

How did I get started in EMS?

In the summer of 1979, I was on my way home from work in rural Southern Illinois. Driving down the Interstate, a pick-up truck rolled-over in front of me. The cap flew off and people flew everywhere. Traffic began pulling over and people were rushing to the family's aid. I came up to a 6 year old boy named Buster. He was obviously in pain, his thigh as wide as my thigh. I now know he had a broken femur. I covered him with a blanket and held his hand until help arrived. I had no clue what to do. I felt so helpless. I vowed to myself that I was going to do something about that.

The following week, I found a CPR class being offered at the local fire department. I enrolled. During the class, a firefighter friend of mine asked me if I was interested in an EMT class starting in two weeks. I enrolled and soon found out it was part of a start-up group organizing an ambulance company for the county. Before this, well before 911, the local funeral home's hearse acted as an ambulance. No EMTs, no equipment, no nothing. I became part of this start-up group and became a charter member of the county-wide volunteer ambulance association. We bought five van type ambulances with a DOT grant and went in service as the only EMS for the county.

I was certified as an Illinois EMT in February, 1980, and National Registry EMT in September 1981. I later became a certified CPR instructor. In 1982, I moved back to Pennsylvania and challenged the test and became a Pennsylvania EMT.

I was a volunteer EMT in western Pennsylvania until I moved to the mid-state. In 1988, I joined Silver Spring Ambulance and Rescue Association as a volunteer. For 20+ years, I have been on the Friday night crew serving the 6:00pm to 6:00am shift.

I have been a volunteer EMT for 28+ years now. I have two stork pins and was on the first Cumberland County EMS crew to successfully revive a cardiac arrest victim with an AED in June of 1991. I have seen good and I have seen bad, but I know that I am helping someone on the worst day of their lives.

I have never lost that thrill I felt on my first ambulance call. When the pager calls, I am out the door. The thank-you's may seem small, but the rewards are great. Hopefully I will do some good today.

Where did the 28 years go? It is often said, find a job you love and you will never work again. I did that long ago.

**Tom Whitfield, EMT-B**

**Age 56**

**Volunteer**

**Carlisle, PA**