

Burn Victim Triumphs with Help From Family and Friends

He didn't see it coming; the flash of flames that would turn what should have been a great summer into an exercise in pain tolerance and patience. Tom Christiansen was celebrating the end of his junior year in college around a bonfire on a beautiful summer night with friends. Unbeknownst to him, someone walked up behind him and over Tom's right shoulder threw gas from a five gallon tank onto the fire. The flames shot up, he tried to jump back but was caught in the middle of the flames; vapors from the gas burning Tom's skin. The first 8-9 seconds he felt nothing, and then it came – severe pain. Pain he would feel for months and months to come. He spent the next seven weeks in and out of the burn center at Regions Hospital. He had lost all the skin from his shins on down and suffered 2nd degree burns on other areas of his legs.

The friend who threw the gas on the fire was uninsured. He felt bad, but when it came time to help with any bills, he didn't have the money. Tom talked with three different lawyers who all said he didn't have a case if the kid was uninsured. Three weeks after the accident, Tom was paging through a burn magazine at the hospital and saw an ad for Soucie and Bolt; he thought he would try one last time.

Soucie and Bolt attorney Terry Peterson went to visit Tom at his parent's house in Prescott,

Wisconsin. "Terry is a wonderful guy. He listened to my story and initially thought the same thing as the other lawyers, but unlike them, said he would look into it further and see what he could do. A couple of days later he called to say we had a case. The guy that threw the gas was insured under his parents' homeowner's policy, so that enabled us to seek damages."

While Terry worked on the case, Tom continued with treatment. Over the course of two months, he had prescriptions for 462 pills, including many hardcore painkillers. When he went off the pills, he couldn't sleep for almost 2 months straight, typically sleeping only 90 minutes a night. The pain was excruciating. When he had to go in to have the burns cleaned, he would turn pale, break out in a cold sweat and start shaking in anticipation of the pain. Through it all, Terry was there, as well as the rest of the firm.

"With Terry it never felt like I was working with a lawyer, it felt like I was working with a family member. Every time I called the office, whoever answered would ask how I was doing and how I was feeling. Everybody knew who I was and what was happening. They operate like a family too, except there isn't any bickering! Everyone has high expectations for themselves and each other and that carries over into how they treat their clients."

Tom never wanted to sue his friend, saying you couldn't have offered him any amount of money to tolerate that sort of pain or compensate for it, but his life and the life of his parents had been

turned upside down. Needing help with everything from standing to bathing, his mother became his around the clock nurse. Sometimes it took half an hour just to get him standing upright; it was a hard situation for everyone to be in. The medical bills began to pile up and the gas money alone to make the trip to Regions Hospital every day was taking a huge toll on their finances.

It took a little less than a year to settle the case. The insurance company didn't want to pay anything, but Terry pushed them and Tom received \$10,000 more than he had ever hoped to get.

"If you've gone through a traumatic experience, you need to call Soucie and Bolt. Even if Terry isn't available, anybody there will do a great job for you. I never felt like I was walking into a building and told to take a seat. Everybody knew who I was and they really cared about what was happening to me."

Tom was able to return to school in the fall. He had a handicapped sticker because he was unable to walk far, had to have accommodations in the rooms to keep his feet elevated and tried to tough it out during class without painkillers so he could concentrate.

"I couldn't have gone through this with anybody else – I wasn't just another client to Terry. He brought me in, treated me like a real person and always made me feel welcome and important. I felt like I was the only one they were working with the whole time. It was a really good feeling at a really bad time."

...because bad things happen to good people

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Safety Tips Worth Repeating

Mom is the Best Fire Alarm

A study by the Columbus Children's Hospital concluded that having smoke alarms in your home does little to ensure that your children will hear it and react. The study showed that 23 out of the 24 children (ages 6-12) woke up to the sound of their mother's voice, but only 14 of the 24 awoke to the sound of an alarm.

Those that did wake up to the alarm did so after three minutes compared to 20 seconds when they heard their mother's voice. Manufacturers of smoke alarms took notice and there are now voice alarms on the market. Investing in one could mean the difference between your child waking up during a fire or simply rolling over and going back to sleep.

Teens, Driving and Cell Phones

We feel comforted knowing our children have a cell phone with them in case of car trouble or other

emergencies. But what if the very cell phone we give them for protection actually was more likely to cause them harm? In a survey of 1,000 teenagers between the ages of 16 and 17 conducted by AAA and *Seventeen* magazine, 46% admitted to text messaging while driving and another 51% admitted to talking on their cell phone while driving. The distraction caused by cell phone use while driving has been documented repeatedly by numerous organizations including the National Highway Safety Administration. We need to stop our

teens from putting themselves into avoidable danger, as motor vehicle crashes remain the leading cause of death for 15 to 20 year olds.

Helmet Heads

Trauma to the head represents more than 80% of all the injuries to children older

than 1 year of age and trauma is the leading cause of death in children in the United States. Bicycle accidents account for the highest number of head injuries numbering over 151,000 per year. If helmets were worn, the number of head injuries could be reduced by 85% according to the Consumer Safety Product Commission. Helmets should also be worn for all contact sports: skiing, snowboarding, horseback riding and any other activity where a fall or blow to the head could cause serious injury or death.

As always, if you know of someone who has been injured or killed in an accident, car collision, electrical or power line incident, or other circumstance that requires expert legal help, please call us at 763 427 8888.

