

The EMS experience

Saluting those with 20 years or more in EMS

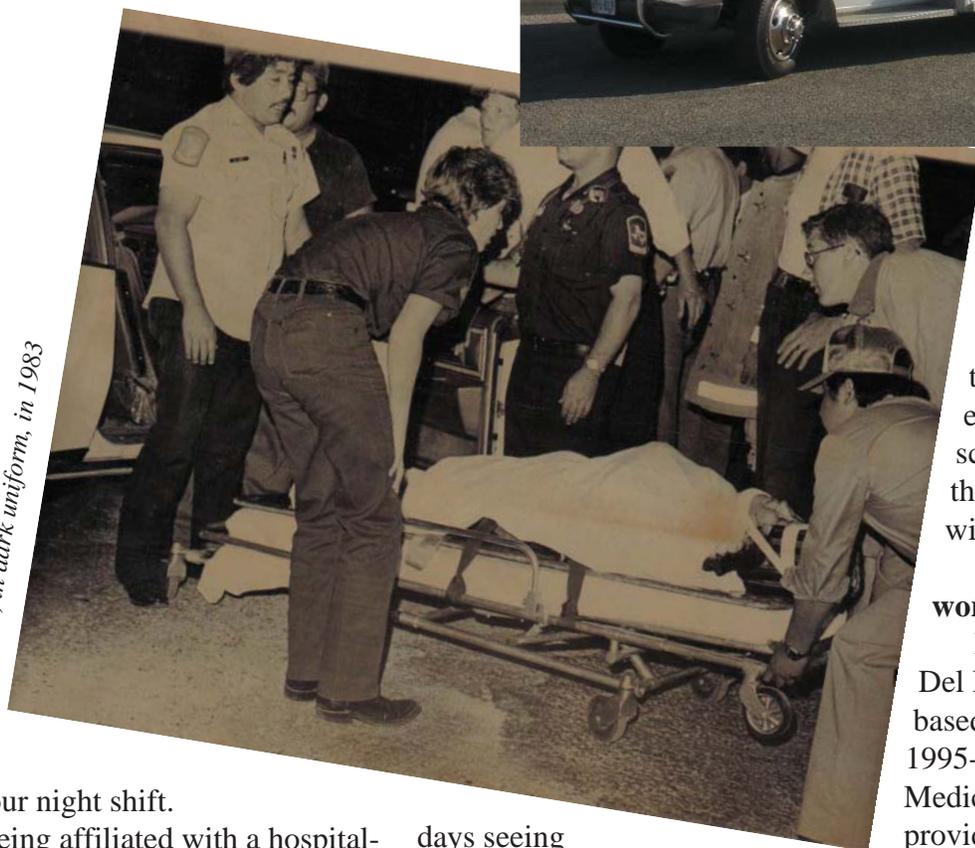
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When was your first day on the job?

I was hired as an EMT-Basic at Val Verde Memorial Hospital EMS on Feb. 8, 1982, after completing the course in December. I was 19 years old. Advanced life support was new; my supervisor was in Special Skills school. We had no paramedics. I usually worked the



Jechow in 2007



Jechow, in dark uniform, in 1983

save a trauma patient's life and wanted to be available should he need someone to hold a rib spreader. It was a time when all medics were eager to learn and to help. Our scope of practice was whatever the physician asked us to assist with.

Which services have you worked for over the years?

I spent most of my career in Del Rio working at a hospital-based EMS from 1982-84 and 1995-present. Val Verde Regional Medical Center EMS is an MICU provider which, in my opinion, employees some of the best medics in the state. My former director, Jack Howley, remains the epitome of a role model of self-sacrifice and service to not only the citizens, but

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12-hour night shift.

Being affiliated with a hospital-based EMS has its advantages: the EMTs and paramedics were and continue to be utilized for emergencies within the medical center. I remember in my early

days seeing our vascular surgeon, Dr. Terry Lindsey, walking briskly into the ER. I would follow (stalk) him as I knew he would do something amazing in an attempt to

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also of the EMS community both local and regional.

During those eleven years in between, I was a volunteer provider and educator with Nueces Canyon EMS in the Camp Wood/Barksdale area. During most of this time, I was the volunteer director of services. Training and working with volunteers taught me much about the compassion and sacrifice of an often overlooked and underrepresented group. What they lacked in the image of professionals they made up for exponentially with their sense of duty to their fellow man in need.

As an educator, I've taught for many programs and coordinators in southwest Texas. I started Southwest Texas EMS Training in an effort to provide initial and refresher courses in order for providers to 'grow their own.' Of the nearly three hundred students that I had the honor to instruct, most are still active in EMS and many have taken on leadership roles. Most have made me proud.

Why did you get into EMS?

Originally, I didn't want to be in EMS. I took a seasonal job with the National Park Service as a park technician at Amistad National Recreation Area during the summer of 1981. Unfortunately, during my first time to vote in a presidential election, I voted for Ronald Reagan (1980) who permanently furloughed my job. I took a PADI course, Coast Guard Boat Operator's Course, and an EMT-Basic course to attempt to regain my job. After my clinicals

in EMS, I was hooked. Not that I was any good at first (I was book smart without experience) -- I had to work very hard and learn from more experienced medics. Eventually, it was second nature.

How has the field changed since you've been in it?

Through the years, I've adjusted/promoted the changes for the better: CE programs, competencies, NR testing, etc. I've shifted with the paradigms.

Lately, it seems that the focus has shifted away from the public servant mentality that I've adopted as my role to that of a business. EMS systems, even those that are tax supported, are placing a priority on reimbursement over that of patient care. I'm not so naive to think that the EMS system cannot progress without improved compensations for our services. Issues exist such as better pay for personnel, rising costs of healthcare and the diminishing resources to cover these expenses. The problem is not just isolated to EMS. I've always resolved that I take care of my little corner of the world.

Was there a particular moment or call that stands out?

Too many. I have seen tragedy and miracles, human interest and EMS abuse. I'm reminded of a story a former partner recently told me while riding our bikes along the highway near the lake. He confided to me that he dreams often of many things in his life. He closes his eyes for a brief nap and he dreams. But since he left EMS in 2000, he has never once dreamt of a call. I close

my eyes and wish for the same.

What was your favorite part of your career in EMS?

Teaching. In my classes, I have each prospective student hand write their applications including a summary as to why they want to be in the class. The value, in addition to literacy, is for purpose. Students who succeed show purpose in their task.

Most if not all say that they want to take the class to help people. They've often been in situations where they felt helpless.

My favorite part of my career in EMS is when former students call or email me and tell me how they handled a particular incident so well that they were even proud of themselves.

While I realize that I was not the only one involved in their learning, I've always felt that by teaching, I've duplicated my own efforts to help people.