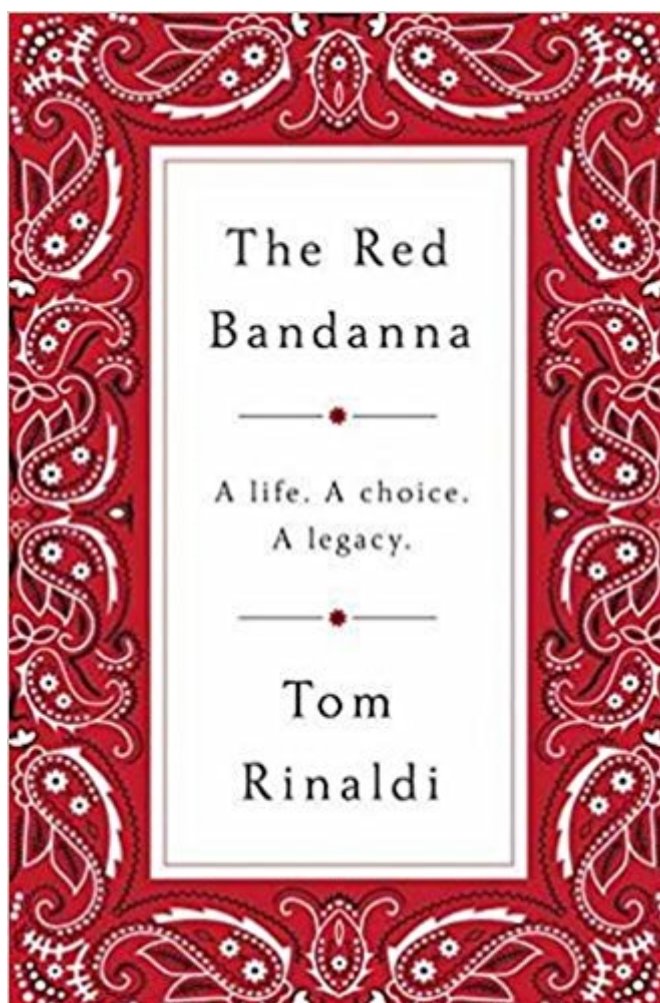


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# The Red Bandanna: A Life, A Choice, A Legacy



## Synopsis

A New York Times bestseller What would you do in the last hour of your life? *•* The story of Welles Crowther, whose actions on 9/11 offer a lasting lesson on character, calling and courage *•* One Sunday morning before church, when Welles Crowther was a young boy, his father gave him a red handkerchief for his back pocket. Welles kept it with him that day, and just about every day to come; it became a fixture and his signature. A standout athlete growing up in Upper Nyack, NY, Welles was also a volunteer at the local fire department, along with his father. *•* He cherished the necessity and the camaraderie, the meaning of the role. Fresh from college, he took a Wall Street job on the 104th floor of the South Tower of the World Trade Center, but the dream of becoming a firefighter with the FDNY remained. When the Twin Towers fell, Welles's parents had no idea what happened to him. In the unbearable days that followed, they came to accept that he would never come home. But the mystery of his final hours persisted. *•* Eight months after the attacks, however, Welles's mother read a news account from several survivors, badly hurt on the 78th floor of the South Tower, who said they and others had been led to safety by a stranger, carrying a woman on his back, down nearly twenty flights of stairs. *•* After leading them down, the young man turned around. *•* "I'm going back up," was all he said. The survivors didn't know his name, but despite the smoke and panic, one of them remembered a single detail clearly: the man was wearing a red bandanna. *•* Tom Rinaldi's *The Red Bandanna* is about a fearless choice, about a crucible of terror and the indomitable spirit to answer it. Examining one decision in the gravest situation, it celebrates the difference one life can make.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

“[A] lovely book...People see the fallen, beat-up world around them and ask: What can I do? Maybe: Be like Welles Crowther. Take your bandanna, change the world.” — Peggy Noonan, *The Wall Street Journal* “Amid the myriad stories of Sept. 11, there are many moments of heroism. This book tells one of the most memorable. Rinaldi’s reconstruction of that final morning is gripping. His recounting of how Crowther’s family slowly learned of his valor—and of how many now honor him, is deeply moving. The payoff comes when President Obama tells Crowther’s mother after the death of Osama bin Laden, “I know about your son.” For her, he autographs a red bandanna and adds the message, “We won’t forget Welles.” — *The New York Times Book Review* “A beautiful book. Through one hero of that day, Rinaldi really tells the story of all of them, all those who saved others and couldn’t save themselves. I tell you about a lot of books. Buy this one. In the spirit of all the ones who kept going back up the stairs.” — Mike Lupica, *NY Daily News* “How often does a book make you feel so deeply you need to just stop and breathe?... Rinaldi is a masterful storyteller. Sure, the obvious time to have reviewed this gem of a book about a gem of a man would have been on Sept. 11. Yet the obvious time to donate to food pantries is Thanksgiving. The need for both, however, is all year. a must read.” — *Newark Star Ledger* “Rinaldi writes a memorable and compelling account of the classic American hero. For those looking for an inspiring modern-day narrative, herein a young man goes beyond himself to help others—and makes the ultimate sacrifice.” — *Library Journal* “A meticulous and vivid portrait.” — *Publishers Weekly* “The inspirational story of a modern-day hero who escorted dozens to safety during the 9/11 attacks. Rinaldi captures the compelling urgency of the indelible event and fondly tips his hat to Crowther, an exemplary embodiment of human compassion and selflessness. A moving, deeply felt tribute to a courageous individual who sacrificed his life to save others.” — *Kirkus Reviews* “Tom Rinaldi’s *The Red Bandanna* could very well become one of those classic books that are handed down through generations, for more than any book I have read in a very long time it convincingly tells the story of how great men and women become great—how cultural, community, and spiritual drives can develop that inner character that will make the

world a better place. It is all found here in these pages - the intellectual and moral strength of a close and loving family, determination, guts, and the sense of service that brings alive this memorable and beautifully written story of the 9/11 death of Welles Crowther. This book will always be set aside in my house to illustrate the art of writing, but mostly to honor the life of this courageous man - a volunteer firefighter, champion athlete, well positioned stock trader - a true friend and loyal son whose inner inspiration was to become a New York City firefighter. Every first responder will want to read this book, every high school and college English teacher will want to assign it, and every thoughtful reader will give it to someone they love.

•Dennis Smith, retired FDNY firefighter and author of Report from Engine Co. 82

Tom Rinaldi has been a national correspondent at ESPN since 2002. Among other honors, he has won fifteen national Sports Emmy Awards and six national Edward R. Murrow Awards. Born in Brooklyn, New York, he is a graduate of the University of Pennsylvania and the Columbia University Graduate School of Journalism. He lives in New Jersey, with his wife, Dianne, their son, Jack, and daughter, Tessa.

I vaguely remember hearing the story of "the guy with the red bandanna" in the aftermath of the events of 9/11 and again when a relative ran in the Red Bandanna 5k at Boston College a few years ago. But beyond the cursory details, I knew very little about Welles Crowther and his heroism while working in the South Tower of the World Trade Center on Sept. 11, 2001. Written by Emmy Award-winning ESPN correspondent Tom Rinaldi, *The Red Bandanna* is the story of Crowther, from his childhood growing up in the suburbs of New York City through his years as a student and athlete at Boston College and his transition to adulthood with his first job on Wall Street. Using his training as a volunteer firefighter, Crowther led many to safety amid the chaos after the twin towers were hit. Despite having every opportunity to get himself to safety, he instead remained inside the building rescuing as many as possible before the building collapsed. He was just 24 when he died. It would take months for his remains to be found and longer before the details of his actions that day would get pieced together. Rinaldi interviews some of the survivors that Crowther saved as well as many of his childhood friends. He details the history of Crowther's red bandanna - a gift from his father when he was a child - to the movement and symbol it has now become. Rinaldi especially captures the heartbreaking loss still felt by Crowther's parents Jeff and Alison. As the 15th anniversary of 9/11 approaches, *The Red Bandanna* is a nice tribute to one of the many stories of heroism that emerged that day and a reminder that one life really can make a difference.

Tom Rinaldi tells the story of Welles Crowther, a man who was in the Twin Towers when they were attacked. Because of a lifelong habit of carrying a red bandanna in his back pocket, several people came forward after 9/11 to talk about the hero with the red handkerchief, and how he led others to safety, losing his own life in doing so. Mr. Rinaldi tells the backstory of Welles' life, and how he had been in the process of applying to become a NYC firefighter and volunteered his time in that job in his own hometown. I was too close to the events of 9/11 to ever be able to read about it afterward. I saw the column of black smoke rising, I followed e-mails throughout the day from colleagues, friends and my church family, asking after the safety of those known to be in the Towers. In some cases, I didn't know for weeks the fate of colleagues I knew from my freelance work with several companies housed in the Towers. I just couldn't bear to read anything about the attacks, whether graphic accounts of the day or heartwarming stories such as the New York Times series on the individual victims. Lately, I've been trying to read accounts of the day, hoping that the distance of time and the support of context would get me through. This was a good book to start with. It is heartwarming, though heart-breaking, to hear of the actions of people like Welles Crowther. The author reports several times how Mr. Crowther carried a woman over his shoulders to a certain floor and then went back up the stairwell to help others. While his determination to help others is certainly admirable, I would have found him no less admirable if he were to have carried just that one woman to safety. (I assume she perished, as the author notes that she didn't have the strength to continue down the stairs. My thought is that Mr. Crowther might have made a triage decision that he couldn't carry her down 60 or 70 more flights of stairs, so he decided he needed to help others instead.) This account does tip over into hagiography at times, and the prose is purple in many spots, but overall, the book is saved by the candid interviews of people who knew Welles and by the author's exhaustive reportage.

If you enjoy reading human interest stories, I highly recommend this book. Welles Crowther from an early age talked about someday being a hero. In many ways he lived his young life in preparation for the day he would be called upon to act. Little did he know on September 11, 2001 as he left his home to go to his job in Tower 2 of the World Trade Center the day had arrived and the hour was close at hand for fulfilling his premonition.

Well written, insightful. It had to be so difficult for family and acquaintances to relive this horrific event and yet, I'm sure it brought some healing and gave them a way to work through their grief.

Thank you all for your willingness to share your special story. You are all heroes for your continued fight to go on with your lives after this unspeakable act of terrorism. God's blessings!

This is the story of Welles Crowther and his ever present red bandanna. Welles was a casualty of the 9/11 attack on the World Trade Center. When his parents did not hear from Welles after 9/11, they knew their son was one of the fatalities. They did not have any knowledge of his last hours and were pretty much resigned to the fact they'd never know. A few months after the tragedy a story emerged about a calm and nameless young man with his face covered by a red bandanna leading people down the stairs from the 78th floor of the WTC. The teller of the story related that the young man went back to try to save more people. A story emerged of a 24 year old man from suburban Rockland County who was Welles. The story of Welles emerges that puts a face and name on a formerly anonymous 9/11 hero. I was conversely feeling oddly curious yet extremely sad. While I liked this story, I also found that I still felt emotionally raw realizing how much 9/11 affected me and the millions of other people who lived through it.

This is the real life story of a young man that saved lives during 9/11. This book made me relive a horrible time and truly understand the depth of the sacrifice these individuals went through for our country. Welles was an extraordinary person.

This quote from FDNY firefighter Reynolds explains Welles succinctly, "He had every opportunity to leave and he didn't. He stayed and he put others first and that's something you either have or you don't. He had it, and he used it. Respect."

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