

The Oklahoma City Bombing Hits 25 Year Anniversary

Exclusive Interview- Retired Oklahoma City Firefighter Chris Fields, featured in the iconic image of the rescue effort, talks to Blue Magazine about his struggle with PTSD

By: Eddie Molina

As the Covid-19 headlines news coverage everywhere, it's easy to forget other important events. April 19th marked the 25- year anniversary of the worst domestic act of terrorism America has ever seen- the Oklahoma City Bombing.

On April 19th, 1995, domestic terrorists Timothy McVeigh and Terry Nichols- motivated by anti-government sentiment- conspired, coordinated and executed a truck bombing attack of the Alfred P. Murrah Federal Building in downtown Oklahoma City. 168 people were killed, hundreds more injured and countless emotional scars were permanently pressed upon the American people.

In the minutes and hours following the devastating attack, dozens of search and rescue teams scoured the debris in hopes of finding survivors to get them desperately needed medical care. One of the first responders, Chris Fields, a now retired Oklahoma City firefighter, was captured in an iconic image carrying an infant- who unfortunately did not survive.

The Blue Magazine reached out to Chris to find out how that fateful, historic event impacted him and how it changed his life forever.

Blue: What was your role in the Oklahoma City bombing rescue effort?

Chris: I was a firefighter and among the first responders on scene searching for survivors.

How has that experience changed you as a person?

Chris: You think about it a hundred different ways and it all comes



THE ICONIC IMAGE OF CHRIS FIELDS, PICTURED ABOVE, HOLDS A ONE YEAR OLD DURING RESCUE OPERATIONS. CHARLES PORTER IV/ ZUMA PRESS

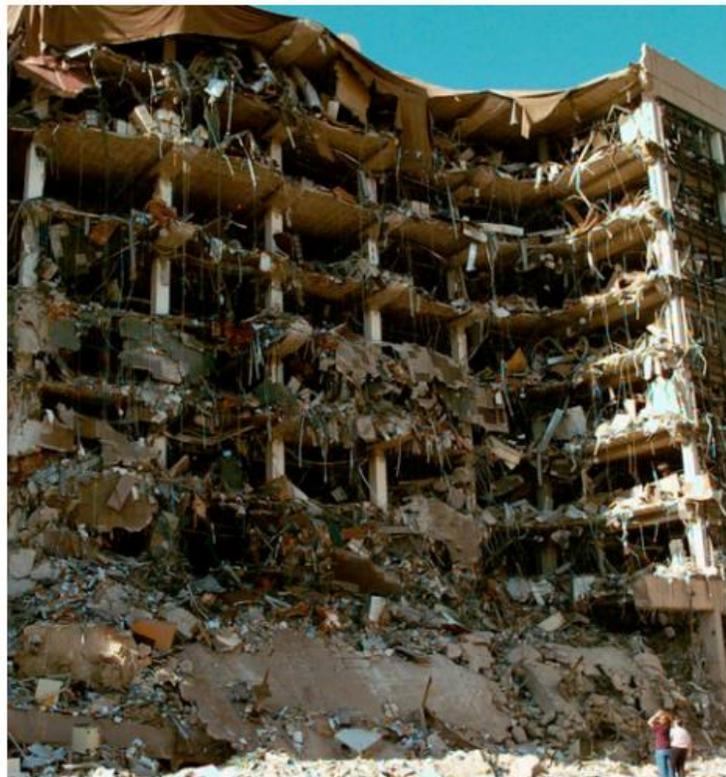
down to old cliché, you don't take anything for granted. Every day I wake up and put my feet on the floor is another blessing. But I went through a lot of mental anguish afterwards. The photo was a catalyst for me to seek help for some unprocessed trauma I experienced. Back in those days, (1990's) you just didn't talk about it (stress) like you would now.

Were you diagnosed with PTSD?

Chris: Yes, I was. I was one of the ones who thought I was 'too tough' to get help. It wasn't until I hit rock bottom that I sought help. I went to a treatment facility with other first responders and that was a huge help. It taught us you're no different than anybody else. Once I started dealing with the unprocessed trauma, I realized things became routine with our line of work, like seeing things that other people, like regular civilians, just don't see and shouldn't see, that we deal with on a routine basis.

What do you want to tell new Law Enforcement officers and first responders about the stress of the job?

Chris: Well, I can't tell them, 'you're going to experience this, and you're going to feel that'. Sometimes it can be an accumulation of events or just one single event that can lead a person to experience PTSD. But in our line of work, you're *going to* experience something traumatic. Just know that you are not alone- PTSD is a normal reaction. How you deal with it is up to you- some talk to a buddy, others need to seek professional help. Just don't wait. There's no reason trauma should cost you your career, your family, even your life.



THE ALFRED P. MURRAH FEDERAL BUILDING IN DOWNTOWN OKLAHOMA CITY. DAVID LONGSTREATH/ AP, FILE

Agreed. PTSD shouldn't be ignored.

Chris: Yeah, I got to the point where I hit rock bottom, where I didn't care if I woke up the next day. I came close to where I just wanted to end it. But there are so many avenues out there for people who experienced trauma and it's different for everybody, as well as different for how you deal with it.

[What activities were you doing to cope with PTSD?](#)

Chris: I really love golf and I enjoy being around people. I'm a social person and I found relief in being around others close to me.

[What are some signs that someone might have a problem?](#)

Chris: If there are activities or things that you enjoyed doing, and you no longer find joy in doing them, you might have a problem. And if you know that's the case, and you're not doing anything about it, believe me, other people will see it. Just go get the help you need. These are different times and it's ok not to be ok.

[Would you say that you're fully cured of PTSD?](#)

Chris: I would say yes, I am. I have my bad days but I go to the activities I enjoy doing. However, this year was the 25th anniversary of the bombing. I realized that Baylee, the baby I was holding in the photo, would have been 26 years old this year- for some reason that hit me hard.

[Do you remember what emotions you were feeling when you found Baylee?](#)

Chris: I do. A police officer handed me Baylee and I remember looking for a blanket to lay her on. At the time I had a two year- old son myself, and I remember thinking '*wow, someone's world is going to turn upside down*' and I was overcome with emotion since I had a son around Baylee's age.

What advice do you want to give First Responders as they are responding to a scene where human casualties are expected?

Chris: First off, I'd say just let your training and adrenalin take over. But more important is what comes afterward. And to that I say, *don't punish yourself- don't beat yourself up for the feelings and emotions you experience from it.* Early on in my career, I chose pride and ego over getting help. I was more concerned with my reputation with my department over my own well-being and that of my family. If you need help, get help, there's nothing wrong with that.

End of interview.

PTSD is a very serious First Responder issue that can have devastating effects if ignored. If any or all of Chris' answers strike a chord with you, take that as a potential sign of PTSD.

Chris closed the interview by offering to help anyone struggling with PTSD. If that is the case, please send me an email, eddiemolina78@gmail.com, with your contact information and I can put you in touch with Chris. Remember, if you need help, get help.

For immediate assistance, contact:

CopLine: 1-800-267-5463, available for the United States and Canada.

National Suicide Prevention Lifeline: 1-800-273-TALK (8255).

Fire/EMS Helpline: 1-888-731-FIRE (3473).