




*Sonny recalled the bus ride over the bridge into Brooklyn. "We could see the smoke and empty space that used to be the WTC. A young firefighter sitting across from me looked out and said, 'Omigod, my heart just got torn out of my chest.' All of a sudden we were in each other's arms crying."*

NAME: **Piper**

BREED: German Shepherd Dog  
Certified Wilderness Search

**Sonny Whyman**  
New Jersey Task Force 1

Ground Zero: WTC



Sonny and Piper and NJ-TF1 were among the first USAR teams to arrive at the World Trade Center on the afternoon of September 11. After unloading at the Javits Center, they were bused within a few blocks of the worksite and walked the rest of the way to Ground Zero.

"When we first arrived, it was like walking into hell," Sonny remembered. "People were running in all different directions. There were dozens of firefighters and they were all pleading, 'Bring your search dog over here.'

"I said to Piper, 'Go find.' He would paw or whine, and then he would look up at me. And as soon as he put his nose to the ground, the firefighters were all over him. They were so crazed to find one of their brothers buried where Piper had indicated. That's when I started feeling the deep depression they were feeling. There were 10 or 12 dogs on our search team. In all, Piper and his buddies found about 15 bodies.

"One firefighter came up to me, with hollow eyes and sunken cheeks and desperation on his face. He asked if he could pet my dog. Then he leaned down and gave Piper a big hug and whispered something in his ear. Piper looked at

him and wagged his tail. When the fireman left, he had just a tiny smile on his face."

The NJ-TF1 shared their base camp at the Javits Center with the FEMA teams that followed. Many slept on the floor, the dogs lying next to them, their heads propped against their handlers.

"The support the dogs received was great, from vets and chiropractors, physical therapists and nurses, all waiting to bathe and massage the dogs. Piper got beat up pretty bad. His paws were red and ragged, and his eyes were red. We had masks on when we worked, but the dogs didn't have that protection.

"My experiences with this K-9 team opened up a whole new area of my life. I know what faith really means. I have a partner who asks nothing of me except to stay at my side and do his work. And when he's tired or hurting he works even harder. In my next life, I would like to be that good."



*Actor Peter Gallagher from The O.C., spending time with Piper during a visit to Lower Manhattan.*