

Dear Mom,

This is gonna be hard for you to read. If you're reading this then something has happened and you got a phone call that no parent should ever have to get. Before you go on and read this, go find the Crescent City Fire Dept. shirt I got Bryan for Christmas one year, and put it on. Those are my colors, and my department, and somehow in my mind I feel like it will be easier for you to read this while wearing it because I'll be closer to you. Maybe it's stupid, but just do it. Seriously. Do not pass go, do not collect \$200, until you're wearing it.

Got it on? Okay.

I obviously don't know what happened, but something went wrong somewhere and now I'm gone. I love you and I miss you! I hope I went out doing something really awesome like saving someone's life in a fire or cutting someone out of their car while upside down on the highway while intubating them. You know I live for that kind of stuff! In all seriousness though, I love what I do. I don't know what I love more, fighting fire or being a paramedic. I can't decide anymore. Each of them has their highs and lows. Nothing is like the rush of being first due engine on a fire and grabbing that cross lay (quick response hose) with your captain behind you and feeling the hose come alive as you call for water from the engineer and knock down the fire before another engine shows up. Nothing is like it! But nothing is like working a critical patient while going code 3 on the highway doing a million things at once! If that's how I went, well, I went out with my boots on doing what I love. I'm good with that!

It's a common phrase and I'm sure I've said it to you before, but EMS and Firefighting aren't careers, they are callings. I can't picture doing anything else in my life. At one point in my life, it was something I could have walked away from, I think. It's 2011 when I'm writing this and that means I've been at EMT for over 5 years now and a firefighter for only 6 months. Lord only knows how long I've been doing them if you're reading this. I can't NOT do this. I have too. It's who I am. I love field work, and I have never been happier in my entire life than when I'm out in the field. I tell people every day that I happen to be fortunate enough to be a person who gets up every day and loves going to work and doing what I do. Not many people in this world have that, but I do. Ha ha, you kept dragging me into the outdoors since I was in diapers, so I guess it figures that I love to work outdoors. I guess I just want you to know that; I love what I do and it's a part of me and who I am. It's not just a job or a volunteer thing for me. I need to do it, it's part of my life and soul and I would (or did) give my life to save someone else's.

I couldn't have done it without you though. All those years of doctor's appointments, and blood work and tests. I still hate hospitals and I was probably the worst patient in the world. But I also didn't ever treat my patients like I was treated. I've held hands many times. I've hugged family members while they cried on my shoulder. I've looked people in the eye and told them it would be okay and I was going to help them. I get all that from you. It wasn't until later in life I realized how hard it must have been for you. But you showed me how to fight and never give up! You're so strong mom! I have no idea how you were able to do it all! I also remember thinking "why me?" and wondering what was God's purpose for all this, but I think that without all that you and I went through, we wouldn't be where we are today. I know it was preparing you for your hands, and your caring for Grandma, and me to be the kind of medic I am and care so much about others. I know that God will keep showing me more reasons why we both went through it, even from above. I know God had a plan for me and my life. He told me that in Jeremiah 29 vs. 11, "For I know the plans I have for you, declares the Lord, plans for welfare and not for evil, to give you a future and a hope." I just hope I used my experiences to help others.

This letter is so hard to write. I don't know what to say. I want to say so much, but I know that I can never say enough. Please don't be mad at the fire industry or EMS, it's not their fault that I'm gone. They told me the risks before I started each of them. I knew the risks and I chose my career anyways. It's not their fault that I love organized chaos and doing what many people say is crazy. I wouldn't have been happy doing something else. It's not their fault, even if it was an accident, you have no idea how hard it is when you're in the moment and stuff is going down. Just don't be mad at them, please.

I don't know what else to say other than this:

Thank you for being the best mom ever. Thank you for dragging me outside. Thanks for keeping Cole busy while I was fishing with grandpa when I was maybe 3. Thanks for baseball in Grandma's backyard with your pop, and teaching me how to swim. For shooting my first pistol with you, and letting me tickle your feet till you couldn't take it anymore. Thanks for teaching me how to bake. Thank you for making me walk to school, and for picking me up from school when it was too hot or raining. Thank you for AWANA and all of the craziness that was Dad and Terry Ruiz. Thank you for soccer and always helping me find my lucky hat. Thank you for painting my room on Wagner in 101 Dalmatians. Thank you for hooked on phonics and the star stickers that made learning to read fun! Thank you for letting me name the dog (Pepper) and getting her cause she reminded me of a Dalmatian. Thank you for dragging me out into the woods and showing me so many cool places that I have forgotten some of

them. Thank you for my curfew and never letting me spend the night at a boy's house, no matter how much I screamed and yelled at you. Thank you for staying strong while I screamed and yelled at you. Thank you for always being able to talk out our problems and laugh and cry together. Thank you for marrying a man that is a second dad to me. Thank you for the hours and hours of coffee time and the thousands upon thousands of pots of coffee (French roast forever!). Thank you for the over charges on my cell phone because we get so into catching up and talking that before I know it, it's been 2 hours and I've drank all the coffee. I could go on and on, but above all:

Thank you for dragging me to church.

I'm gone now. I'm sorry that I am and I'm sorry that this has happened. I'm with the Lord now; I picture myself on my knees at His throne singing my favorite praise song "Here I Am to Worship" in heaven. I wouldn't be here with God if it wasn't for you, you saved my soul from the devil and I am with our Lord right now because of it.

You're going to feel lonely and sad and cry a whole bunch, but I want you to remember this: I died doing what I love and helping people, and I'm with the Lord now and I get to start the best part of my life now! I'm gonna ask God so many questions and lucky for me his patience batteries never need recharging! Please don't mourn me. Remember me, remember the great times we had and all you taught me and showed me, but don't mourn me. I'll find Pop and we will be watching and waiting till we see you up here! I'll keep your new hands warm and ready for you so that when you get up here you can wrap them around me in a big hug! Don't forget, I'll always be with you in your heart and soul, and if you get to missing me too much, well you have some of my favorite Starbucks cups and French Roast in the freezer.

I love you, Mom!

Michelle Tarwater, Certified Flight Paramedic
(1986-2016)