

I'm not expecting fame! I just did my job and forgot about the TV cameras...

Katrina Sheerin from Paramedics has seen plenty in her time (she used to work in a bar)

by **Michelle Fleming**

SIX foot one Katrina Sheerin spent years working in clubs in Dublin. But, at 30, she decided to join the National Ambulance Service. At 34, she's now one of the stars of Paramedics, a new TV3 series following the emergency workers who dedicate their lives to saving ours. When she is not racing to emergencies from her base at the HSE Eastern Region Ambulance Service in Shankill, Bray, she is home with her sheepdog Molly, in Carrick-on-Shannon.

WORKING for years in some of Dublin's busiest pubs, nightclubs and hotels, I saw plenty of fights, stabbings, burns and seizures.

But while some staff panicked, I always kept a cool head and swung into first-aid mode. I remember when I used to see disasters being covered on the news, I thought

'I could do that'. Who doesn't want to save a life, after all?

Back then, however, I never imagined one day I would be working as a paramedic for a living — and loving every second of it. I worked in pubs since I was 13 and after school moved into the hotel industry, before taking a job at HQ at the Irish Music Hall of Fame (now The Academy) and later The George and Bad Bobs, as a manager. Wherever I was working, I always put myself forward for first aid and fire marshal training. It came naturally to me to deal with chaotic situations and I really enjoyed it.

In 2007, I was travelling in Australia and while I was out there, I heard they were recruiting for the ambulance service back home. I was 28 at the time and had decided I wanted to get out of the pub and club game when I returned to Ireland. The 12-hour shifts, six days a week are physically and mentally exhausting and I always knew I didn't want to do it forever.

THE Ambulance Service really appealed to me but I wasn't eligible, as I hadn't completed my D1 or C1 driving licence. When I returned home, I began my lessons, so I'd be ready for the next recruitment drive and **I joined the**

Search & Rescue division of the Civil Defence — it's not only an incredibly worthy cause but a fantastic way of getting a taste of whether you are ready for the ambulance service.

I loved it. We trained on Wednesday nights and some weekends, doing abseiling and rescue drills, and the whole experience made me sure that the ambulance service was right for me.

I applied in 2011, did an aptitude test followed by an interview — and was accepted. I was over the moon and couldn't wait to throw myself into the studying and the exams.

No two days are ever the same. Every job has its challenges and rewards but I particularly enjoy assisting with delivering babies and coming to the aid of older people. I've helped deliver three babies at home and there is nothing in life more rewarding. The mother sent me a picture of a baby I helped deliver the other day — he's six months old now. Within ten minutes of arriving at her home, we knew the baby was on its way. You can't deliver a baby on the move and she was ready. There were no complications, and it was such an emotional, fantastic feeling, hearing the baby's

first cry and watching the father cutting the chord. Part of our training is to assist in maternity



nospitals and we are prepared for any complications.

At another birth, the baby came a few weeks early. The woman had travelled up to Dublin from Sligo with her husband and children and they were staying at her parents' house when she went into labour at 4am. If you planned for a home birth, you couldn't have asked for a more perfect one, with her whole family around.

I also find helping older people — especially those living on their own with no family — extremely rewarding. They may have broken their hip or been laying on the floor for a day with not as much as a cup of tea. It's a horrible

experience for anyone, so it's so lovely being able to go in, tell them they are safe and reassure them you are there to look after them. Sometimes they are fine and you just sit there with them a while talking. That means an awful lot to people.

I'm rostered to do 13 shifts, or 156 hours a month, so I might do four 12-hour shifts for three weeks and three shifts for four weeks. This suits me very well as I moved to Carrick-on-Shannon last year.

I love it down there — you never see stars like that in the city.

I grew up in Dublin's Inchicore but my dad is from Roscommon and growing up we spent every summer and weekend there. It's where my heart is and I've loads of relations in the area. When I was 19, I bought an old stone cottage in

the middle of nowhere, in dire need of renovation. I'm still renovating it! I'm single at the moment so I live there with my sheepdog Holly.

I stay with my parents in Inchicore when I'm on my long shifts and then head off for a few days, so I only commute a couple of times a week. I'm rostered to finish at 7pm but we could get a call at 6.55pm and you may not be back until after 9pm. Most paramedics never plan anything in the evening as you never know when a late call will come in. You never moan about it — you just go and do it.

Children always affect you that bit

more and cardiac arrests and heroin overdoses are very common and always challenging, but every emergency has different challenges and you need to deal with everything as it comes. You get a tough call every day. There's nothing we can't deal with and I know there's treatment and something I can do for everyone. I saved one person who overdosed on heroin, but two were

not successful. After every call I think back over the steps I took and whether I did everything correctly and if I can say 'yes, I did everything I could' and did it by the book, then I can walk away knowing I did everything I possibly could for that person. You can't beat yourself up when things don't work out as you hope but it is extremely difficult. It can be emotional and you have the 'what ifs?' as we all do in any tragedy. We are no different but we have a fantastic support network. If we come back from a difficult call there's always a peer support worker in base or on the phone, and there's a counselling system if we're feeling under pressure.

Every one of us has been to challenging cases and we all sit down and talk cases through. In this job you grow especially close to your colleagues and partners, particularly if you have the same partner for weeks. You go through the difficult calls together and you never forget that and it's lovely to be able to ring one another and say: 'I was feeling low about that'. You have a chat and feel a bit brighter about it. We have a lot of fun and laughs too, which is really good outlet. Spending 12 hours a day with someone, in the ambulance, eating together, at the hospital — they're long days, so you forge very close friendships. We're like one big family.

I enjoy filming with Paramedics but I'm not in it a huge amount. Who was filmed depended on who was working on the day the camera crews came in. I'm not expecting any fame! When we were filming call-outs, it was fine as you do your job with the patient and forget about the cameras but I remember one day in the kitchen they turned the cameras on and I was so nervous just buttering a bit of toast with the cameras on me.

THINK the show is a brilliant way of educating the public on what exactly paramedics do. A lot of people are not aware we are highly qualified medical professionals. Some people treat us as a taxi service, which is not their fault, so I hope

the show dispels this idea.

The truth is, with all the training we have now and the medications we are qualified to administer, we're like a mini-hospital at the side of the road. Patients in need receive a massive amount of care before they reach the hospital.

A few years ago an ambulance driver went out along with a nurse but now we're all drivers and we're all trained. For example, we can give medications to dissolve clots in heart attack victims before we get to the hospital and we are qualified to give medication to seizure victims, whereas in the past we simply had to let a seizure run its course.

Another major change is going straight to the lab with heart attack victims, where they are immediately angiogrammed, instead of going to the emergency department and this greatly increases their survival chances. Advanced paramedics are qualified in lots of other areas, including giving IV cannulas and certain drugs we may not be able to administer.

Now we are in constant contact with the hospital en route to tell them what treatments have been given and what to expect, so they can have the correct medical specialists on stand-by. As for cuts to the health service, they don't directly affect us. The service will always be there. There are always frustrations in every organisation but as a service our patient care and treatment has not been affected. When I joined the ambulance service, I didn't know what to expect — but I never thought I'd enjoy it as much as I do. I've never yet had a day where I didn't want to go to work. Changing my career was the best decision I ever made.

■ **PARAMEDICS** is on TV3 next Thursday at 9pm



out TAKE

The origin of the word ambulance is from the early 19th century French words meaning 'mobile (horse-drawn) field hospital' – hôpital ambulat



Loves her job: Katrina Sheerin from TV3's Paramedics

