

MY CREDENTIAL STORY



Bradford Hepler MT(ASCP)

My foray into the laboratory science field provided the opportunity for certification by the ASCP Board of Certification (BOC). This effort was required in order for me to continue learning and contribute to the field, learn lessons that led to larger goals, career growth and greater opportunities and challenges. My certification has allowed me to have a wonderful life.

It began in 1969, when I married Carol Marie Cimino, finished my undergraduate degree, and made a decision about our family's future. After my graduation from California Polytech, in San Luis Obispo, CA, with a bachelor's degree in chemistry, we faced a decision.

My draft deferment had expired and could not be renewed. Service to my country was on the table. I faced being drafted into the Army/Marines that summer, but I could also choose to enlist in one of the military services. The U.S. Air Force (AF) offered the best option. Since I did not have the eyesight for pilot training, its delayed enlistment program offered me the opportunity to have my experience and background evaluated and considered for a job category selection in the enlisted ranks. We chose this option. As luck would have it, the job category selected for me was the military equivalent of a medical laboratory scientist. This unexpected career choice provided a path of opportunity.

In 1969, I was assigned to Lackland Air Force Base, in San Antonio, TX, for basic training, followed by specialty training in hospital laboratory technology at Shepard Air Force Base, in Wichita Falls, TX. After that, I was assigned permanent change of station to David Grant U.S. Air Force Medical Center at Travis Air Force Base in California. The hospital laboratory had an ASCP BOC-authorized MT (now called MLS) training program. I completed training in that program, fulfilling both Air Force requirements and those for MT(ASCP) certification. The training allowed me to take both the California licensing examination as an MT and the BOC Medical Technologist, MT(ASCP) examination in 1971. I passed both and enjoyed the benefits of licensure and certification.

The hospital laboratory at David Grant U. S. Air Force Medical Center was a full-service facility that allowed me to participate in all aspects of laboratory support. I worked primarily in clinical chemistry, and also served as needed as one the several overnight, single staff laboratory support personnel for all sections of the laboratory on a rotating basis.

My ASCP certification, along with my undergraduate degree, opened the door for me to become an AF officer by application for a direct commission as a First Lieutenant in the Air Force as a Biomedical Science Corps officer. I received a direct commission in 1972. Through a convergence of events, the Air Force needed Junior Grade Laboratory Officers, and I was assigned to a position at Wilford Hall U.S. Air Force Medical Center at Lackland Air Force Base, in San Antonio, TX. I was assigned to the Special Chemistry Department as Assistant Officer in Charge, oversaw the application of special chemistry techniques for applications to amino acid analysis, toxicology screening and confirmation testing, fecal fats, and electrophoresis procedures. While there, I was asked to develop and install a procedure for lecithin/sphingomyelin (L/S) ratios for determination of fetal lung maturity for the OB/GYN service.

Subsequently, with the reassignment of the Officer in Charge of our section, while waiting for a Senior Officer replacement, I was placed in charge of that section. A reserve officer, Jack Wallace PhD, D-ABFT, who had been assigned summer service duty in our section educated me in the practice of clinical and forensic toxicology. He oversaw my efforts in the development and installation of one of his protocols on the use of chemical oxidation and spectrophotometry for the determination of Diphenylhydantoin in serum for use in therapeutic drug monitoring (TDM) and emergency toxicology procedures. He also included me as a co-author in the submission of this protocol in Irving Sunshine's PhD, D-ABFT Methodology for Analytical Toxicology, Vol 1. This led to a lifelong interest and vocation in toxicology.

Due to these experiences, I decided that graduate education was a necessity. I left the service and enrolled in the University of Maryland at College Park under William C. Purdy, PhD. We moved there in 1975, and I joined Dr. Purdy's graduate school program in analytical chemistry with applications to clinical chemistry. In 1976, Dr. Purdy accepted a position at McGill University in Montreal Quebec Canada and moved there, taking with him six graduate students, myself included.

I graduated from McGill University in 1981 with a Ph.D. in analytical chemistry and accepted a fellowship slot, under Dr. Sunshine in forensic toxicology in Cleveland at the Cuyahoga County Coroner's Office (CCCO). I eventually moved on to the Wayne County Medical Examiner's Office (WCMEO), Detroit, MI, in 1990 as chief toxicologist.

In 1992, I became the laboratory director of the WCMEO. I continued to contribute to the forensic toxicology community through publications, presentations and leadership roles in both the Society of Forensic Toxicologists, the Toxicology Section of the American Association of Clinical Chemistry and the Toxicology Section of the American Academy of Forensic Science. I retired from the WCMEO in 2011 and am now a forensic toxicology consultant.

All of this has been possible because I joined the U.S. Air Force and began a career as a laboratory scientist, which opened a new professional horizon. Serendipity placed me in a position that allowed me to seek certification as an MT, which led to events, friendships and professional networking that charted the course of my family's path and my career.