

I Wish You Could

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I wish you could see the sadness of a business-man as his livelihood goes up in flames, or that family returning home, only to find their house and belongings damaged or destroyed.

I wish you could know what it is like to search a burning bedroom for trapped children, flames rolling above your head, your palms and knees burning as you crawl, the floor sagging under your weight as the kitchen beneath you burns.

I wish you could comprehend a wife's horror at 3 a.m. as I check her husband of 40 years for a pulse and find none. I start CPR anyway, hoping to bring him back, knowing intuitively that it is too late. But wanting his wife and family to know everything possible was done.

I wish you knew the unique smell of burning insulation, the taste of soot-filled mucus, the feeling of intense heat through your turnout gear, the sound of flames crackling, the eeriness of being able to see absolutely nothing in dense smoke ~ sensations that I have become too familiar with.

I wish you could understand how it feels to go to work in the morning after having spent most of the night, hot and soaking wet at a multiple alarm fire.

I wish you could read my mind as I respond to a building fire. "Is this a false alarm or a working, breathing fire? How is the building constructed? What hazards await me? Is anyone trapped? Or to an EMS call, "What is wrong with the patient?" Is it minor or life-threatening? Is the caller really in distress or is he or she waiting for us with a 2x4 or a gun?

I wish you could be in the emergency room as a doctor pronounces dead the beautiful five-year-old girl that I tried to save during the past 25 minutes. Who will never go on her first date or say the words "I love you, Mommy" again.

I wish you could know the frustration I feel in the cab engine, the driver with his foot pressing down hard on the pedal, my arm tugging again and again at the air horn chain, as you fail to yield the right of way at an intersection or in traffic. When you need us, however, your first comment upon our arrival will be, "It took you forever to get here!"

I wish you could know my thoughts as I help extricate a girl of teenage years from the mangled remains of her automobile. "What if this was my sister, my girlfriend, or a friend? What was her parents' reaction going to be when they opened the door to find a police officer with hat in hand?

I wish you could know how it feels to walk in the back door and greet my parents and family, not having the heart to tell them that I nearly did not come back from the last call I was on. I wish you could feel the hurt as people verbally and sometimes physically, abuse us or belittle what I do, or as they express their attitudes or "It will never happen to me."

I wish you could know the brotherhood and self-satisfaction of helping save a life, or preserving someone's property, of being there in time of crisis, or creating order from total chaos.

I wish you could understand what it feels like to have a little boy tugging at your arm and asking. "Is Mommy okay?" Not even being able to look in his eyes without tears from your own and not knowing what to say. Or to hold back a long-time friend who watches his buddy having rescue breathing done on him as they take him away in the ambulance. You know all along he did not have his seat belt on ~ Sensations I am too familiar with.

Unless you have lived with this kind of life, you will probably never truly understand or appreciate who I am, we are, or what our job really means to us.

... I WISH YOU COULD.