

# BLOOD, SWEAT & DEATH ARE ALL IN A DAY'S WORK

Ambulance driver Brian Kellett wrote a secret blog about the dangers he faced every day – then his cover was blown and his life changed overnight

SWITCHING ON THE flashing blue lights and siren of his ambulance, Brian Kellett leapt into the driver's seat and put his foot down. Any passers-by seeing the medical technician race through the streets of London must have assumed that he was on his way to a heart-attack victim, the scene of a brawl or a car crash.

Brian had been told over his radio that the 999 call was from "a man experiencing breathing difficulties". So what heart-stopping emergency did he find when he reached the house?

"A man with a verruca," says Brian, rolling his eyes in disbelief. "This man, in his late thirties, told me it was painful when he walked. I looked at his foot, told him he had a verruca and he said: 'Can you take me to hospital?' And there's nothing we could do except take him to the hospital. You can't refuse, you just have to do your job."

Contrast this, though, with the more brutal days.

"The most gruesome jobs are things like road accidents," he says. "I attended one where four of the five lads in a car had been killed and my ambulance was turned into a temporary mortuary."

"Then there are the alcoholics who die in the night, but projectile-vomit blood on to the ceiling before they pass away. At one flat, I thought there'd been a murder. There was blood on the ceiling, walls and floor – it turned out the guy simply

had a terrible nosebleed but it had gone everywhere." Does anything make him squeamish? "Not really," he says. "The things that keep me awake at night are turning up to a nursing home and seeing an old lady, all skin and bones, bleeding on a rubber mattress because the home doesn't want to waste clean sheets on her. Or the old man whose vomit hasn't been cleaned up for two weeks. That's what disgusts me."

## REAL-LIFE DRAMA

It's jaw-dropping anecdotes like these that made Brian's anonymous blog – detailing his life as an ambulance driver – compelling reading when he started it in 2003. Written under the pseudonym Tom Reynolds to protect both Brian's identity and those of his patients, the blog soon became a hit. He later turned it into a book, *Blood, Sweat & Tea*, which was followed by a sequel. Now, it's been made into a new Channel 4 comedy series, *Sirens*, starting this week.



Cop that: Stuart in *Sirens* with Sgt Maxine Fox (Amy Beth Hayes)

"HE ONLY HAD A VERRUCA, BUT WE HAD TO TAKE HIM TO HOSPITAL"

"I'm excited but also petrified – it's changed my life," he says. "There are three characters in the show and I'd say I'm most like Stuart [played by Rhys Thomas, who appeared in *Bellamy's People*], just much nerdier. When I went to see the rehearsals, I looked around the room with 60 people all reading the script and thought: 'Wow, they're all here because of something I've done.' That

was pretty incredible."

Brian, 39, who lives in East London, joined the ambulance service in 2002 after working as a nurse for eight years.

"I liked the fresh air and I liked medical stuff, so I worked out I could do both in the ambulance service," he says. "But the first time I drove one while training, I crashed it. The vehicle is 8ft wide and I tried to get it through a 7ft 11in gap. It was just a few scrapes and I got told off by my instructor, but at least I learned my lesson early on."

It may not have been the best start but from then on, Brian spent eight years dealing with all kinds of sick and injured people.

"The best thing about the job is that there's no such thing as a typical week," he says. "During the day you're probably going to get called out to an elderly person having trouble breathing or a chest pain patient, while at night there will be countless drunks who have been injured somehow."

"There are the frustrating calls, like the times I've had to deal with the fourth drunk of my shift who's fallen asleep in someone's garden while I can hear on the radio there's a sick child needing help."

"Or the time that a 98-year-old man had been waiting for three hours laid flat out in the snow with a broken hip while I was tending to a 19-year-old man who had a bit of a runny nose. You can't believe how stupid people can be."

Brian admits the most satisfying call-outs were when he could give comfort to someone in need.

"I really enjoy helping old people who have simply fallen down in the night and need assistance getting back to their feet," he says. "We dust them off, check



The Sirens crew: (l-r) Ashley (Richard Madden), Stuart (Rhys Thomas) and Rachid (Kayvan Novak)

Brian Kellett and his TV alter ego Stuart

THE BEST THING IS THAT THERE'S NO SUCH THING AS A TYPICAL WEEK

them over for any injury, make them a cup of tea and put them back to bed. That's brilliant. You leave the house, the person doesn't need hospital attention and you've made a real difference. That's a great feeling.

"Once we were called to a flat because a lady's dog had died. She'd got home from work, found the dog in her flat and started having an anxiety attack. It was about 9pm, so we comforted her and took the dog away in our ambulance. It might not have been a medical emergency but she was genuinely distressed and it felt good to be able to help her."

## RUMBLER

Sadly, Brian – who has now left the ambulance service and returned to nursing – says that 80 per cent of the calls he attended were time-wasters.

"There's one we call a maternal-taxi," he says. "Pregnant women who have had one contraction and call us because they've seen what birth is like on *EastEnders* and think the baby is on its way in

seconds. Rather than get a cab, they decide to call us instead."

He was on annual leave on the day of the 7/7 bombings in 2005, but when he heard the news, he rang in and covered a station in East London. With many of his colleagues already at the scene

of the terrorist attack, all Brian could do was wait to be despatched elsewhere.

"It was strange – I only got one call and that was a mum giving birth. There were no other calls – no cases of breathing difficulties, no chest pains," he recalls. "Bizarrely, I've seen this before. When a major event happens, the A&E department is empty. But as soon as it's over, patients start arriving with chest pains."

"My theory is that 80 per cent of people who call an ambulance don't need one; another ten per cent need medical help but could get to hospital on their own; while the remaining ten per cent really do need our help. When something like 7/7 happens, the 80 per cent wait until it's all over to call us."

Although he started writing the blog anonymously "as a chance to rant and moan about stuff", his

cover was blown in 2004 when he swallowed some HIV-positive blood that had splattered on him from a patient. It was a worrying time and he was given antiretroviral drugs to try to kill any infection.

"I wasn't as scared as you might think," he says. "I hoped I hadn't swallowed enough blood to be in any immediate danger. Plus, the drugs they gave me should have caught it in time, although there's always the risk they won't. But because I wrote about it on the blog, some people put two and two together and realised it was me."

"I was terrified I'd been found out, but then I got a call from my boss saying: 'Keep up the good work!'"

## 25% OFF!

Brian's two books have been turned into a new compilation, *Sirens* (£8.99, *The Friday Project*), and *buzz* readers can buy it for £6.74 – that's 25% off, plus free P&P. Call 0844 576 8122 and quote ref: SR01.



WATCH IT! **SIRENS** MONDAY 10PM CHANNEL 4