bonded died in his arms. She remembered, "Fred called me to say that his patient, known to be dying of a cancer, was in the ER, bleeding. When I arrived, the door to the examining room was closed, so I waited. I will never forget the look on his face when he emerged. 'Cathy, he died while I held him in my arms.' We went to a quiet corner of the ER and I asked him to tell me about it. When he finished, I asked if he was okay. He said firmly, 'yes.' I knew he was. In fact, I knew he was better than okay. I knew he had crossed one of those thresholds that young physicians must cross – supporting and caring for a dying patient and not abandoning them, no matter your own distress.

The family was so grateful. It was one of the many critical transitions Fred made while in training."

Another story that Dr. Morrow shared involved a woman who was 32 weeks along in her pregnancy and came to the labor floor with a footling breech and premature delivery. "Fred was on call and immediately called me. I knew I couldn't make it in time, and he would be doing this alone. I reminded him of two or three things to remember about footling breeches and told him, 'You can do this, Fred,' and he said, 'Okay.' I arrived at the labor floor, and there he was – literally dancing up and down the hallway outside the delivery room pumping his fists in the air saying, 'I saved another life, I saved another life,' and here was this baby who had safely arrived and was doing fine. He just loved that. He floated on air for days with those kinds of things knowing that what he was doing made a difference."

It was during his residency that he met his wife, Kimberly Trudel. Friends say that they knew right away that she was the one for him and fondly remember his nickname as "Fred 'I'm-in-love' Rimmle." They were married 3 years later in a ceremony overlooking the Maine coast. Everyone who knew them commented on how much they loved each other. "He and Kim had a beautiful relationship," said Dr. Aliza Acker, his colleague at the Hunt Center. "She was an inspiration in his life. He was so madly in love with her. Light shone from inside him when they were together."

Fred's wife introduced him to what would be one of his future passions – the art of bird watching. He didn't take to it in the beginning, but his interest soon began to build. With Fred, that meant he would soon be pulling his friends and family along to share in his newfound discovery. He enjoyed bird watching with his Mom, and they shared that activity whenever he would go home to New Jersey. His love of nature was deeply rooted in his scouting experience, which he shared with his father. It comes as no surprise to anyone that Fred attained the rank of Eagle Scout. His parents recall, "He achieved this level at a young age, which is unique in itself. But, what made us even more proud is that he stayed to lead the troop and continue to earn more merit badges and awards."

After his residency, he briefly entered private practice before joining the Family Practice Residency at Beverly and Hunt Hospitals in Danvers, Mass. During this time, he began to enjoy the best

of all of his worlds. He continued to enjoy his passion for teaching, learning, and healing. His personal goals were beginning to be fulfilled by becoming part of his community in Marblehead. He and Kim furnished a historic home, which was built in the 1700s. They continued to enjoy their outdoor activities of hiking and bird watching. Fred had just discovered the world of business and management as it pertains to medicine. He was scheduled to attend his first seminar in the near future.

At his memorial service in Marblehead, Fred was remembered as “a caring and respectful physician and teacher; a deeply spiritual person who translated his beliefs into action.” Choosing academic family medicine reflected his beliefs and enabled him to share his passion for healing. His colleagues remember him as an excellent clinician who was impeccable in his pursuit of detail, a true caregiver whose commitment and irreverent sense of humor carried him and his colleagues through many hard times. His students remember him as always being there for them. A perfectionist; he demanded excellence and, at times, seemingly superhuman performance – though never more than he was willing to do himself.

Since the events of September 11th, several scholarships and memorials have been planned to

honor Dr. Fred Rimmele III. It is important to recall a line from his residency application letter in which he said, “Family practice is a wonderful way not only to work in a community but to become an integral part of a community.” The memorials and scholarships established in Fred’s name are proof that he indeed achieved his goal of becoming an integral part of his community.

The scholarships and memorials that are being established show that those who knew him not only saw Fred the physician, but also Fred the man. For example, a third-grade class in Marblehead is sponsoring a walk-a-thon to raise money to purchase a bench and place it in the park overlooking Marblehead Harbor. The town clerk wants to establish a scholarship at Marblehead High School, and his class from Amherst is putting together a memorial. A memorial garden will be planted at the Family Practice Center in Maine that honors his interest in birds, nature, and trees and essentially all creatures great and small.

Kim and his family wish to thank the community for their support, their prayers, and sympathy. Donations can be made to Maine-Dartmouth Family Practice Residency (MDFPR) Rimmele Memorial Fund, c/o Fred Rimmele Memorial Garden, 4 Sheridan Drive, Fairfield, ME 04937.