



# THE BEACON HILL TIMES

T H E R E A R E N O T I M E S L I K E T H E S E T I M E S

## Adventure of a lifetime for local doctor

Dr. David Kieff, ENT emergency specialist at the Massachusetts Eye and Ear Infirmary, had just drifted off to sleep in a cabin deep at the bottom of the Grand Canyon when he heard a knock at the door. Little did he know that he would soon begin a medical adventure that was more exciting than the five days he'd spent vacationing with his family - and that this adventure would help save a young man's life.

"On Aug. 3 our son, Austin, age 19, was returning from hiking near Phantom Ranch in Grand Canyon National Park, Arizona, when he was struck by an avalanche of rocks from flash flooding during a thunderstorm," his parents Tina and Gehard Hilkemeyer wrote in a letter of appreciation to Mass. Eye and Ear President and CEO John Fernandez. "Austin was helped back to camp by his cousin, where upon he became progressively confused, lost consciousness and began having seizures. Fortunately, Dr. Kieff was also at Phantom Ranch that night. He spent the next nine hours helping to save our son's life."

Hit by falling rocks, Austin was suffering from a fractured skull, brain injury, broken clavicle, frac-

tured vertebrae and ribs, as well as a punctured lung. Dr. Kieff could tell that Austin needed advanced medical attention immediately.

Helicopter evacuation was not possible until the next morning due to bad weather, so he sprang into action, the Hilkemeyers wrote.

Dr. Kieff provided swift assessment of the situation and resources and helped move Austin out of the rain. He called emergency services, speaking with specialists in Arizona and at Massachusetts General Hospital. Dr. Kieff was prepared to use the tools available, including sterilizing and using kitchen supplies from the camp and a power drill, to relieve the pressure on Austin's brain to save his life, if absolutely necessary.

Fortunately, a nearby ranger station had limited medical supplies, and Dr. Kieff was able to stabilize Austin with IV fluids and medicine to control seizures that had developed from brain trauma and bleeding because of the severe injuries.

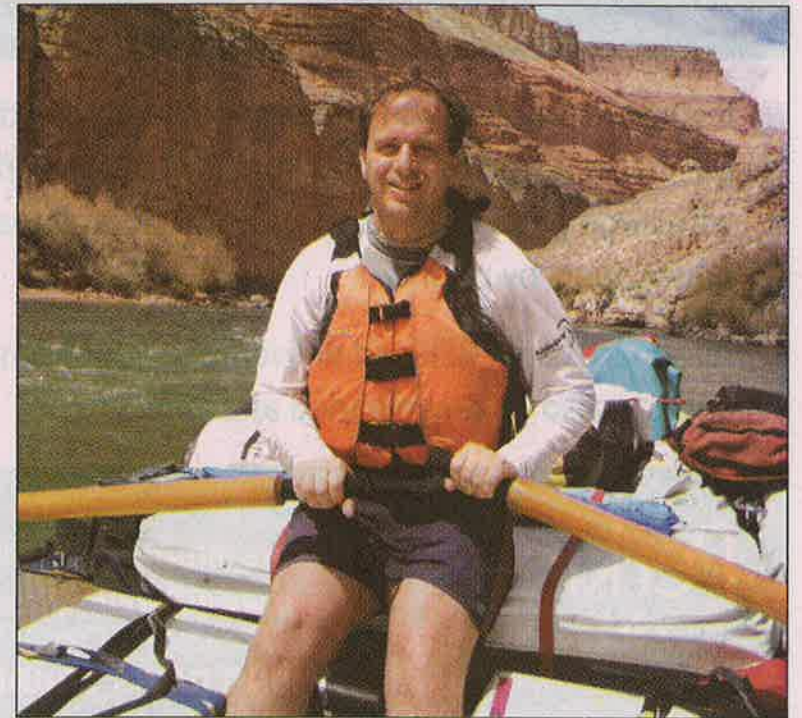
The Hilkemeyer family reports that Dr. Kieff shared medical supplies he happened to have with him and remained at the family's

side over the next eight hours, even after Austin began to stabilize. He helped to guide the Park Service Ranger emergency medical technicians in caring for Austin, catching a catnap on the couch rather than returning to his own bed, knowing he had to hike 10 miles uphill the next morning.

The Hilkemeyers continued: "[Dr. Kieff] acted as a 'good Samaritan,' not knowing what the outcome would be or the character of the people he was trying to help. We do not know what responsibility a person in Dr. Kieff's position has to provide medical skills in an extreme situation as this, but we feel assured that he provided a higher standard of care than most medical professionals, making Austin his primary concern that night."

Happily, Austin's parents report that their son is healing well and now in inpatient rehabilitation.

"We recognize that Dr. Kieff was lacking the equipment and personnel that are critical to do his job and was dealing with a difficult injury outside his specialty. And yet, his service to us was world-class medical care. In our opinion he is the type of person who is in the medical field for all



*Dr. David Kieff, ENT emergency specialist at Mass. Eye and Ear, enjoyed rafting down the Grand Canyon last month before his biggest adventure.*

the right reasons," the Hilkemeyers concluded.

When asked about sharing this story, Dr. Kieff hesitated and then smiled.

"This could be a good public service," Dr. Kieff said. "When you hike places like the Grand Canyon, you hear a lot about proper hydration because you are in the desert.

You don't think of avalanches and the danger of hiking in rain. That is a good thing for hikers to know. They may also want to consider bringing a climbing helmet when hiking in areas with falling rocks. Medical care is not always available. I know that I will bring a helmet myself, next time."