

Script – Broadcast – After the fire

INTRO

A year ago, Eric Cunningham's life flashed before his eyes. Cunningham was injured when a controlled brush fire in the backyard of his Byron, Illinois, home quickly got out of control. His t-shirt and right arm immediately caught on fire. His wife, Ginnie, was running errands, so his teenage children, Olivia and David, rushed to help their dad before he was transferred to OSF HealthCare Saint Anthony Medical Center.

The Regional Burn Unit at OSF Saint Anthony is the only burn center in northern Illinois and one of five in the state of Illinois. The unit treats more than 200 burn victims per year with specialized treatments, burn reconstructive surgery and rehabilitation therapy services.

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Cunningham spent 16 days in the burn unit. Then he had home care for a month followed by outpatient therapy.

Cunningham suffered second and third degree burns on 20% of his body. He had surgery to transfer skin from his leg to his badly burned arm. He also endured difficult treatments including a daily cleansing and debridement of his skin. Debridement is the medical removal of dead, damaged or infected tissue to improve the healing potential of the remaining healthy tissue.

After the initial shock wore off, Cunningham says the pain kicked in. He was concerned that he would suffer permanent damage from his accident.

((SOT))

Eric Cunningham, burn survivor

"The thing that really sticks in your head every day is that process of having your wounds scraped to get all the dead and old material off and then getting that redressed," he says. "And as that got more intense, pain medicine helped. About five days into my stay, I had surgery for the skin graft." (:20)

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But despite the pain, Cunningham says he was comforted by the care both he and his family received from the staff at OSF Saint Anthony. Ginnie spent 13 or more hours each day at his bedside.

Cunningham, who is vice president of Collins Aerospace, was away from work for three months recuperating before he was able to return. While he still wears a wrap on his right hand, he says he's feeling better and now lives life with a grateful attitude. He's also willing to share his harrowing story with others.

((SOT))

Eric Cunningham, burn survivor

"What did I learn specifically from that? And how do I potentially help other people who are going through similar challenges – whether they're bigger or smaller," he says. (:10)