

April 4th, 2021 started the same as previous Easter days. My daughter's and I attended church service while my boys, their dad and grandpa headed down to Jackson County Speedway for practice in his sport car. I took the girls to an Easter egg hunt and headed home to start preparing for dinner so our family could come over and celebrate with us. That is when I got the call that changed our lives forever. Mike, Hunter's father, called me and said there was an accident at the track and that I should head that way. He didn't go into details. I quickly gathered up my girls and got out the door. I knew that I couldn't take them to the hospital so I was taking them to my sister's house. While driving I got a second call saying to not head down to Jackson, that they were bringing him up to Columbus. Still no details were given. I got to her house to drop off my girls not knowing that was the last time I was going to be home with them. At this point, I wasn't sure what hospital to go to. I finally received a third and final call and was told that Hunter was being transported by MedFlight. I pleaded that he tell me what happened and that's when I found out that his car caught fire and he was in it when it happened. I completely lost it. I should have been with him, he was all alone in the helicopter, where is he going... I began praying that he was going to be okay. I drove to my aunt Novella's house while I waited to hear where they were taking Hunter. Time was slowly passing and I began calling all the local hospitals to find out if they were expecting his arrival. I kept getting the same answer, "he is not here, sorry but try another hospital." Where is my son? How bad are his injuries? What am I going to walk into once I find him? Is he going to survive? I finally got word that he was headed to Nationwide Children's Hospital so my aunt rushed me to the hospital and dropped me off. I was in no state to drive at this point. I check in and was told that he is not there. Where is my son? I found out that MedFlight transported him to OSU but they were unable to locate a pulse in his feet so they requested that he get transferred to Children's Hospital. The time crawled by. He finally arrived and I was rushed back to see him. I approached his room and there were dozens of people in and out of his room. I finally locked eyes with him and I felt like I could finally breathe. He is alive, he is awake, and he will get through this. Hunter had 1st degree burns to his hands, 2nd degree burns to the inside of his knees and 3rd degree burns to his feet and ankles. 20% of his body was burnt. His journey to recovery began right away. They put him in a twilight sedation so they could scrub the affected areas and get them clean out to avoid infection and wrapped him up. He spent the first night in PICU. Bright and early the next morning he was taken to his 1st of 16 surgeries. That was so hard for me to watch them wheel Hunter away and into a surgery room. Time is not my friend as it crept by so slowly. Hunter's surgeon came out and pulled Mike and I into a private room to discuss his surgery. They had to scrub his skin down, cut 4 slits into the sides of each foot and ankle to help with swelling, and applied special creams and medication to his affected areas. The degree of burns on his ankles and feet were so severe, that he had burnt through his nerve endings and didn't really feel too much pain. Hunter was transferred to H5B, the Burn and Trauma Unit. We would stay there for 25 days. I never left Hunter's side. I left my other four children at home with my sister. I knew they would be taken care of and Hunter needed me. He began physical therapy and Occupational therapy right away. He had sessions with them every single day. Hunter had a skin graft surgery which lasted four hours. They took the skin from his upper left thigh. That was extremely painful for him. He still had no feeling in his feet and ankles yet. They applied a wound vac on both feet to help pull the extra moisture from the wounds and help prevent infection. Unfortunately it didn't work. He ended up getting a very bad infection in both of his feet which resulted in areas of his graft to not adhere to the transfer site. This broke my heart because I knew that meant he had to do another round of grafts. At this point Hunter's nerve endings started firing back up. This put Hunter in excruciating

pain. The team referred Pain Management to start handling his pain control. It helped but just didn't control the pain for long enough between doses. They brought in a pain pump and doubled his medication dosage. Every ten minutes he was advised to push the button to get a dose of pain meds. It seemed to help but as the day went on he just seemed very tired. Little did we know that he was getting too much in his system. Throughout the night our amazing night nurse found him unresponsive and administered Narcan to bring him back. This should have never happened while in the hospital. The next day, they removed the pump and he started having withdrawals. This was hard to witness knowing that he was in legitimate pain but trying to detox his body of all the narcotics. Hunter continued therapy every day and had to learn how to stand up, walk, and climb stairs. Something we take for granted everyday. He was so strong, stayed positive and had the mindset that he can conquer this. Eventually he had a 2nd graft surgery, ended up getting very high fevers and they found a blood clot in his left forearm. Towards the end of his stay, I had to learn how to change his wound dressings. I cried the whole time during the first dressing change. It was the first time I had seen up close the damage done to his feet and it broke my heart. No parent should ever have to see their child in a situation like this. I continued assisting in daily dressing changes and then we were finally released after 25 days. Finally back home and reunited with our family. This stay was short lived as he got another infection and landed him back into the hospital. Surgery and wound vacs were placed again and he went home after 5 days with the vac on both feet. This never stopped Hunter from getting back out to the race track. He helped in any way that he could. He would work in the tower, and eventually started flagging the races again. He had one more stay in the hospital after getting the wound vacs removed due to extreme pain and that stay was 3 days. Hunter missed out on completing his Sophomore year of high school. He missed out on his first year of racing sprint cars, and delayed getting his drivers license. He had outpatient therapy sessions and got back to his new normal. Life picked back up where we left off. To this day, he is still getting laser surgeries and injections into his feet to continue the healing process. These take place every 6-8 weeks. Hunter was nominated by the staff at Children's Hospital to attend burn camp out in Colorado. He attended camp in August 2021 and met with kids from all over and the country who have been involved in a burn injury. This was life changing for him. He had an experience of a lifetime and was able to connect with kids that have been through the same things as he has. To this day, he still stays in contact with friends from camp. The racing community has been so supportive and rallied behind our family. They implemented new rules and regulations to ensure that this doesn't happen to anyone else. This past Christmas Hunter felt compelled to give back in some way. He started a toy drive and collected 205 toys to donate to the kids in the Burn/Trauma Unit to get gifts at Christmas. Many children in the hospital had no family in there with them and others had very extensive injuries and they couldn't be home to celebrate. He plans on continuing this toy drive every year and hopes that each year we will collect even more items. Hunter is the most amazing young man. His strive to do better, to help others, and then make this bill come to reality is just the beginning. I believe that this bill will not only recognize those that live with the scars but also remember those that have lost their lives due to burn injuries. I tell Hunter that his scars are proof that he survived. He wears his scars with pride and will tell anyone that wants to know about his story. I hope that you consider passing this bill and make Burn Awareness Week a reality. Thank you for allowing me to speak with you all today.