

"I am a police officer. When I get to work, my civilian clothes come off and my uniform goes on. It's uncomfortable and hot, dark colored and made of wool. I have to put on a bulletproof vest. I have two pairs of handcuffs, a small flashlight, a Taser, a baton, some extra magazines of bullets and a gun. I am trained to defend myself and others from serious harm or death. The uniform itself makes me a target of violence. Artists rap about killing me. Gangsters write on walls about doing the same. But I love this uniform.

"I am the person who comes when you call 911. I come with lights and sirens, driving fast, putting myself in danger, not knowing what I am driving to; a child just playing on the phone, husband or boyfriend beating his wife or girlfriend, neighbors arguing over a parking spot, or a parent whose child is acting up and they are so frustrated and desperate that they call us for the answer? Will I be taking someone to jail, mediating a dispute, or playing parent? Will I be yelled at, cursed at, spat on or attacked? Will they be happy to see me or angry that I am there?

"I have put a tarp over the body of a 7-year-old who stepped out in front of a car driving at least 40 miles an hour. I watched his blood wash away as it began to rain. I stood over the body of a middle-aged man who was riding his bicycle home from work and was struck by a teen driver who had two other teens in the car with her when she lost control.

"I get called when someone dies, even if it wasn't a crime. I have sat in houses with dead people for several hours, waiting for a family member if I was able to find one or a coroner's representative if I was not. Sometimes the family doesn't want to come at all. Sometimes they cry. Sometimes it seems they are annoyed that they now have to make arrangements. I have looked at the bodies of people who have overdosed on drugs, choked, hung themselves, shot themselves, or cut themselves.

"I have had to tell a sister that her little brother was shot in the back of the head while walking home. He died a half-block from home, killed by a Hispanic gangster because he was a Cambodian gangster.

"I've had people jump out of a second-floor window to get away from me. I have found people under beds, in closets, and in a shower after 'she' told me 'I swear he's not here. I am the only one inside.'

"I have found people in attics and garages. I've had people run from me, ride off on a bike, or not pull over in their car when I put on my lights and siren.

"I pursued a wanted parolee and a gangster for a half hour. He had methamphetamine in his system and in his pants pocket. He had stolen a 9mm handgun.

"People have run from me because they had drugs, guns, a warrant or they just didn't want a ticket.

"I have had to check people's backyards at night when they think they saw someone or heard a strange noise.

"I took a report of a gangster who was shot in the face and lived. I saw him again a year later and listened to him brag about how he could not be killed. He was shot and killed less than two weeks later at a party.

"I have arrested a 14-year-old girl for prostitution and an 80-year-old man for domestic violence. He had made his wife sleep in their cold garage with the dogs. They were both alcoholics.

"I kicked an alcoholic dad out of a motel room where he was living with his wife, three daughters and four sons. There was no kitchen, stove or refrigerator; only a cooler. An infant was being bottle-fed orange drink because their government assistance had already been spent that month. I took them grocery shopping.

"I took a 10-month-old child into protective custody. I found her lying on a bed with a pile of crack cocaine. I waited three hours for the `mother' to come home so I could arrest her.

"I found a man bleeding on a living-room floor, a loaded gun next to him. There were bullet holes all over the inside of the house. There were two duffle bags full of marijuana, a scale and small baggies. There was a Christmas tree and decorations. His wife and daughters were standing outside in the cold, crying. He survived what had been an attempted drug rip-off and is probably dealing drugs somewhere else today.

"I've jumped fences, kicked down a door, and broken my arm in three places.

"When I'm eating lunch or dinner, people have said, `My tax dollars don't pay you to eat.' I've had to throw my meal away to go to a call.

I've had co-workers scream for help and I have had to ask for help myself. I've been scared.

"I've worked on Christmas, New Year's Eve, Easter, Fourth of July and Halloween. I've dealt with the homeless, gangsters, drug dealers, prostitutes, victims, suspects, mothers, fathers, brothers and sisters, City Council members, doctors, lawyers, all walks of life.

"I have dealt with more harm, despair, hopelessness and death in the last four years of my life than you will your entire life.

"When I leave work, my uniform comes off and my civilian clothes are put back on. But my duty to `protect and serve' is still there.

"When I go out to dinner with my family, I have to check the restaurant for that gangster who told me to watch my back or for the boyfriend I arrested for beating up his girlfriend. When I go to the grocery store or the mall, I must do the same thing.

"In a public place, I will wonder why a guy is looking at me. Do I know him? Have I arrested him before? Does he actually recognize me? Should my family and I leave?

"When I walk into a bar or go to a party someone always yells, `Did somebody call the cops?' or some other smart remark they think I have never heard before.

"Friends make cop jokes. My family makes cop jokes. Someone always asks if I've had a doughnut, even though they have probably eaten more than me. People love to make fun of us. Some love to hate us.

"I don't enjoy writing you a ticket. I don't get paid more if I write more parking tickets. If I'm at your house because your party is too loud, it's because your neighbor called us.

"Don't hate the police because you've been given a speeding ticket when you know you were speeding. Don't hate the police because we arrested your boyfriend for beating you up; or because you got caught with drugs, a gun, in a stolen car, or for driving drunk. Don't hate us for your mistakes or poor choices. We don't write the laws, the politicians you vote for do.

"Don't hate us for yelling at you; there may be a reason for it. We may be looking for a bad guy. Or you may have said something smart to us or been drunk. Or maybe we just had a really bad day.

"I like some of the same bands you do. I like the same movies you do. I like parties and barbecues. I like hanging out with friends and family. I like sports, traveling, camping and reading. Do I sound much different than you?

"I am different..... I am a police officer."

Author Unknown