

My name is Hunter Young and I would like to share my story with all of you. I am 17 years old and in my junior year as an honor student at Teays Valley High School. I attend Eastland Fairfield Career Center, majoring in engineering. From age five to about twelve years old I raced quarter midgets. For those of you who do not know what that is, it is easiest to explain by describing them as a go cart and a sprint car. As I quickly grew taller I was unable to fit in them anymore. For a few years my Grandpa and I pondered over the idea of moving up to a sprint car and finally built one together for me to race in late fall of 2020. In the spring of 2021 I was looking forward to the racing season and on the morning of April 4, 2021 we headed to Jackson County Speedway in Jackson, Ohio to put in some practice laps. That day my life changed forever.

THE DAY: April 4, 2021

My Grandpa, Dad, younger brother Aiden and I set out early in the morning. When we arrived we were the only ones there so we got the car unloaded and I got dressed with all my safety gear. My safety gear consists of Nomex undergarments; which includes socks, underwear and face sock, a 3 layer fire suit, fireproof shoes, gloves, neck restraint and helmet. For those that don't know what some of those items are Nomex is a brand from DuPont that is heat and flame-resistant fiber that won't melt, drip or support combustion providing a super barrier between skin and fire. I took the track by myself and ran about 3 laps. The track is about a ¼ mile oval. About the third lap I began to feel warmth in the lower part of my body; by lap four I was HOT and I switched my car out of gear to stop and then I hit my fuel switch.. I urgently tried to exit the car. I was beginning to panic. I had forgotten to disconnect my steering wheel and couldn't get out so I had to sit back down and remove it. I got it disconnected and got out of the vehicle. At this point my younger brother had driven the four-wheeler to my car to ask what was wrong. I still had my helmet on, being heard was difficult and at this time I still wasn't sure what was going on. You see, my car is fueled by alcohol which is straight methanol and methanol flames are almost invisible in daylight and typically only detected by the heat generated or the burning of materials. Once the interior in my car caught fire and the smoke and flames started did my Dad and the fire safety crew onsite realize what was happening. What was happening? The fuel line ruptured and caught fire. My onboard fire suppression system had not been properly operating and did not function.

At this point the fire safety crew and my Dad got to me and started ripping off my equipment and clothing. I was then placed in the medic until med flight arrived to transport me to The Ohio State University Hospital. In the medic; they had placed cloth and poured water all over my body and placed two IV lines into me and started giving me medicine. I can't really recall the timeline because it all went so fast but yet so slow! I arrived at OSU and was there for a very short period of time. My parents had not arrived yet because they did not know I was going to OSU, they had gone straight to Nationwide Children's Hospital.

I was transported by medic to Children's where I spent 25 long days in the hospital. Since COVID was still affecting the visits at the time; those days felt even longer without being able to have the encouragement of visitors from family and friends. In those twenty five days I had lost 6% of my body weight, countless surgeries, multiple infections, had to learn how to walk again and struggled with steps, numerous infections, two skin grafts, blood clots, wound vac, and an overdose of pain medications that I resulted me having to be given a dose of Narcan. I was released with a wound vac machine and had to have the dressing on my feet replaced regularly. I was in a great deal of pain but pushed through. I had a second stay due to an infection that landed me back in Children's for an additional five days. A few weeks later after a failed skin graft I was admitted for two more days! I've had multiple laser surgeries and injections, hours of occupation and physical therapy. I continue to have laser surgeries and take multiple medications to regulate my pain and discomfort.

What brings me to today? Several months ago a project in our government class was to write a letter to an elected state representative. I did some research and discovered that the state of Ohio did not have a day to honor burn victims. I wrote to State Senator Bob Peterson and asked him to take the idea of a Burn Victim Day in Ohio into consideration. There is so much I would like to do in the future to assist burn victims. I have already started and assisted with the racing community. The Ohio Thunder series since my accident has now mandated new safety rules.. Since my accident, the series has mandated an on board fire suppression system, Nomex undergarments and at least a 2 layer suit. These things were suggested but not required by the series in years past. I do not want to stop there!

During Christmas, with the help of my Mom, I collected over 250 toys to donate to the Burn Unit at Children's hospital. After being in the hospital I saw so many children far worse than I and wanted them to have a special Christmas. I plan on continuing this for years to come.

I'd love to one day in the future operate a nonprofit organization to assist burn victims. The funds could help with counseling costs, rebuild costs, and organize burn camps in the Midwest. I personally attended a burn camp in Colorado and still are connected with kids I met that went through a similar injury. I feel blessed and fortunate to have had the opportunity to attend that and be able to speak about the different types of emotions I have. I would also like to provide resources for the hospitals to provide more things to entertain and pass the time. . But being just 17, I have a lot of work to do and I'm determined to be successful in these goals because I am a survivor.

In addition, I am not going to let this tragedy discourage me from living my dream of being a sprint car driver. I am currently on spring break from school and when I walk out of this building this morning I am headed to the track to get back in that car to practice and plan on racing this Friday night!

I think the Senate Bill 278 would help provide awareness and resources to prevent fires, and resources to help people start over after a fire so I would appreciate your consideration.

Thank you for giving me this opportunity to share my story.