

The EMS Experience

Saluting those with 20 years or more in EMS

Carol Mason, EMT-P, and Joe Mason, EMT-P



Carol Mason,
EMT-P, 2003



Joe Mason,
EMT-P, 1996

What was your first day on the job in EMS?

My husband and I have both been in EMS since the dark ages.

Joe started volunteering in 1974, dispatching with the Harris County Emergency Corps. (HCEC became obsolete in 1997) in Houston at old fire station #15 at Main Street and Houston Avenue. This is now part of the Houston Fire Department.

I began volunteering with HCEC in the fall of 1977. At that time, you had to have Red Cross Advanced First Aid Training as a minimum to ride on the trucks. My first day riding for Harris County Emergency Corps., I rode in the rescue truck. EMS did all the rescue in those days, and fire departments only did fire. During my first shift it was raining, cold and nasty. Because I was a girl, I had to prove to the boys I could handle all the tools. So I spent the night jump-starting ambulances in the rain or putting all the hydraulic tools together and taking them apart. When we finally got a MVC, the big-boy air horn left me weak at the knees, but I managed to get out and treat the patient without

getting sick. I remember being amazed that the blood looked like Jello.

Which services have you worked for over the years?

Joe has volunteered at Harris County Emergency Corps., Cypress Creek EMS and Waller EMS. He worked for American Ambulance and has been an EMS Instructor for the Lone Star College System. His day job is with Chevron as a geoscientist.

I have volunteered at Harris County Emergency Corps., ESD #1, Cypress Creek EMS and Waller EMS. I have taught EMS classes at North Harris College, Montgomery College and Tomball Colleges as an adjunct professor. I was a founding faculty member of CyFair College and the Fairbanks Center. I currently tutor EMS students and teach CPR for "Learn It Now."

Why did you get into EMS?

Johnny and Roy and the crew of the TV show *Emergency*, of course. They were my heroes. I was already working as a lifeguard because I couldn't find a job teaching art. My

mother talked me into taking the Red Cross Advanced First Aid class. We met some people that rode with the HCEC.

Joe got into EMS after witnessing a horrible motor vehicle collision in which he felt helpless. He decided to get more training.

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

The old HCEC did a lot of fund raising to pay for costs—it was a completely volunteer service. The first ambulances were converted coffee vans, and they smelled yummy. Everyone brought their own supplies in their own jump kits for their shifts, and everyone pooled their money to pay for fuel for the ambulance. HCEC territory originally ran from I-45 and Main Street in Houston all the way to the county line north, east and west. It was a huge area to cover. HCEC became the parent for Cypress Creek EMS, which now runs part of the northern areas.

When Joe and I first began volunteering, there were very few



people with advanced training, mostly nurses. Two of our mentors had advanced EMT training, John Musick and Charlie Hooks. *We were in awe of them.* Joe and I were not married then. In fact, my mother rode with Joe with the HCEC first. He and I met at a Rice football game where HCEC was providing EMS.

In the past, EMS was like a big family affair, but it has now changed to a more corporate atmosphere. There is less volunteering, it is less personal, there are more toys, more computers and more business. Some changes are great, of course. We have better knowledge of drugs and reactions to drugs, better cardiac assessment equipment, more academic knowledge of anatomy and physiology, and more quality control.

And EMS training has changed drastically. When we first became basic EMTs, our class had physicians as instructors. This allowed us to have a close working relationship with the doctors and nurses. It also allowed us to do a lot of things that would be

frowned upon now for that level of skill. Some of the things we did we look back on now and shudder. Other things we did were innovative and became the standard of care. In those days, most women became nurses as they got more advanced training. Only a few oddballs, like me, earned our stripes in IV therapy, advanced airway, and cardiac care, and became what are now known as paramedics.

Is there a particular moment or call that stands out?

I vividly remember fights between our HCEC units and the funeral home haulers. One time, on Hwy 525, a mortuary man scared me when he broke out the side window of our truck with a tire iron, while his partner blocked our doors so we couldn't load the patient. The scene required police intervention. Joe recalled an MVC where the car was crammed in a ditch culvert. He was waist high in muddy water, and he looked up to see Dr. Red Duke's boots. Dr. Duke rode the helicopter

regularly back then, keeping an eye on his interns. There are so many calls that stand out, we should probably write a book so we don't bore everyone to death repeating our stories.

What has been your favorite part of your career in EMS?

The remarkable people we have met and worked with are definitely the reward of this job. Our mentors, coworkers, students and the patients that we have been allowed the privilege to know will stay with us our whole lives. It has been fun playing with all the innovative toys, embracing new ideas and learning new skills. We are refreshed by the fervent enthusiasm of the new students and are proud of our old students who are now taking on leadership roles in EMS. We plan to die paramedics.

Do you have 20 years or more in EMS? Do you answer to dino-medic? We're looking for a profile of you! If you are interested, please write Kelly Harrell at kelly.harrell@dshs.state.tx.us