

# MY CREDENTIAL STORY



## **Tamesha Biemeret, MLS(ASCP)<sup>CM</sup>SBB<sup>CM</sup>**

On a cold winter morning in Appleton, WI, I began my clinical rotation in blood bank. A recently-transfused patient had developed an antibody and presented with jaundice, a positive direct antiglobulin test, elevated LDH and bilirubin levels in her serum.

I was nervous and excited. Nervous because I did not know what all of it meant, and I was praying that this patient would not die on my first day. Excited because the blood bank technologists were focused, confident and calm. In class, the consequence of a reaction to transfusion medicine was accentuated, with patient death a rare, but possible scenario. The blood bank is the only area in a clinical laboratory that provides medicine directly to a patient. There is no, or very little tolerance for error, and the ramifications are significant. On this day, I saw competence in action, and so my ASCP Board of Certification (BOC) credential story began.

I graduated in June 2009 and began my career as a clinical laboratory scientist, generalist. I have worked in all departments of the laboratory—bench technologist, lead technologist, and general supervisor in acute and long-term care facilities, children and adult hospitals reference and bio-technology laboratories—for more than eight years. Blood banking is my passion. In May 2017, I sat for the ASCP Specialist in Blood Banking exam. This decision changed my life in fundamental and unexpected ways.

Initially, I was hesitant to share my story. It took me five attempts to become BOC credentialed. I am sharing this story to encourage transformation and inspire courage in others. I failed my first attempt at the Specialist in Blood Banking, SBB(ASCP) exam. I was distraught, but learned that more preparation, focus and time were needed to master this exam.

I had two jobs, worked more than 60 hours a week, had a three-year-old child, and was taking care of my aging parents. Five people lived in my two-bedroom condo in San Diego, CA. I was undaunted. The credentialed professionals I knew who succeeded on this exam had participated in a CAAHEP-accredited Specialist in Blood Bank Technology program. These programs usually require a full-time commitment, hefty tuition fees, and often take a year to complete. I lacked the money, resources and time to take this program, so I studied from the ASCP reading lists, resources provided by my mentors in the laboratory, the American Red Cross (ARC) lecture series, and conducted extensive research online.

I failed yet again on my second attempt of the exam, leaving me feeling inadequate. Nonetheless, I was undeterred. I had written down some of the questions I remembered from the tests, but could not find the correct answers. I researched, questioned fellow blood bankers, and consulted technical manuals without success. The knowledge of blood banking needed to pass the test is vast. Routine transfusion service testing offers covers only a fraction of the material. I highlighted some of my questions to the presenter at an ARC lecture series, which helped. I was enthralled by the challenge of learning this material.

After my third unsuccessful attempt at the exam, all my peers, friends and family knew I was studying for this test. It was a difficult time, as I needed to have a courageous smile every day. Some days, I questioned my reasons for wanting this credential. I felt the need to push onward, yet I didn't know the way forward. I was committed to the process, but needed to use different strategies to succeed. I registered for more lectures, studied several hours each day, and up to eight hours on weekends when I wasn't working. I purchased additional books, made charts, listened to voice recordings in the car, and took every blood bank practice test I could find.

Two days before I was to take the test, I had a fall and sustained multiple injuries. The pain was unbearable. The following day was worse. Therein lies the important lesson I learned. I felt defeated. Nonetheless, I got up and took the exam, but failed. The test time expired before I was halfway done.

Now, there was just one final opportunity to take the exam before I had to choose another route for certification. The pain was excruciating. My commitment to the process was steadfast. I started again. By now, more than a year had passed since my decision to become credentialed. The fundamental lessons learned along the way changed my life.

I learned to fail with grace and to always believe in my success. When I began my clinical rotation nine years ago, I did not know this is where the road would lead. I am grateful and privileged to have had this opportunity. The wins and the losses do not define us; lessons do.

On my fifth attempt at the exam, I passed! I became a certified specialist in blood banking in June 2018. I did not receive a raise or a promotion, nor was I planning an immediate career change. I was doing this to broaden my knowledge of blood banking and earn this credential.

I encourage anyone who is passionate about earning an ASCP Board of Certification credential or trying to achieve a dream to go for it! Let my story serve as your catalyst.