

Preview Chapter of:

Two Dark Thirty

**True stories to inspire teaching and
learning in our local heroes**

Marc Hill

Chapter One

Where do I Begin?

*“Tell me the facts and I’ll learn. Tell me the truth and I’ll believe.
But tell me a story and it will live in my heart forever.”*
—Native American Proverb

It was the early morning, just past 2:30 AM, and the full moon was bright in the sky, casting a near-daylight shadow on the road. My partner and I were driving our ambulance back to the fire station from the hospital’s emergency room (ER). To say we were exhausted would be an understatement. We had just finished our twelfth call that day and were on a stretch of back-to-back EMS calls in the past three hours. Our reports were stacked up and the paperwork was beginning to get mixed together in the center console of the ambulance. We left our comfortable beds at the downtown fire station just after 10 PM, having only been in them for twenty minutes, just long enough to warm the bed up. I was trying to finish my latest patient care report on the laptop when we got dispatched by our 911 call center for a patient lifting assistance and welfare check. Our local police department was also on its way to the scene.

The address was familiar, and so was the patient. Let’s just say we were on a first-name basis. The gentleman was in his mid-twenties and had a dangerous alcohol and drug problem. He would often fall out of bed in his inebriated state and scream for help. Eventually, someone in

his apartment building would grow tired of his screams and they would call 911.

We arrived on the scene and made our way into his apartment. As we walked down the dimly lit hallway, with all of our EMS gear, we noticed the apartment door was already open. Our police officers were already on the scene. We could hear muffled talking. As we slowly walked into his residence, our boots stuck to the linoleum floor as we walked through the kitchen. There were various states of half-eaten food, spilled liquids, garbage, and empty beer cans and bottles everywhere. As we rounded the corner we found our patient lying on the floor next to his bed. However, this time was very different.

In prior visits, he usually had a pet boa constrictor snake next to his bed in a six-foot glass enclosure. We could see this time, when he fell, he must have tried to grab onto the aquarium and knocked it to the floor, breaking the glass and freeing the snake. Not only were we attending to a vodka-soaked patient covered in urine, feces, and broken, bloody glass, but now we were on the lookout for an escaped four-foot reptile that was slithering somewhere in the run-down apartment.

This, my friends, is what I refer to in our field as ‘Two Dark Thirty.’ My partner and I turned to each other with a shared look on our faces that said, "What else could go wrong?"

So, you may now be asking, why did I title the book ‘Two Dark Thirty’? Isn’t this a book about teaching? Many of the emergency services are also paramilitary in nature. They adhere to general rules of conduct and codes that are similar to military values and norms. Some of this comes as time-telling, such as using the 24-hour scale. Zero would mean midnight. It has been my experience many of our worst

calls for emergencies happen at the witching hour, the time of night just after bars close. The time tends to be 02:30 AM, or in the term, I like to use, ‘Two Dark Thirty.’

This is the time when emergency calls come in and wake up those who serve on the front lines of our communities. It’s the middle of the night when you get a dispatch for a multiple-vehicle collision and rollover with entrapment of victims and both cars are on fire. Or there’s a house fire, and someone is currently hanging out of the third-story window screaming for help. It’s a 911 call from an apartment building where a savage fight has occurred; two people have multiple stab wounds, and blood is all over. Stress ramps up within seconds after you are woken up from a dead sleep by hearing the tones go off. This is when seconds count and all hell breaks loose.

At Two Dark Thirty, everyone in emergency services needs to be ready for those instances that occur at the least expected moment. When it comes to teaching and learning in emergency services, isn’t it at these moments we can truly gauge our success... or shortcomings?

Acknowledging this up front helps set the tone for the seriousness that underlies the preparation, effort, and dedication we need to put forth, to be tremendously successful and to educate ourselves and others in this profession.

As an educator, you cannot ignore the heightened element of stress and still expect your students to lead and be ready for those instances that always occur in the middle of the darkest night. This book is designed to provide answers to those types of questions. I wrote it to support all in education—to become better and achieve more from my own

thoughts, beliefs, and experiences—and in the end, to prepare our students to perform and excel at Two Dark Thirty.

Be a Storyteller

"The purpose of a storyteller is not to tell you how to think, but to give you questions to think upon."

—Brandon Sanderson

Gripping stories tell a tale. If you have ever read a great book, the author captivates you and brings you into the world you are reading. They immerse you in descriptions, characters, and plots. The same feeling happens when you listen to a story being told. If you tell stories in your class, you can grab the attention of your students. Once you have their attention, you can take them on a journey anywhere.

Stories and word-of-mouth teachings are the truest forms of communication and the first steps in education. Being a storyteller is paramount for any teacher. It is a skill that you must hone and develop. But don't think the stories have to be all about you. I tell tales all the time about my own experiences, but I also tell stories of what has happened to others.

Humans have existed on this planet for hundreds of thousands of years. The majority of the population has only been truly literate for the past 100–200 years. By literate, I mean being able to read and write. For most of human history, only the extremely rich, kings and queens of nobility, and those who were members of protected classes, such as the clergy, could read and write. The powerful saw being literate as a way to control the population. Obviously, this all changed with the invention of the printing press. The powerful could no longer keep the

information from spreading through the populace. Being literate spread education in the world and people started to ask questions, which led to change and advancement.

Before we could read and write, we learned by listening to and speaking about our history through stories. Humans have learned through word of mouth, or oral narratives, since the very beginning. The oral traditions of native peoples and those of our ancient ancestors all tell a story. They focused on life lessons and on passing knowledge of the local area. They were the hints, tricks, and life hacks to surviving in the world of that time.

I still believe it is a brilliant way to educate people and communicate information. Stories fascinate students and pull them into the lesson.

In ancient Greek times, the philosophers of Plato and Aristotle questioned everything and created stories to challenge thought. These short stories were meant to illustrate a moral lesson and give examples to their students, to make them think about their current beliefs. Jesus taught his biblical messages through stories and parables. Modern-day storytellers, such as authors, radio, and television and film directors, use the many forms of multimedia to captivate their audiences and bring them into a wondrous world of imagination. They set a stage to pull you into a new realm of creativity and put forth thoughts that can lead to investigation and learning.

Oral traditions have an obvious basis in the spoken and heard senses. We use our ears to hear and our minds and hearts to process those thoughts and feelings. Those senses are built into us. How many of us remember song lyrics and remember events based on when a song is played? Singing songs was an easy way to recite and memorize prayers

and stories. We use that sense of hearing and relate it to what we see and are doing at that time. We are tied to remembering things based on our senses. Oral storytelling uses the sense of hearing and our brain's imagination to envision what we are hearing.

Storytelling is one of the most important ways to expand the knowledge of your students. They will remember your story about a topic or about why something happened far more than the specifics of the third chapter's fourth paragraph second line. To be a good teacher, you need to entertain. Be a storyteller. Engage your students in this thoughtful activity. Have imagination and be creative in your delivery.

Some characteristics of a good story are:

1. *Catching the listener's ear: the story is interesting and exciting.*
2. *Short and sweet: the story is the right length to explain but short enough to keep attention.*
3. *It has elements of drama or intrigue that make your listeners think and pay attention.*
4. *It draws a conclusion or has a moral lesson to it.*
5. *It is easy to understand and can be retold by the listener.*

I occasionally run into former students of mine from decades past who still refer to me as Mr. Hill or Coach Hill. I even work with two of my former students in my current fire department. One of my former students is now my supervising lieutenant. When I started in the department, it took him years to be comfortable enough to call me by my last or first name. Every time he saw me in the hallway or in the station, he would refer to me as Mister or Coach Hill. Everyone laughed and thought it was funny. It is and was.

Think of the last time you ran into a former teacher or coach of yours. Did you think you would call them by their first name? Usually not. To this day, I have a hard time swearing in front of my parents; I still think I will get in trouble.

When I see my former students, what they remember most about me as a teacher is my stories. I would take the time, in my prepping, researching, and reading, to find interesting tales to tell. Who doesn't love a good gossip tale about a double-cross or political intrigue? *Law and Order* has been on television for over twenty years, and there is a reason why it is so successful. There must be something to it, right? Each subject and lesson I taught had a story, much like this book has stories tied throughout each chapter. Stories captivate, and stories illustrate in our mind's eye the subject and help our brain to create memories and remember more information. This is essential for emergency service heroes, who must know the information by heart to act quickly and decisively in catastrophic conditions.

If you are enthusiastic about the subject and thoughtful, exciting, and entertaining in your delivery, you won't have trouble in your classes with discipline, grades, or comprehension. Those factors will all be taken care of naturally. This will be true because your students will see, feel, and hear your passion and excitement about the subject. Something as simple as telling a story illustrates your point and creates a better understanding for the student. It goes miles further than just writing notes and reading a PowerPoint presentation.

In my years of teaching experience, I have found bad teachers blame and make excuses. It's the bad teacher that says the students just don't get it because they aren't smart enough. It's a bad teacher that blames the parents or blames the district for lack of money or whatnot. They

make excuses because they believe it is not their fault the students are failing. The hard truth is it is them. It has nothing to do with money, or technology, or anything tangible. Those are all excuses, and we need to look at ourselves first. What did we do or not do? Think about your lesson and think about how a story can add to it. Own what you teach in your lesson.

Students in ancient Greece did not have walls, roofs, or electricity, but they learned, grew, and developed the systems and features that enabled Western Civilization to become what it is today. Why? Because they told stories and used thought experiments. They discussed and challenged each other, and they pushed each other further.

A good teacher finds ways to reach their students no matter what the problem is. Take the time to realize what went right and what went wrong with your prior lesson. Reevaluate yourself. Did you use too much jargon or specific words no one understood? Did you talk over your audience and assume they had more experience than you had?

I'll talk more about evaluating later in the book. For now, consider being a storyteller to engage and entertain your students for positive results. It is not complicated. Remember to keep it simple, be clear in your expectations, and be honest with your students. Start by telling a story.

Engage Your Students

What was the most boring class you ever had in school? We all have had one or two, and some of us have had years' worth of boredom in school.

When I was in college for my bachelor's degree, I had a course called *History of the Copper Country*. As a social studies student it was a required course, but it sounded interesting to me. However, the professor who taught the course was far from it. He would come into the class and sit at a table in the front. Then for the next hour he would literally read from a binder of class notes. He would not get up, he would not look up, and he would not engage in discussion. There was no time to ask questions. He would come in at the exact time class stated and then start to read after taking attendance. He read right up to when class was scheduled to end. Needless to say it was a tough class to go to.

How many have had similar experiences? Many of those subjects were boring not because of the subject, but because of the teacher. If the teacher doesn't do a good job of relaying the information and keeping attention, students zone out. Do not be that type of teacher! Be active, passionate, and collaborative. You cannot be boring or monotone and expect to keep your students' attention.

Move and keep the attention shifting, by simply walking around the room. You can go from place to place within the room to change the direction of your voice, and you can keep people on task by coming closer to them. If you are teaching your class online via video, then raise and lower your voice. Keep changing your position on the screen and use your hands. Doing this will help to create attention for your students and will keep their focus.

Talk to your students. Ask questions. Sometimes, asking how the students want to learn is the best course of action. Engage them in the learning process. Lead them to the answers and guide them through the lesson material. Be appealing and captivating in your plans for your

students. Talk to your students about the entire educational plan for the course.

Engaging a student can have many characteristics and can happen in several ways. As an example, you can start class with a funny video or cartoon to get the mood right. You could start by coming in dressed up in an interesting costume—or just start by telling a story. Bring the students into the lesson and have them participate. Be creative. Engage their minds, engage their learning spirits, and engage their thoughts and beliefs.

Define Your Expectations

An important task to remember is to clearly communicate your expectations. We have all been in lectures and in training where there are pockets of people gossiping and not paying attention. It's distracting when someone keeps getting up for coffee or to go to the bathroom, or when someone is texting on their phone during class. You need to be an example and model the behavior you expect.

You are the instructor; explain openly what you are doing and why, how, and when. Tell your students to straighten up, pay attention, and silence their phones for the next hour. Explain where the bathroom is if they don't know and tell them there is no need to get up because there will be ten-minute breaks every forty to fifty minutes.

You must set the tone. You are the teacher-leader in the class. Students need to know what you expect. Adults can be just like children. They enjoy order and routine. However, to follow the rules, they need to know what they are.

Never expect people to know how to act. That is an assumption. I can't tell you how many times I've had adult students act in a certain way when I assumed they should know better. The adage 'It's not the age but the maturity' is very true. In teaching refresher courses for emergency medical services (EMS) and firefighting, I have had students in their sixties and even their seventies acting and behaving like 3rd graders. I'm amazed when I must pull them aside and explain how their behavior is disrupting the group.

Because of my willingness to do the hard and uncomfortable communication, I never really had issues in the classroom with my management and discipline. Being a public-school teacher in middle and high school isn't much different from teaching adults in college. You will know when you need to be louder or move around. You will feel and observe it in the room. Those are some of the basics when it comes to classroom management and control.

You need to be a presence in the room. If you sit in the front, behind a desk, and you never get up or move around, people will nearly always choose to do something else. This is especially true when the topic to be covered is on the challenging side. Be engaging with your students and capture their attention but have clear expectations and be the example.

You Are No Imposter

Sometimes I have doubts about myself and my abilities. The fear of the unknown is natural. This usually occurs on the first day or in the days leading up to starting a new position or task. We all get butterflies in our stomachs. This is normal and usually goes away after you get settled into the position. But sometimes it does not go away, and the

dreadful feelings stay with you and sometimes get worse. This continual feeling is a condition, and it has a name. It is called Imposter Syndrome.

People who suffer from this state have such massive doubt and trouble with the position they hold because they think they do not deserve it. They believe everyone is looking at them and will find out they are a fraud and they do not belong in the position they hold. They are waiting for the proverbial rug to be pulled out from under them and the giant spotlight to be cast on their failure. These individuals often feel there is no amount of training or increasing education they can do that will ever prepare them for this position. They have absolutely no faith or belief in themselves.

According to an article in *Psychology Today* (1), around 25–30% of high achievers may suffer from Imposter Syndrome. At least 70% of adults may experience impostorism at least once in their lifetime. It is important to note the article focused on high achievers. High achievers are the ones that have such grand expectations for themselves they develop this syndrome because of not being able to live up to their own expectations. Within the emergency services, we find a great many high achievers. The 'A-type' personalities dominate the firehouse. High achievers are great at having a solid drive. What is not known is how much self-doubt they have internally. They are great at portraying the right persona but inside they are crying. Impostorism becomes a problem when you let that doubt manifest and become a constant nagging thought in your mind. Start by knowing that we all begin at zero. We all start at a point where we must learn new ideas and new concepts.

We all occasionally have the feeling we are in over our heads. Do not let the feeling morph into something more serious, like Imposter Syndrome. You will be new at first and fresh out of the box, as we say sometimes. You will be the greenhorn, the new person. As time goes on and as you become more familiar with the job and the role that you play, you will become more comfortable with the position. This enables you to prepare students more effectively for Two Dark Thirty.

Yes, you can do it! Believe in yourself. If you have questions, ask. Find resources and others to help you. You are not alone. Feel free to go to the book website (twodarkthirty.com) and contact me there or post on the discussion board. We need to stick together. Have faith in yourself. You are not alone.

Attitude is Everything

"Weakness of attitude becomes weakness of character."

—Albert Einstein

Not every day can be perfect. We are human, after all, and our moods can change like the seasons or the weather. That being said, a good-quality teacher has an overall positive attitude and aura that is evident within seconds of meeting them.

You can tell how a teacher feels just by watching him or her walk into a room. Do they look confident and enthusiastic about the day's lesson, or are they staring at the ground and shuffling around the room? In our time as students, I think we can all agree and remember seeing this type of behavior in our instructors. You can feel the positive or negative presence. A positive attitude will be emitted as an aura of kindness,

appreciation, knowledge, and genuine care. The best teachers want to see you do well and learn.

As a first-time teacher, walking into a classroom can be very intimidating. Everyone gets nervous. Remember to relax. Everything will be fine. Students can sense fear, so make sure you walk in with confidence. No one expects you to know everything, and if anyone tells you otherwise, they are liars or do not know what they are talking about. Take a breath. If this frightens you, accept it and use it to motivate yourself to be better. Your emergency services students will respect and respond to your courage, because they understand the need to act confidently when they're under stress, too.

If being in front of groups scares you, practice by putting yourself into situations where you are in front of people or groups. Sometimes the best way to learn is by throwing yourself right into it. Get out there and make yourself uncomfortable. Grow and learn from the experience. Find a Toastmasters club or other organizations to develop public speaking skills. Ask around if anyone needs help with a group presentation. Find what works for you and use it to make yourself better.

When you come in ready and full of a positive attitude, the students will pick up on this. They will see your confidence, and this will develop their trust in you as the instructor.

When I was teaching at a rural country middle school, my wife and I had our first daughter, and I went on paternity leave. During that time, I had a long-term substitute teacher, Ms. Smith, who was very smart and knowledgeable about the subjects I taught. She was eager and happy to find her first teaching position. I left her with detailed daily instructions

and everything she needed to keep the ship running, just as I had done. It was simple, and I thought it foolproof.

However, within a week, Ms. Smith had major discipline issues and lost the student's attention and control. She was unsure of what to do and called me at home. She told me she followed my plans, but the students were not behaving, and everything was a mess. I could hear the upset and frustration in her voice. I told her to change things to suit her style of teaching; she did not have to be just like me. If the subject was covered, she could do whatever she felt she needed to do. Ms. Smith tried, and she attempted many strategies for the remaining time.

After six weeks, my leave ended, and I came back. The students were relieved to see me, and so was she. After Ms. Smith left, I asked the students why they misbehaved and what was so wrong. They said, in frank terms, they thought she didn't like them as students, and they didn't think she knew anything about the subjects. Being new, Ms. Smith went in with no confidence in herself and her abilities. The students immediately picked that up. She failed before she even started. Like sharks, the students smelled blood in the water. Ms. Smith was finished before she even began.

Attitude and confidence in yourself can go a long way. If you have doubts, and we all do, find something to be confident in. Practice the craft before you get there. Set yourself up for success. For many new teachers, having a prepared lesson will instill confidence. Believe in yourself and come in with a positive attitude.

Find Significance in What You Are Teaching

"Success is fine, but success is fleeting. Significance is lasting."

—*Beth Brooke*

Part of having the right attitude, confidence, and belief is understanding what you are teaching. Make sure you teach something you enjoy and find interesting. At the very least, find something interesting to you in the subject matter and spend time on that. Faking it will not work. We can all tell in the first few minutes of listening to someone's discourse whether they believe what they are saying.

Are you saying it with feeling? Are you motivated to teach this subject, or are you being told to get out there and tell students about it? When someone is speaking, if they do not know the material and do not want to be there, students can feel it. They shut off any kind of attention to the instructor and cease learning.

Do yourself a favor. If you don't find the subject interesting or are not excited about it in any way, shape, or form, then find someone who is. Bring in a guest speaker who cares to teach and talk about the subject. I guarantee if you ask around, you will find someone who has an interest and knowledge of the subject. It is okay to split the subject into parts and find guest teachers or lecturers to talk about the parts they love. Yes, you are becoming more of an event organizer, but the students will love you for it. Engaging their minds and enabling them to start learning is the goal of a successful teacher.

When I was going through Paramedic School and learning about cardiology, our instructor brought in a thirty-year veteran cardiologist from the hospital. He taught us a great deal about the heart, its

functions, and cardiac health and disease. He was amazing, and he had an unmistakable passion for his subject. The class learned a lot from him, and he made the subject more interesting because of his passionate stories and enthusiasm. You want the learning to take place, and to do so, you need to find the right resources to do that. No one wants to sit through a "death by PowerPoint" lecture and listen to someone read off the screen with a monotone voice.

If finding a guest speaker is not a possibility, then I highly recommend you find something about the subject you find interesting. Make it your own. Remember this: you can make it as easy or as hard as you want. It is up to you!

Passion for a topic can go both ways. When I was teaching 11th-grade U.S. history, I spent a lot of time on the American Civil War. I thought the subject was fascinating, and I liked the time period. I loved everything about it, and I spent a lot of time discussing the politics involved in the decades leading up to the war, as well as the reconstruction and Jim Crow laws that followed. I thought the topic was interesting, and my students were reacting to the excitement and passion I showed in class. They learned a lot about the war and how it has shaped our culture and society today.

However, I spent so much time on the subject I was asked by my coworkers in the Social Studies Department about how I planned to get through all the other required material before the end of the semester. They were right to be concerned. In this case, my passion may have put a rush on other topics that were important as well. I had to make choices, and I had to use the remainder of my time wisely.

I decided what was relevant and what I could sum up and skip. Luckily, this was my decision to make, and I had the freedom to do so as a teacher. Our administration trusted me as a professional to get through the subject material and curriculum in the best way possible. No micromanagement was needed. I respected their trust and my freedom and worked very hard to do my best because of that trust. I learned a valuable lesson: not only did I need to find a passion for the subject, but I needed to do so promptly and not overlook other important parts of the curriculum.

You should be able to sense if the students understand and, if not, ask! Change what they are doing to make sure they grasp the concepts. A poor teacher will look up, or maybe not look up at all, and see blank stares from the students and just continue to get through what they intended for the day. For emergency service students preparing for Two Dark Thirty moments, this can be dangerous.

An engaging and caring teacher will go back to the beginning and try something different or new. Have the self-respect to take the time and ask questions of your students. Gauge their understanding as you teach. Stop if there is a problem or confusion arises. At the end of the day, learning is contagious, but so is a misunderstanding. Be a storyteller and engage and captivate your students. Have faith in yourself and project a positive attitude. Set the tone and be the example you want them to follow. You are the class leader—the one who prepares them for the situations they'll face in the dark of the night.

Remember the moment, at Two Dark Thirty, when my partner and I were looking for a four-foot boa constrictor while trying to take care of a broken man? Keeping the attention of your students is like keeping a snake in its aquarium. As you use this chapter to improve your teaching

style, you are ultimately preparing emergency service heroes and heroines to face the chaos that always ensues at Two Dark Thirty.

Mr. Hill's Notes:

- Start by being a storyteller.
- Be engaging and use your senses to teach.
- Involve your students in learning. Have a plan to captivate your students.
- Consider bringing in a guest speaker!
- Mindset and attitude are everything.
- Be positive!

I hope you enjoyed this short preview of my book ***Two Dark Thirty***.

You can continue by buying your copy today at [Amazon.com](https://www.amazon.com)

When you do, please leave a review, and spread the inspiration of teaching and learning!