

See you on the river.

Occasionally in this profession you encounter that one person that rekindles that love of being a paramedic. Someone who makes you realize, or, more importantly, helps you remember why you chose a career where you sit in a cramped ambulance for hours on end, where you wrestle hallucinating, angry, suicidal patients.

Not often enough does this person cross paths with you along their journey of life to make these indelible impressions. It's this kind of patient that makes you forget about all the insignificant problems of your work place and reels you back into the realm of why you do what you do.

Finally, I crossed paths with such an individual the other night.

He was elderly. White hair crowned his freckled skull as he sat on the toilet with a towel covering his lap. The venous arms sat crossed on his robust belly, his eyes darting around the room under his white, bushy eyebrows. He glanced, inconspicuously, from paramedic, to firefighter, to son, to wife. He had fallen, and because his 91-year-old wife was too weak to pick him up, the troops were summoned via 911.

I arrived to be greeted by son, neighbor, wife, fire, and some mysteriously quiet woman lurking in the shadows. He had gotten lightheaded and fell to the carpeted floor. Nothing exciting. Embarrassed, he sat quietly on the toilet, hoping we would all vanish like mist into the cold night air. He didn't want to go, but being as life is one big cycle, he had now returned to the part of his life where all decisions were made for him. The son, tall, thin and what I imagined to be mirror image of the man on the toilet 30 years ago, stated he needed to go. I concurred.

The trip, treatment, prognosis, and history are all insignificant and irrelevant. That's not why I'm writing this. I'm writing this because when I looked at him, when I talked with him, we both felt at ease. We both seemed more comfortable with the situation and we both truly enjoyed one another's company.

He sat half-naked under our white hospital blankets. The dimly lit box bounced on the beaten paths to the emergency room. And we talked. We talked about the war, his family, his job, his kids, the fact that he had been married 54 years and I, 5 months. We talked about Colorado and Montana

and we talked about fly-fishing.

We had both found a friend. He was as excited to talk about fishing as I was to hear about it. He talked about his favorite spots, his favorite fly, his favorite reel, and the bamboo rod that had been passed down to him from his dad. We forgot we were in an ambulance on the way to a hectic hospital.

He made me smile. And I made him laugh.

We got to the ED and his care was transferred to an awaiting RN, clipboard in hand and business on her mind. I shook his hand, smiled, and told him it was a pleasure. I said if I had a nickel for each time I had a patient like him, someone who was genuinely nice, that I'd have at least a buck-fifty. We laughed and I exited.

As I walked away, computer in hand he smiled and said, "See you on the river".

I'm certain I'll never see him again. But I do know that someday, somewhere, our paths will cross again. And hopefully, it'll be on that crisp, flowing river with fly rods in hand.