

A Family's Remembrance of Tragedy Brings Thoughts of Gratitude



In 1992, our son, Jack, was burned over 35% of his body (photo, left), when he was seven months old, with third degree burns. I was in graduate school at Erskine College, and my wife, Jennifer, was teaching to support our family. One day, I picked Jack up from daycare at lunch. When we arrived home, I placed him in a walker in the kitchen and left to get a bib. Suddenly, I heard a loud crash. Jack had reached the crockpot electrical cord, pulling it directly on top of him.

We rushed Jack to Abbeville County Hospital. He was then flown by helicopter to Humana Burn Center in Augusta, GA, where they said Jack was the youngest patient with third degree burns they had ever treated. His chance of survival was minimal, they told us.

Faced with incredible medical costs, we were lost. Then, a Shriner in Gastonia, NC introduced us to the Shriners burn program. Within days, we arrived at SHC - Cincinnati, the Shriner's Midwest burn center. Ironically, we discovered that the Chief of Surgery there, Dr. Henry Neale, was the brother-in-law of one of my graduate school professors at Erskine.

We were informed early on that Jack would need additional release surgeries as he grew, and we were given certain exercises to help him with joint movement. Jack never had any additional surgery. Actually, over the years, Jack played USTA tennis for 10 years, International tennis, and NCAA II in college. Today, he is a successful businessman in Charleston, SC and is getting married on June 4, 2016 (photo, below).

For almost 18 years, Jack was cared for by the Cincinnati Shriners Hospital. Their team of medical professionals would travel to Charlotte, NC every year for check-ups. Interestingly, Jack looked forward to his annual check-up, hoping to see Dr. Neale again. How many children do you know who look forward to doctor's visits?

It takes special people to care for children who have been burned. Our family was incredibly blessed to have been the recipient of such amazing care, at no cost. To this day, I thank every Shriner I see and tell them about Jack's experience. I give, as well, to every event I know that Shriners are sponsoring.

What many may not realize is that the Shriners Hospitals are not just about medical care: they are about *total* care, for the patient and his family. Without the Shriners, our family would have been absolutely decimated with medical costs. Jack would not have received the pressure garments or the care that enabled him to be a child who lived a full life.

We will never be able to repay the Shriners for the care they provided to Jack and us, but we will certainly try. -Dr. and Mrs. Jay West



Note: Dr. West is a partner in a commercial appraisal practice in Anderson, SC. The company was contacted about appraising some property in SC by SHC - Headquarters, where he shared Jack's story. Staff members there passed it on for *Shrinelines* for publication. We are honored to tell this touching story by Dr. West, for in mission, care, cooperation, we as a Shriners Hospital system are a singularity. Every hospital is honored by the successes of others. Thank you, Dr. and Mrs. West--and thanks to our colleagues at SHC - Cincinnati. And congratulations to Jack and his bride!

