

One Death, Many Losses

by Tammy Miser

That fatal night

The phone rang late October 29, 2003. I was nearby and heard Mark say, “ There was a blast at Hayes Lemmerz.” I immediately thought “not again” then my mind switched to Shawn. “Oh my God it’s Shawn, it’s Shawn isn’t it?”

Jeff (a co-worker and friend) stayed with Shawn until he was rushed to Fort Wayne. Unable to contact family members Mark called the St. Joseph hospital and they did have a young unidentified male. Mark began by giving the nurse a description of Shawn, she informed us the male had no body hair and 3rd degree burns over most of his body. Ultimately Shawn was identified by apparent weight and body structure alone.

My family drove 5 hours; the whole while I was thinking to myself, praying to myself it wasn’t Shawn and feeling sorry for the family who would have to deal with this. Arriving at the hospital my heart sank and walking in I felt my legs give. My Mother was waiting at the elevators to warn us Shawn was barely recognizable and lead the way.

We walked toward the room and were met by the hospitals Chaplin; he expressed his condolences and cautioned us of Shawn’s war like condition. I thought to myself, “Shawn is a tough cookie, he’ll do fine, I’ll take him home and I’ll care for him”. Walking in I saw Shawn’s face peeking out of the blankets then I gave everyone a hug and gained the courage to confront Shawn. My God Shawn was swollen and his face was splitting but I could still tell it was him, I could still see his cute little nose and the remnants of his light red eyebrows. I started to lift the blankets and my mother stopped me, the Doctors refused to bandage his body; they told her there was nothing left to save.

Mom proceeded to tell me they waited on us, waited on us for what? They planned to take Shawn off his breathing apparatus. I didn’t want them to take Shawn off, I loved him, I would take him home, I would take him if they had to take his arms and legs and I couldn’t believe they would even suggest that. I knew Shawn wouldn’t want to live that way but I didn’t care. Maybe he changed his mind or maybe he didn’t know how much we all loved him or how much we would miss him. We did let Shawn go that morning; it was the hardest thing I ever had to do. I still feel the guilt of killing my brother; he may have been that

one with the power to overcome and we did not give him that chance.

Shawn's last moments

Shawn and a couple of others went in to relight the furnace (this was normal for Hayes because they had fires on a daily basis) and they all decided to stick around a few minutes to make sure everything was ok. Things seemed fine so they went back to gather tools. Shawn was directly behind the furnace with his back toward the furnace when the first explosion occurred. Some stated that Shawn got up and started walking toward the doors (this cannot be confirmed) then there was a second and more intense blast. The heat from the blast was hot enough to melt copper piping (1084.62 °C / 1984.32 °F). Shawn did not die instantly like one would think, he laid on building floor smoldering while the aluminum dust continued to burn through his flesh and muscle tissue. The breaths that he took while in the building burned his internal organs. Thank God the blast took his eyesight. My brother had no nerve endings and was a fleshy carcass. Shawn was still conscious and asking for help when the ambulance took him.

The kind of person Shawn was

Shawn was 33, never married, had no children; he was a great host, loved company and would do anything for anyone. Shawn enjoyed his nieces and nephew; he loved to entertain them buying a pool and an old tractor for their entertainment. He bought my oldest daughter her first car and took her out driving many times. He was especially thrilled when I had my son calling him "The Boy".

Shawn was proud of his county home, his English bulldog (Duchess) and the fact that he was going back to school. Shawn took pride in everything he did and enjoyed life to it's fullest. He enjoyed football, racing, model trains and digging things up from anywhere to see if it could be fixed and give it to someone in need. Shawn was always trying something new just to see if he could do it and was childlike in his excitement. Shawn was a kind and loving Son, brother, uncle and friend

The system & accountability

The employer would not return calls and/or mail more than likely because they

had been advised by lawyers to have minimal contact. IOSHA issued Safety Orders alleging that Hayes Lemmerz International-Huntington, Inc. violated the Indiana Occupational Safety and Health Act. The fines totaled \$42,000, representing seven serious violations, to be paid to IOSHA in three payments of \$14,000, with the last payment being made no later than 60 days past May 10, 2004. Hayes Lemmerz was also to make a donation to the St. Joseph burn unit. OSHA concluded Hayes Lemmerz did not show plain indifference or intentional disregard in Shawn's case. They came to this conclusion by consulting with the Labor Board and lawyers. Indiana workers or their surviving family members cannot sue their employers in civil court but may bring a claim before Indiana Workers Compensation Board, and a civil law judge will review the case and determine a financial settlement. Shawn was not eligible for any such a payment because he was unmarried and had no children.

All these decisions about my brother's death were made without one word to his family or any input from us being considered. Shawn valued higher education and children; I felt he would have rather a donation be given for college scholarships, there are still no new or planned regulations for flammable dust and there were no moneys paid out in Shawn's behalf making it cheaper and easier to kill someone than it is to fix an issue.

A workplace death is so different from any other. Normally if someone is killed you know someone is responsible, they will go to trial and be held accountable. In a workers death there is almost never any accountability.

The after effects

A sister

I have dealt with death before but none has compared to this. I truly felt dead inside, as though I no longer occupied my body. I was physically ill, couldn't eat, sleep, or focus. The numbness of it all even affected my hearing. I couldn't believe we just let Shawn go; we should have protected him, he was alone and I will never see him again. No more Hey Sis!, dreams of red headed nieces and nephews, and famous deep fried turkeys. Shawn will never know how much I genuinely loved him.

Being a parent there are very few people in life that you feel will care for your children as well as you. Who will love them, respect them, give them a good

moral system, be there for them in their time of need and share their accomplishments. Shawn was to be the caregiver of my children if ever anything happened to my husband and I, now I have the burden of not knowing what will happen to my children if I am no longer able to.

I didn't just lose a brother I lost part of my support line; he was a treasured friend. Shawn came to my home and called many times knowing I was the only one there, we had coffee and talked about almost anything. He never judged me as a mother, sister or wife he just gave his opinion if asked. If I ever need Shawn he was just a call away.

They say that time heals but I'm not so sure. I feel that time numbs, like watching a shocking movie and replaying the crime scene over and over in your mind until somehow it doesn't seem as terrifying and no longer influences your heart. If the effects of time are allowed who will stand up, who will fight for children's future right to a safe and hazard free workplace and who will truly be there for other families in need. For now I choose to keep my pain, a piece of the anger and guard my heart from the calluses of tragedy.

A nephew

My five-year-old son was the hardest to deal with after losing Shawn. Shawn was like a second father to Zak, always taking the time to make him feel gifted, as if he was essential in his life. When I stop and think about it: I really don't think I have ever seen an Uncle as proud of his nieces and nephew as Shawn.

Zak felt God could do anything and he would bring Shawn back when that failed, all he needed was a star or magic; he became desperate and stated he wanted to die so he could see Shawn again. We finally convinced him that we loved him and needed him here with us. Zak still has nightmares on a daily basis and is petrified of hospitals feeling that once someone goes in they never come out. His fear is that we will go to work and never come home. Zak's biggest concern is that Shawn will forget him or he will forget Shawn. Zak has lost an uncle, second father and mentor.

A mother

My Son Shawn Duane Boone
by Hope Mock

October 29 2003 I got a call from my Daughter (Tammy) and Son-in-law (Mark) telling me Shawn was in an accident at work, after calling three or four hospitals we finally found out where he was. They said that we better get there as soon as possible. When we got there; the Doctors said there was no hope. They said they weren't going to do anything to try to save him and they were not even going to bandage his wounds. I told them I didn't want to hear any more I just wanted to see my son. Later the Pastor told us he hadn't seen anything that bad since they dropped the bomb. The doctors also said they had never seen anyone that bad. They were just keeping him alive so we all could say our good byes. As we were waiting his face kept swelling. Black fluid was coming out of his lungs. He had no hair; at least he still had his eyebrows. Through it all I could still see my baby's face. My oldest son (Stacy) and his wife (Jennifer), Shawn's friends and relatives were there. A short time later my youngest son (Tommy) came in and they told him while we in the room. They were rather blunt and I think it hit him rather hard. It took a long time for my daughter and her family to get there because they live in Kentucky and we were in Indiana. After all Shawn's friend's, Aunts, Uncles and all of us said our good byes they took him off the respirator it took Shawn about 20 minutes to go.

We had to have him cremated it took to long to have that done so we had the funeral without Shawn being there. We didn't even get to bury Him in one piece. No one was able to see him for the last time, just a picture of him. When there is no one lying there to take a last look at for some people it is just like it didn't happen.

We were told all kinds of stories about what happened, he walked out on his own, the blast was so strong it instantly knocked him out, he lost some of his limbs and he was awake and aware of what was going on around him. Later after we got a copy of the fire report we found out he was awake and knew what was going on. In fact as far as we know Shawn last words were (I'm in a world of hurt). This was in one of the Firemen statements. Being Shawn's Mother I don't want to believe the last thing my baby done was scream I'm in a world of Hurt. So for me for now, I keep thinking I will get back up to the hospital to see Shawn tomorrow and he will soon be getting home and all his things will be here for him. His dog Duchess was his Baby and she is here with me waiting.

Thank you for hearing about my son

A brother-in-law

In Memory Of Shawn D. Boone
by Mark Miser

I got the call around 10pm on Oct 29th 2003 telling me Shawn had been in a very bad accident at work, an explosion involving the chip melt system that had caught fire several times before when I was still employed at Hayes. I remember that I was getting ready for a trip to Las Vegas where I would meet Tommy to do some long awaited gambling there. We had been planning this for a very long time I am talking years. The call came from my good friend and former co-worker Jeff Routzahn who was the paint engineer at Hayes Lemmerz where I used to work and where Shawn still worked. He had called to let me know that he had seen Shawn being transported via a helicopter to the burn center in Fort Wayne. I immediately let Tammy know what had happened, we were both in shock. I called the hospital to find out if this was true and how Shawn was doing; they did not even know his name. I wanted to jump through the phone and be there for him. We called all the family, Tommy, Tammy's mom and Stacy. The hospital told us Shawn was not going to make it; we left for Indiana immediately...

Shawn died at 6am that morning Oct 30th 2003, we all said goodbye before it happened, we all cried and wondered when we would wake up from this nightmare. Zak says that Shawn came out to the waiting room and set with him while we were all in the hospital room saying goodbye. We all just assumed that Zak was seeing things or mistook someone else for Shawn. I believe that maybe Shawn did sit with Zak, I mean he was scared and confused and Shawn would be there for the kids always, why not now?

I think of Shawn everyday and wonder if things could have been different. I sometimes go to call Shawn and remember that I can't. I think when we buried him it helped me to know that at least we knew where he is now. I mean before it was like he just disappeared and when couldn't find him. I never had brothers growing up and when I married Tammy I gained 3 brothers, I took that serious and had a connection to each of them. So when Shawn died I lost my brother not a brother-in-law. Shawn was also very close to my dad and when dad died Shawn was there for my family and me. My family was there when we buried Shawn, it was personal and it gave me closure on that, but it will never fill the emptiness I have now. Tammy has done so much for the cause and I get strength from that, I will never forgive Hayes for their thoughtlessness at Shawn's memorial and all the days since the explosion. I'm sure that they don't care and I could care even less about that.

This article was supposed to tell you how I feel since Shawn died and how I coped with it. I hope that this has told you something about how I feel and my recollection of the whole tragedy. The fact is I don't know just how I feel now; I miss Shawn and wish I had never got him the job at Hayes. Shawn is my brother and that can't change, he was my friend and that can't change either, Shawn was always there when I needed him and that has changed. Sometimes I wonder if we should have kept Shawn alive, maybe we could have done something, but then I realize that would have been selfish and Shawn would have suffered more for no reason but our own selfishness. Still it haunts me.

I talk about Shawn a lot at work, I want people to know whom Shawn was and they have a connection with him because he worked in the same business as they do. He was their fellow worker and that feels good. It also feels good that Tammy is working hard to make sure that this does not happen again to someone else. In the process Shawn will be remembered by a lot of people and that is good!!

A niece

by Megan Miser

(14 years old)

The only thing I had to worry about that night was getting my homework done. The phone rang and about five minutes later my Mom was pounding on the door telling me to get my bags packed. Of course I was clueless and stood there wondering what the heck was going on.

I thought Shawn was going to be fine and told myself that I would go to the hospital and he'd be fine they were all just exaggerating like they always did. When I saw friends and family in the waiting room crying I started to get worried. Everyone went into Shawn's room to see him, when they asked me I couldn't bear to see him after what everyone had said. The cries and stories were horrible.

I never knew the death of one man could affect so many people. I expected 50 people and over 300 people showed up to my Uncles funeral. There was hugging, during and people telling me how much I have grown; people I didn't even know.

Crying isn't my bag so I tried to stay outside and no tears came until Dave (one of Shawn's close friends) read his poem. I use a box of tissues in that minute. I

don't know what to do or say but Shawn's death has change myself and many others and I might not cry but I still think of Shawn and miss him.

A niece

By Sheena Miser

(19 years old)

The first thing I remember was answering the phone sometime after 10pm and thinking, "Who would be calling the house right now?" It was Adrien, and he told me that there was an explosion at Hayes. I immediately thought, "How could they let this happen again?" I didn't think that it was anything serious at the time. I certainly didn't think that anyone was hurt, or killed for that matter, I soon told Dad and it seemed only minute later when the phone rang again- and again, Then I started thinking something else was wrong, it still didn't occur to me that my uncle was working that night. However, when Mom came up the stairs and was crying, I knew what was wrong, I told her it would be okay, and that she'd be able to see him, God only knows how much I hoped that I was right.

It's hard to see your parents in so much pain and not knowing what to do for themselves. A situation such as this, makes people crazy in mourning, but it was so much harder seeing my Uncle Shawn, someone whom I had seen nearly every single day, someone so kind, looking the way he did. This is someone that I loved dearly and thought of as a second father; I mean we were his "kids", his family. And there was nothing that I could do to help him. I think one of the worst things was that he didn't look like himself at all.

Once Shawn had passed away and we all gathered in a small room across the hall, we were able to go in alone and say what we needed to with Shawn. I remember kissing his forehead and telling him how sorry I was that this had happened, and how much I love him.

To this day it's still hard to think about thanksgiving and him telling me. "Hunny that cheesecake looks great." Or on graduation, "I'm so proud of you Sheena, hunny." Or his humorous words: "Congratulations!!!! Stay in school and go to college...it's cheaper than real life! I love you very much." Shawn was someone that made you feel special and treated you with respect and love. I'll always think of him when I think of "family", and when I do I'll remember someone great, my Uncle "Boone."

I love you Shawn.

One death, many losses

5,559 workers were killed in 2003 how many people's lives were altered in just that one year? Shawn's death brought over 300 to his funeral he touched many in the 33 years he had. Who knows what gifts were taken from them. What I do know is that out of one death comes many losses.