

Remotary Publics Bring Stamps, Seals to Those in Distress

by Con Chapman

JAFFREY, New Hampshire. Beverly Huber thought she was ready for a spring climb up New Hampshire's Mt. Monadnock by the White Dot trail, the steepest ascent to the summit, after a year spent hiking and training on easier peaks. "I guess there's nothing like the real thing," she says as she rubs her sprained ankle while her boyfriend Jonathan Peters elevates her leg.



Mt. Monadnock

The two have called for help on a cell phone, and they look up when they hear the sound of a rescue helicopter overhead. "Don't worry, sweetie," Peters says. "You're going to make it."

A ladder descends from the chopper bearing Niles Gilbert, a notary public trained in remote document authentication, with a pack on his back holding the tools of his trade; pens with black and blue ink, his notary seal, and a rubber stamp that says when his

commission as a public official authorized to certify legal papers will expire.



Remotary Publics

"How's she doing?" Gilbert shouts over the roar of whirring blades overhead.

"She's in a lot of pain--I don't think she can make it down on foot," Peters replies.

"Okay, we'll do it here," Gilbert says, as he opens up his backpack.

"You're not going to operate, are you?" the fallen woman asks in an anxious tone of voice.

"No, I'm just going to witness your signature on some documents. There's a rescue reimbursement form and a medical waiver in case you need to go to the hospital later," the notary replies.

"Are you sure that's your signature?"

"What the hell are you talking about?" Peters screams at Gilbert.

"Well, it will save a lot of time when you're standing at the admissions desk and there's a kid with pink eye in line behind you."

Having asserted his authority, Gilbert goes to work on the young woman, asking to see her driver's license for positive identification before he pops the question that will insulate her waiver of rights from future attack if life-saving ankle surgery goes awry. "Is this

your free act and deed?" he says, looking her straight in the eye so that there's no confusion.

"Not really," she answers, "but if I have to say it, I guess so."

"I'll take that for a yes," Gilbert says, then directs her to sign the forms where he makes an "X". The woman barely has the energy to scribble her name as her strength fades in the cold mountain winds. As soon as she's done Gilbert gets to work filling in the "jurats"--the printed text by which he certifies to the authenticity of her barely-legible scrawl-before he stamps and seals the documents.



"This pen's almost out of ink!"

"There," he says with satisfaction. "That ought to hold you for now."

Remote notary publics, or "remotaries" for short, are finding themselves increasingly busy as hikers and climbers seek help by cell phone or personal digital assistants such as BlackBerries from mountain peaks and white-water rafting excursions when they find themselves in over their heads, sometimes literally. "It's expensive to go in and save someone's life," says New Hampshire Public Safety Director Armand Hershum, a state known for its parsimonious approach to public services. "I want to make sure somebody's going to cover overtime and coffee breaks for my rescue workers."



"I've got the documents-let's roll!"

Gilbert has come prepared with extra copies of the various forms and waivers that are required in order to dispatch an EMT to the scene, and he leaves the young couple with a set. "These are for your files," he says as he puts the cap back on his pen. "It's been nice taking your acknowledgement," he says as he stands up and straps his pack on his back and prepares to climb back up into the helicopter.

Huber is barely conscious, but fueled by outrage, she regains her voice. "Aren't you forgetting something?" she asks sarcastically, causing the notary to turn around and take in the scene of distress before him.

Gilbert bites his lower lip in embarrassment. "You're absolutely right--I'm so thoughtless sometimes." He removes his pack and rummages through it until he finds a waterproof plastic card.

"Let's see," he says as he scans down his rate sheet. "You signed two documents at \$1.25 each, so the notary fee is \$2.50."

