

Serving Students Selflessly

There are a great many teachers in this county who would do anything for their students short of getting fired. They are selfish in that way because they know that if they get fired, they will no longer be able to help students. The same is true in public education no matter whether we are talking about kindergarten or college paramedic programs. A true teacher is there to provide help for his students no matter what issues may come up in the classroom or out of the classroom. I honestly believe that a good teacher can and will develop the expertise enough to be able to convey the subject matter to a student whether or not that subject area is an area that the teacher is certified to teach. There is a lot of red tape out there to prevent good teachers from teaching. I want to give you an example of one such organization with too much red tape, and/or not a good enough understanding of good teaching. The American Red Cross has certain policies and procedures to make certain that the common man cannot become a Red Cross Instructor unless (s)he follows a certain set program and a certain set curriculum. I have been a Red Cross CPR Instructor and a Red Cross First Aid Instructor, and I have been through the programs to become an instructor. These programs were all when I was a Basic EMT and were obviously many years ago.

I am not a person to brag about my certifications, but I would like to provide you with a little of my background and my current certifications. I am a certified

American Heart Association Basic Life Support Instructor and an Advanced Cardiac Life Support Instructor. I am certified to teach Pediatric Advanced Life Support and Pediatric Emergencies for Pre-Hospital Providers. I am certified to teach International Trauma Life Support. I am licensed by the State of Michigan as a paramedic and an Instructor/Coordinator. I have been instructing at the basic EMT and Medical First Responder level for the last fifteen years and was co-instructor for the paramedic class just completed on Beaver Island in the last six months. I have jumped through every hoop that has been requested of me except one. I REFUSE to go to the mainland for a two day Instructor Training Program by the American Red Cross to become their CPR and First Aid Instructor. I have spent twenty years gaining the experience in the area of emergency medical care, and I believe that there needs to be some change made in the area of Instructor certification by the American Red Cross. I do not need to be taught the curriculum of Basic First Aid and CPR. I do not need to do any more student teaching hours. I am good at what I do, and I should be trusted enough to follow the curriculum provided by the American Red Cross. I'm even willing to sign the paper that says that I will teach the curriculum based upon their materials and their requirements, but I am not going to waste two days of my life sitting in some room somewhere with someone with less experience in all areas can tell me what I am doing right and what I am doing wrong. You see, I have also been a classroom teacher in the Michigan School Systems for the last thirty years.

Not such a long time ago in a land not so far away, a Registered Nurse named Beth walked into an American Red Cross office and, less than an hour later, she walked out with an American Red Cross CPR and First Aid Instructor's Card. For the right fee, I can become a First Aid Instructor for several different certifying agencies in this nation. If the American Red Cross is not willing to make an exception for a person with my credentials, but is willing to make an exception for a registered nurse with absolutely no emergency experience, there is something wrong with the Red Cross. There is nothing wrong with my credentials, so there MUST be something wrong with the policies of the American Red Cross when it comes to certifying instructors.

Some of my former students from my EMT class are now attending college in a nursing program. Some have become musicians, artists, sculptors, and writers. The things shared with each of these students would depend upon which hat I was wearing at the time. When I first started teaching, I was asked to teach because I was good at Algebra and had taken mathematics classes in college. Back then the nuns were interested in getting some mathematics instruction into the public school on Beaver Island taught by nuns. I began teaching on Beaver Island for that very reason. I had been involved in restaurant management for about fifteen years when I moved to Beaver Island. Interestingly enough, I left Grand Rapids because one night while working a double shift at the Big Boy Restaurant on Pearl Street, owned by a franchisee, my left lung collapsed. It is not such an unusual thing for a tall thin smoker in his middle twenties to have a

spontaneous pneumothorax. I was just born with a weakness on my lung, and the stress of working a double shift for a not so appreciative owner caused my lung to collapse. I had worked for this same owner in Traverse City, Cadillac, Grand Rapids, and Muskegon, and had spent more than fourteen years working for him when this lung thing happened. It happened like this.

One of the waitresses, who was not liked by the owner's son, got fired earlier in the week. The third shift manager called in sick. I had one waitress, one cook, and one cashier. The restaurant was filling up with what we referred to as the "bar crowd", the group of people who want something to eat after they have spent some time at a public cocktail party. We generally had a good group of people, and Lou, the 30-year-old Filipino waitress who got fired, could handle this crowd with a lot of laughter and a lot of fun. I wasn't nearly as good at her job as I wished I could be on this particular night, but one older waitress took one side of the restaurant, and I took the other. This restaurant seats about 140 people total if each booth has its maximum number of people, but tonight there were probably just over a hundred people in the restaurant. The waitress and I got water ready for all hundred, delivered the water to all of the people, and passed out menus. Fran was a 60 year old mother of my best friend George. Fran started at the one far end of the restaurant, and I started at the other far end and took the counter as well. We decided to divide and conquer which meant I would get drinks ready for each table, two or three tables on each side at a time, then come back and do the same thing after delivering the drinks to the tables on my

side. I am sure that Fran had 60 people and I had fewer than 40 so this method worked well. We got all the drinks: coffee, hot chocolate, lemonade, iced tea, hot tea, and soda. Then we went back our respective ends and began to take orders for food. We had agreed that we would take no more than two tables worth of orders at a time to give the cook some time to keep up. After about twenty minutes or so, all of the food orders had been taken, and it was time for me to get back into the kitchen and help the cook. Fran kept good track of the entire restaurant along with the cashier, who continued to wait on the counter area. As the food came up, Fran took her trays out very efficiently. I only helped her if there were two tables of food hot and ready to be delivered at the same time. As each of my food orders came up, I washed my hands and delivered the food to the table. We were completely finished with all but one of my tables which was a six-top, meaning six people at the same table. They had each ordered some pretty complete dinners and some breakfasts also. As I left the kitchen and picked up the first tray of food with food on it for four of the customers at the sixtop, I felt a very sharp pain in my left chest. I did NOT drop the tray of food. I did NOT fall. I just very carefully slipped down to the ground setting the tray of food onto the counter. I got back up and delivered the food to the table, but I was having trouble catching my breath. It seemed that every breath that I took made the next one even more difficult to get. I went back and picked up the last of the food for the sixtop, asked Fran to check on my tables, and told the cashier that I needed to sit down. At least all the customers had been taken care of. They all had their food and their drinks, and now my job as

manager of the restaurant was just about completed. After most people had paid the check for the food and drink that each had eaten, the cashier came back to the kitchen and found me sitting on the floor back by the back door. "You don't look good," the cashier said. "You want me to call an ambulance." "No," I gasped, but I wouldn't mind a ride to the hospital." Fran, the 60 year old mother of a friend, had to take charge of the restaurant and make certain that it got cleaned up and ready for the next day. I was dropped off at the Emergency Room by the cashier on her way home.

In the ER, the ER tech said, "This is a pretty busy place tonight." I commented that the restaurant had been pretty busy too, and he asked me if I would mind walking down to x-ray. If you have never had a spontaneous pneumothorax, you don't know how ridiculous that question was. Not only had I had one, I had finished working through the bar rush before coming to the ER. "I can't walk," I gasped, and then I looked down at my fingers. They were a weird color of blue, but I assumed that the lighting in the ER was bad. The ER tech wheeled me down to the x-ray where they took a front and a side view of my chest. The x-ray tech said, "Holy poop," when the x-ray came out of the developer. "We need to get this patient and these x-rays back to the ER STAT." The ER tech was mystified until the x-ray tech told him, "The top lobe of his left lung is collapsed. No wonder he didn't want to walk down here." The wheel chair got me back to the ER where the ER doc called in a surgeon, and they put in a chest tube in my left chest right there in the ER.

One week later, I went back to work to see how things had gone while I had been gone. I found that my job had been taken over by someone else. They had fired the third shift manager, and that's the job that they offered me. After fourteen years of working with this owner's franchise, his son replaced me with someone new, and I was to take a 50% cut in pay and lose my assistant manager's position. All because I was working extra hard for the man on the night that my lung collapsed, and because I had been out of work for the doctor-required seven days. So if Kirk or Anne reads this, I hope you had a good life, but no matter what, you cheated me out of a good job, and you cheated yourselves out of a dedicated manager who worked harder than both of you put together. Your dad could see the hard workers, but neither of you could.

Some of my students in the public school have also become patients. There was one named George who was always the one that drove all the teachers crazy. He was the one that we sat around the campfire and talked about. He was the one that we wanted to get trapped in a car for a while. We didn't want him to be injured badly, just enough that he had a dull ache. Then we wanted him trapped in the car with that dull ache for about six hours. We thought that, maybe if he had that experience, he might learn to grow up and become respectful and responsible for his own actions. He blamed everything on everybody else. It was always his mom or his dad or his teachers or his classmates that were the cause of whatever problem he had gotten himself into. There was one time that I

remember that he couldn't blame anyone else. George was always ignoring the rules. If he needed to cross the street anywhere near school, he would purposely disobey the safety patrol guards. He honestly didn't think that any of the rules pertained to him. Here is what happened to him.

George was walking down the street flicking a lighter that he had in his pants pocket. He didn't have a real need for a lighter. He didn't smoke, but he had some fire crackers that he liked to light off once in a while. Most normal people would put two and two together and get four, but not George. George had fire crackers in the same pocket as the lighter, and he was walking down the street flicking the light while the lighter was in the pocket with the fire crackers. He, of course, didn't see anything the matter with flicking the lighter while the lighter was in his pocket. He certainly didn't see anything the matter with flicking the lighted in the same pocket as the fire crackers. Somebody forgot to tell the fire crackers that they were not supposed to catch on fire. Somebody forgot to tell the lighter that it wasn't supposed to flame while in George's pocket. Fire crackers and flame from a lighter in a pants pocket have a tendency to burn pants and to burn flesh as well. George came into the medical center with his burn. I didn't see the burn when it first happened, but I had decided to volunteer one day each week at the medical center to see if I could get some experience. The day George came into the medical center for his burn treatment was one of the days that I was volunteering. I decided to volunteer some more days after that day also. When the dressing was removed, I could see that the burns were some second and some first degree burns covering about two hands worth of

space on the top and side of his leg. “The burn has to be peeled,” the nurse said. “See all that tissue in the center of the burn that is trying to scar over the top? All of that tissue has to come off. Then the wound needs to be washed carefully and completely. Then we’ll put the antiseptic burn ointment on and redress the burn.” The first time I helped peel that tissue and watch his discomfort I know that I had a smile on my face for about the first 10 seconds. I couldn’t enjoy the discomfort even of the student who had caused me so much trouble over the years. I thought that I could enjoy it wholeheartedly, but I couldn’t. It just LOOKED too painful.

I also had George’s older brother Fred have a serious emergency. Fred was a good kid from my perspective. He was a hard worker, and he never gave me a hard time. He was always polite. Unfortunately, he made a serious mistake while building a building as a contractor. He had some walls up and was getting ready to put on some rafter-like roof materials called trusses. He was up on top of at least a ten foot wall getting ready to nail one of the first of the trusses in place when the wall he was standing on decided to fall away. My former student Fred fell the entire distance and landed on his buttocks. Station 57 EMS was paged to the site to take care a “victim from a fall”. When we got there, Fred was in denial, but it was pretty obvious, when I did the pelvic exam, that he had a serious injury. I simply put the heel of one hand on the top of the pelvic crests and gently pushed down. He screamed!! “Okay, boys, we know what we are dealing with,” I said. “We’ll use the backboard as the backside splint and we’ll

splint both legs to each other with a pillow in between. We'll secure the whole thing with triangle bandages and then load him up onto the cot and get him to the hospital." Fred was cooperative and a very good patient. We got him loaded up and put him on oxygen just because we could. We took him on gravel roads to the airport and flew him over to Charlevoix using the local air carrier. Fred was not going to be the one to finish that building. He was out of commission for about six weeks, and although he never said anything to me, I knew he was thankful for the help that BIEMS gave him.

My fellow teacher Jack and I were paged once to an accident with three of our students in the car. The car had slid on the road, turned sideways, and rolled over. We had three of our students involved. I had had their mother and father in my classroom years before. It was pretty difficult to run across the road to the ambulance garage and get into an ambulance knowing that three of your students could be seriously hurt. I'm sure that all three of them got some emotional stress and injury out of this situation, but they didn't have any more of it than the two teachers who responded. Jack and I were half out of our minds with worry when we pulled up to see the vehicle rolled. We were very glad to have our three students come crawling out of that rollover vehicle. It might have been embarrassing for all three of them to have one of their teachers do a complete head-to-toe palpation exam for each of them, but we wanted to be sure they were all okay. We took them to the medical center for another evaluation after being sure that they had no serious injuries. Jack and I went back to teach.

For the rest of the day, we worried about our students who ended up taking the day off school to recover.

There have been so many school related events that I would like to mention. We used to sponsor a soccer tournament on the Island. The field was just an old hay field out behind one of the restaurants called the Circle M. This restaurant was an old Catholic rectory built by a German priest with stone walls that were two foot thick. It had a small bar and was called the Circle M Supper Club. There was a big field out behind a storage building that we got permission to use. We mowed it and marked out a 60 by 120 foot soccer field on it. We used white spray paint to mark all the lines using string to help us get the circular parts marked with the proper radius. We invited other schools to the Beaver Island Invitational Soccer Tournament. The first year we invited only other Island schools: Washington Island, WI; Mackinac Island, MI; St. Joseph's Island, ONT. The years after that included mainland schools and soccer clubs. The one year I remember the most involved a soccer team from Harbor Springs. It was a soccer club with a really strict coach. During warm-ups for one of the games, the Harbor Springs Soccer Club Coach had the cast cut off one of his kid's arm. We thought that was really not necessary because you don't use your arms anyway, but to cut a cast off to allow a kid to play was a little excessive from our perspective. In this game against Beaver Island, Harbor Springs was way ahead. We were not really very good at the game. We had started the sport on the Island because there were enough boys and girls to make up a team for coed soccer. There

weren't enough boys for football so soccer became our fall sport. The young man whose cast had been cut off was being yelled at by the Harbor coach because he was not playing aggressively enough. The young man went back out on the field and played very aggressively. He played so hard and so aggressively that he fell down on both of his arms. We were fifty yards away and could hear the sound of the bones breaking as he fell. The officials stopped play, but the mean and out-of-control Harbor coach was standing there yelling at the young man who had broken both of his arms. The Beaver Island coach and several of the parents had to physically remove this coach from the area so that we could splint this boy's arms. Through his tears, the boy said, "I hate this game. I'll never play for him again." With a rigid splint on both arms, and two slings, the young man boarded the local air transport plane. Beaver Island made him a promise, "You are welcome to come back and play, but your coach will never be allowed back to coach a team during our tournament again." We made certain that that coach didn't ever get invited back.

During yet another Beaver Island Invitational soccer game, this time on our current soccer field directly behind our school, two young men on opposing teams went up to "head" the ball. Instead of hitting the ball, the two boys' heads hit each others head. That sound is the nastiest sound that I've heard in a long time. Both boys went right straight down to the ground groaning. One of the boys was put right on the sideline by the coach and told that he was not going to be able to play until he was checked out by his family doctor. The other boy

wanted to continue playing. Our current provider from the medical center was at the game and determined that this boy had double vision and a possible concussion. I couldn't believe it when the boy's coach allowed him to play the second half for a while, but the boy got nauseous and felt like he was going to vomit, so the coach finally let him sit out.