



## CASE STUDY

# Student EMTs Save Senior with CPR and AED Plus at College of the Ozarks



That February morning had started out like any other day on the campus of the College of the Ozarks in Point Lookout, Missouri. Senior Walter Watts, a 21-year-old psychology major, woke up late and scrambled to class, just barely making it through the door on time. Afterwards, he went upstairs to the second floor psych office to grade papers, instead of his usual job of delivering lunches.

Meanwhile, Gavin Harnstrom, also a senior, ran into Dakota Williams, and the pair decided to skip their Bible class and drop by the student-run campus fire station before heading out for an early lunch. Harnstrom and Williams were among four seniors who were employed as emergency responders at the fire station as part of the college's work-study program. All full-time students of the college are required to work 15 hours each week in return for tuition at the Christian liberal arts college.

When the emergency phone at the fire station rang about 11:30 a.m., little did any one of them know that February 7, 2012, would be a day they would probably remember for the rest of their lives. The caller was a professor from the psych office urging them to come quickly, a student had collapsed from what she assumed was a seizure.

Harnstrom and Williams immediately hopped into their rescue vehicle and sped the two blocks to the psych office; they were the first to arrive at Watts' side. There they found him, on the floor, turning blue from lack of oxygen. This was not a seizure!

Finding no pulse, Harnstrom bounded down the stairs to the rescue vehicle to retrieve the ZOLL AED Plus® as quickly as he could. By then, Jessica Messer and Dalton Trussell, also student EMTs, had arrived, alerted by the emergency radio Jessica carried with her. CPR was started. Watts' shirt was removed so the electrodes could be applied. Seconds later, the AED Plus announced that a shock was advised. Stunned, the three student EMTs looked at each other. This was real, not a student drill, someone's life—one of their classmates—was at stake. It was all happening so quickly.

Harnstrom pressed the shock button; then the AED Plus prompted the rescuers to "Start CPR." By the time the paramedics arrived with the ambulance minutes later, Watts had a pulse. He was rushed to Skaggs Hospital in Branson, then to Cox South in Springfield, where an EP study showed symptoms of Wolff-Parkinson-White, a rare heart condition caused by an extra electrical pathway in the heart. He was then fitted with the ZOLL LifeVest® Wearable Defibrillator, which he wore for two weeks, while he was sent to the Mayo Clinic in St. Louis for a second opinion before undergoing surgery back at Cox for an implantable cardioverter defibrillator (ICD).



**Walter Watts**

*"Surviving cardiac arrest changed my life and has given me a new perspective.... I appreciate my health every day."*

Walter Watts

After recuperating at home with his family in California, Missouri, and taking online classes, Watts returned to college to complete his degree. He hopes to become a clinical psychologist. He has since celebrated his 22nd birthday, says he can do everything except obtain a commercial driver's license or fly a commercial airplane, and is actually more physically active than he was before. He runs and kayaks.

"Surviving cardiac arrest changed my life and has given me a new perspective," he said. "I actually feel that day was serendipitous and divinely planned. It was nothing less than a miracle. It's given me more opportunities and I appreciate my health every day."



College EMTs who saved Walter: (from left) Gavin Harnstrom, Dakota Williams, Dalton Trussell, and Jessica Messer.

Reflecting back on that day, Harnstrom says it was the first emergency he had ever handled. "I was scared, excited, and nervous when I first arrived on the scene, but after about five seconds, my training kicked in," he said. "The AED Plus told me exactly what to do. I didn't

have to think about it. The AED instructed me to go deeper on the chest compressions. I thought I was doing fine, but thankfully, it guided me to provide high-quality chest compressions."

According to Williams, the AED Plus "worked fantastic" and Watts wouldn't have made it without it. "The AED Plus put us at ease, like a big helping hand. It saved our skins and it saved Walter's. Even though we were trained, this was so spur of the moment. The AED told us what to do and reassured us. Using it made us feel like we couldn't do anything wrong," he said.

"Saving a life is a surreal experience. Walter's family must have said 'Thank you' 6,000 times. It puts you on Cloud Nine to save a life. But I'm just happy that I was able to be there when it counted," Williams added.

Both Harnstrom and Williams have graduated from the College of the Ozarks. Harnstrom earned a degree in mass communications and would like to pursue a career as an EMT after having served as fire chief of the campus fire station. Williams, after earning his degree in sociology, has since moved to Springfield, where he is in training to become an EMT for Mercy Hospital.

The ZOLL AED Plus, the first and only Full-Rescue AED that provides Real CPR Help® for depth and rate of chest compressions, audibly coaches rescuers with prompts such as "Push Harder" or "Good Compressions" during CPR.



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