

If you only knew written by a proud paramedic

If you only knew the things that I have seen. All the tears that have dripped down my face as I worked what I was sure would be my last call, only to be wiped away by sweaty gloved hands. In this game, there is no time for tears.

If you only knew the sensation of being jolted awake, at 3am, time and time again. Until sleep no longer feels necessary to survive and your body, your mind, becomes numb. I am so tired of being numb.

If you only knew the weight of a wife as she crumbles to the floor when I pronounce her husband dead. In the very same spot that their young baby took his first steps just hours before. His first birthday cake still on the kitchen table and I feel my chest caving in. That weight is almost as heavy as the weight that I've carried on my shoulders since that day.

If you only knew the pain in my gut when I arrive on scene after a suicide. Blood and dreams scattered on the wall. Images that cannot ever be erased, for me or for them. I struggle with the thought that as a system maybe we could have done more, done better but yet, here we stand. It's too late now.

If you only knew how hungry and tired you can be after running calls for 23 hours straight, with no time to eat, sleep or even pee. You lose all sense of time. Sometimes even I forget how long I've been awake.

If you only knew the sound a mother makes as she watches her child slip away. We keep going, knowing that our efforts are in vein but we do them anyway. I think I would want that if it was my child. I always think of my own children as I cradle their little bodies, I wish I didn't, the thought is hard to bare.

If you only knew how frustrated I feel when we make our seventh trip to you in a single shift. The smell of alcohol seeps from your pores. I know your name and you know mine. You want our help but neither of us are sure in what capacity. I have tried so many times. I just wish you would let me help you.

If you only knew what it felt like to pull cold wet skin out of a river in the middle of winter. Shivering inside from the snow in the air, the soginess in your boots and the coldness you feel for trying not to feel. It chills you to the bone and makes you question everything you know.

If you only knew how scary it is to arrive on the scene of a shooting. Are they still here? Am I safe? Will I ever see my family again? I let the thoughts creep in but the patient needs me, deserves me, all of me. So, I brush my fear a side and trudge on. The fear is real but I do it anyway.

If you only knew how hard I studied, how many hours I spent in school and how much I actually know. Only to be called names or belittled by those who don't understand the work that I do. It's not easy. Grades and titles don't matter in the back of the truck.

If you only knew how hard I cry sometimes when I am alone. How much I can't leave behind and how much I struggle to overcome the things my eyes have seen and the words my mouth has said. I even can't make myself believe some of it's real.

If you only knew how much pride I feel, after I successfully intubate a tiny little trachea. Knowing that because of me they have a chance to survive. I wish I could see them now.

If you only knew how amazing it feels to use your brain, your hands and your skills in the back of a truck. To have NO other resources and somehow, somehow at 100kms per hour perform street miracles. It's the best part of the job.

If you only knew what the wet grass feels like under your knees, as you kneel in a ditch to calm a young teenage girl as she is cut from her mangled car. Through tear-filled eyes she tells you that you are the reason she is alive and how thankful she is for you. Although you try not to let the emotion come, it does and with her, it's okay.

If you only knew how much I love all this, the good and the bad, the ugly and the sad. If you only knew what a family I have here and somehow, through all of this, I find the ability to soldier on. Hungry, tired but standing tall. Armed with incredible colleagues, skilled hands and caring hearts.

If you only knew how proud I am to be a paramedic, to be a life changer, a life saver, an all too often forgotten hero.

If you only knew.

By Cindy Swart