

NEW YORK POST

GROUND ZERO'S 'ANGEL' NUN DIES

By SUSAN EDELMAN

November 3, 2006 -- An Episcopal nun who spent five months blessing remains at the World Trade Center died this week and has been granted her dying wish - to be autopsied to prove her lung disease was caused by toxins she inhaled.

Sister Cindy Mahoney, 54 - who became known as the "Angel of Ground Zero" - arranged for the autopsy from her deathbed months ago, hoping to help the cause of 9/11 rescue and recovery workers seeking financial aid and medical care.

"This can't happen over and over and over again," she told David Worby, a lawyer for 8,000 recovery workers in a videotaped statement in August.

"There are people like me who have given up [the struggle to survive]. Because we're asking for help we're made to feel like malingerers.

"Don't let them shut us down," she begged.

The autopsy was performed by Dr. Janice Ross, a pathologist in South Carolina, where she moved in 2002.

The findings will be reviewed by Dr. Michael Baden, the city's former chief medical examiner.

They are waiting for lab results from tissue samples, which are expected in the next two weeks.

The autopsy could prove that WTC dust was deadly - because Mahoney had been a healthy, active, non-smoker. "She came to 9/11 with clean lungs," Worby said.

A New Jersey medical examiner has attributed the death of retired NYPD detective James Zadroga to his time at Ground Zero - the only such ruling so far.

Worby said 81 of the workers he represents in a class-action suit against the city have died, but none was autopsied.

"Her whole life was about helping people," said Mahoney's niece, Elizabeth McManus, 23, who cared for her aunt around the clock in the Aiken, S.C., home of friends.

The big-hearted, feisty Mahoney, a former EMT who grew up in Aiken, became ill and destitute after returning to her hometown from New York.

Two weeks before 9/11, she had been transferred to a lower Manhattan convent, and raced to the Twin Towers when the planes hit.

She spent nearly every day consoling relatives of the dead, blessing body parts, and comforting fellow workers.

About 4 a.m. Wednesday, Mahoney called frantically for her niece.

"I can't breathe. Help me! Help me!" she cried.

"Those last few minutes she was absolutely terrified," the niece said.

Mahoney suffered chronic obstructive lung disease, asthma, and other respiratory and gastrointestinal diseases common to Ground Zero workers, Worby and relatives said.

"She was so sick and suffering so badly, and that's over for her now," McManus said.

"She believed in heaven and would say, 'I'm just waiting to be called home.' "

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