
The EMS Experience

Saluting those with 20 years or more in EMS

James Futrelle, EMT-P



James Futrelle, EMT-P, currently with Scurry County EMS, has been a paramedic in West Texas since 1988.

What was your first day on the job?

My first day on the job was September 24, 1985. That was my 18th birthday.

Which services have you worked for over the years and why did you get into EMS?

I started as a firefighter with Pinewood Volunteer Fire Department while I was still in high school in North Carolina. My experiences as a firefighter made me want to transition to EMS. I learned to help a lot of folks as a firefighter, but I could only stand and watch while

people suffered. That same year a friend died on New Year's Eve, and as able as I was a firefighter, I was helpless to stop the pain and suffering. I don't do helpless. As soon as I went away for college in August of 1986, I joined the Cape Carteret Volunteer Fire Department. They were a fire and EMS service. They put me through EMT school at night while I took college classes during the day.

I left college in North Carolina in 1987 and came to Big Spring, Texas, to continue my education. I became a paramedic in June of 1988 and have been one ever since.

I worked for Rural Metro/AMT in Big Spring from 1988 through 1996. I worked for Southern Ambulance in Midland from 1996 through 2001. I opened my own computer business in 2001, and I worked part time as a paramedic for the Howard County Sherriff's Office until the end of 2007. I took a job with Scurry County EMS in May of 2008 and have been here ever since. Working in Scurry County reminds me every day how much I love this job.

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

How has it not? I love the toys.



James Futrelle, left, works a scene in the early 1990s.

Yep, the medics were in compliance—gloves have been standard equipment for only the past 15 years or so.

Power stretchers are my favorite. My first stretcher was an old two-man. I spent 20 years lifting people. Now, push a button, and they go up! Push a button, and they go down!

We have 12-lead EKG as a standard in most places; I learned on the three lead LP5. Glucometers, pulse oximetry and capnography are just a few more of the technological wonders augmenting our assessments. Keep in mind, I said *augmenting* our assessments. No “toy” should ever replace a thorough and competent physical assessment. The biggest change though, can be seen in the attitudes. I’ve watched EMS develop in the eyes of the public and our peers. We have shed the image of “trained monkeys” and earned a place as medical professionals, capable of making educated, diagnostic evaluations and treatment decisions. We have come so very far and have so much further to go.

Is there a particular moment or call that stands out?

There are a number of calls that stand out in my mind. Some were funny, and I laughed so hard I could not breathe. Others are so tragic that I will never forget the faces. The greatest moment though, is when you first step out of the ambulance at a call. Any call and every call. It does not matter what type of call it is. It is like Neil Armstrong stepping on the moon.

You’re taking that first step into an unknown situation, with unknown circumstances and an unknown outcome. Like Superman, people expect us to show up and have the a solution to their problems. If you can’t fill those shoes, then don’t get out of the truck. That sensation, that first step, will never get old.

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

My partners. I’ve worked with

clowns and cynics, activists and pacifists, martyrs and morons. I’ve worked with people who have no business in this field, and I’ve worked with some of the most dedicated and brightest this field can offer. In every place I have worked, I have been privileged to find partners who were exceptional assets to this occupation and made a direct impact on my own growth and development. My current posting is no exception. My first partner was the most profound, though. She was a 50-year-old ECA when I first became an EMT. She taught me the most important lesson that any of us can hope to learn: We are treating people, and people are more than just things.

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