

This afternoon the worlds of Prehospital Care and Trauma Surgery lost a luminary – Norman E. McSwain, Jr., MD, FACS, NREMT-P.

I first met Norm when I attended a pilot PreHospital Trauma Life Support (PHTLS) course in Denver, Colorado in 1984-- Norm found out I was in medical school at the time and asked me “why in the world do you want to practice emergency medicine instead of being a Surgeon?” It was a question I wouldn’t be able to answer for several more years when I finally did my surgery clerkship in medical school – I was bitten by the surgery bug.

I then had the chance to train in surgery, with Norman as my Program Director, at the Tulane University School of Medicine in New Orleans. During my residency and fellowship, I was responsible for more than a few of Norm’s gray hairs.

Following that, I had the chance to become as Associate Medical Director for PHTLS and work along side Norm as a colleague – helping to grow and innovate a program he started more than a decade earlier. We collaborated on several edition of the PHTLS textbook as well as some other articles and projects.

Few people have been more influential on my career than Norm – we bonded through prehospital care and trauma surgery. He contributed to my knowledge as a general surgeon and a trauma surgeon. He helped open opportunities for me to contribute on a national level – Chair the EMS Subcommittee of the ACS College of Surgeons. He encouraged my participation in the National Registry of EMTs Board, and on the DOT’s National EMS Advisory Council. It was a no-brainer for me to select Norm to give the Scott Frame Memorial Lecture when I was President of EAST.

Norm’s contributions to trauma surgery and prehospital care are significant and his influence immeasurable. Not only did he care for countless patients throughout his career, he served the City of New Orleans as its Police Surgeon for many decades – caring for the good guys. He travelled the globe teaching PHTLS. Norm was ALWAYS about the education – teach EMS providers the fundamentals and they will be able to handle any situation.

Norm could have become immensely wealthy on the royalties of the PHTLS textbook (now in its 8th edition and translated into more than a dozen languages) – instead, he stressed that his goal was ALWAYS great patient care to the trauma victim on the street. He insisted that all royalties for the PHTLS text go to the National Association of EMTs – the professional organization for those on the frontline of EMS.

Norm occupied a unique place in the world of trauma surgery. It’s been written that Norm is the only person in the history of the American College of Surgeons to receive all five of the major trauma awards: 1.) Committee on Trauma, Meritorious Achievement Award for State/Provincial Chairs, 2001, 2.) Scudder Orator, 2001, 3.) Committee on Trauma Millennium Commitment Award, 2000, 4.) Surgeon’s Award for Service to Safety, National Safety Council, 1998, and 5.) Advanced Trauma Life Support (ATLS) Meritorious Service Award, Committee on Trauma, 1989.

Norm was a unique individual – he shunned neckties, opting instead to wear short-sleeve turtleneck shirts (after all, its HOT in New Orleans!). Other trademarks were a leather jacket and a collection of bear claw necklaces made by Native American artisans. There are few things that Norm enjoyed more than performing surgery, teaching and drinking scotch. Norm truly did it HIS way!

Goodbye teacher, mentor, friend – you were an inspiration to my career! Tonight I’ll raise a glass of scotch in your memory! – Jeff Salomone