

# Just pull the damn trigger

With a gun shoved in my mouth, I was ready for the end

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Becoming a cop was my dream



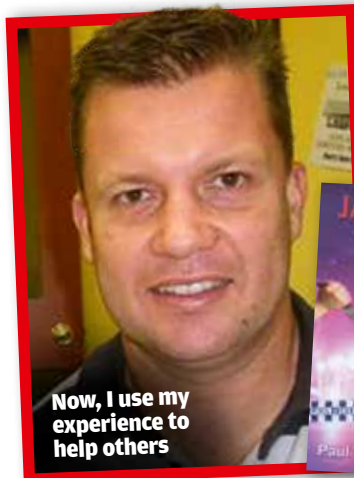
I could have been killed by my attacker

**M**y stomach lurched when I saw two dead bodies on the car seats. They looked like ragdolls. Blood was everywhere. One survivor had a leg bone protruding from his flesh. "You okay?" my colleague asked, sensing my distress. "Yeah, sure," I croaked, taking out my notepad. It was my first car crash after fulfilling my childhood dream of graduating from the NSW Police Academy. I felt sick. But afterwards, it was straight to the next job. Dealing with a huge angry bloke at my first domestic dispute, I fought to stop myself from shaking. I had to harden up if I was going to be any good at my job. By the time I was transferred to Bourke, I'd attended the scenes of numerous fatal accidents, violent domestics, suicides and murders. I didn't realise, but I'd changed. "You don't show emotion," my wife said. Sadly, she was right. One day out on patrol, my colleagues and I were surrounded by angry youths throwing bottles.

Suddenly, I felt a sharp pain, then dizziness. I stumbled and clutched my face. It was covered in blood. A 14-year-old boy had thrown a glass bottle full of liquid at me. I suffered a broken nose and teeth, but he could've killed me. For me, it was the beginning of the end. Constantly terrified for my life, I experienced nightmares of the hundreds of traumatic scenes I'd witnessed, and I'd started to drink. My marriage broke down, and I moved to join the force in Byron Bay.

A few weeks later, I attended a fatal car accident involving a two-year-old girl. "Don't stop CPR!" I begged a nurse, who'd pulled over to help. I couldn't face telling the parents, who escaped relatively unscathed. "She's gone," she said. At home, I didn't cry; I drank. Later, at a different car crash, I held a severely injured woman in my arms. "Everything will be okay," I said to her. But her eyes rolled back and blood spilled from her mouth. She was gone. I couldn't take it anymore. I went into the toilets at work, sat down and put my gun in my mouth. As I sat there, with tears in my eyes and my hand trembling, I started to squeeze the trigger.

In the police force, I was discharged with post-traumatic stress disorder. It was hard giving it up, but I decided to help others by giving talks about the disorder, explaining the warning signs. I even wrote a book, *Jack Knife - The Crashing of a Policeman*. Being a police officer was my dream, but it became a nightmare. It's easy to criticise cops when you're pulled over for speeding. But that officer might have just told someone their child is dead, held a dying person or been assaulted. So please, with National Police Remembrance Day coming up on September 29, take a moment to consider what officers go through on your behalf. Maybe then, instead of hurling abuse, you'll say "thank you".



Now, I use my experience to help others



*Do it, Paul, just a little bit more, I thought. But I couldn't. My colleagues didn't need to deal with my mess on top of their other work. I sought help and, after 11 years*

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