

Day of Mourning BC Schools Project



Matthew Bowcott Profile & Questions on the Video

A slip that almost cost his life



It was just another evening shift in the restaurant where Matthew worked as a cook. As part of his closing up duties, he had emptied the deep fryers and was carrying a 10 gallon saucepot of 375-degree oil for disposal.

One of the other cooks was spraying the kitchen floor, which was another of the nightly duties. As Matthew was carrying the pot of hot oil, he had a gut feeling that something was not right, but he ignored it and carried on.

At that moment, his feet slipped sideways on the wet ceramic tile and down he went, spilling hot oil on his body and face. It happened so quickly, Matthew didn't have time to turn his face away. The oil came within a quarter of an inch of his eyes, nose and mouth. Had he swallowed the oil, his organs would have been burned, and he would surely not have survived.

The kitchen staff members immediately threw him outside and started spraying his body with the hose, in an attempt to wash off the oil and bring his body temperature down. Fortunately, there was an ambulance sitting in the parking lot next to the restaurant and Matthew was rushed to the hospital. These two important points helped to save his life.

"The pain was so bad that I didn't even want to live—I said, know what God, don't even save me--- just let me go," says Matthew.

Due to the trauma to his body, the medical staff didn't think he would survive the night. Shortly after being admitted, Matthew flat lined for two minutes so the doctors sedated him and put him on life support.

Matthew spent the next three weeks in the Burn Unit at Vancouver General Hospital receiving treatment for the severe burns that covered more than 40 percent of his body. He also received a skin graft from his thigh onto his shoulder and chest. This was a painful process for him and his family and friends, who were there for support during his recovery.

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Matthew's experiences have given him perspective on health and safety. "If the work environment is unsafe for young workers, injuries are inevitable," says Matthew. "We need to emphasize safety and training for everyone, and especially for new or young workers."

Matthew wants young workers to understand that if they don't feel safe, they need to say *no*. They have a right to a safe workplace and the right to be properly trained. And if that training isn't made available, they have the right to ask for it.

Matthew doesn't want young workers to have to learn the painful way, like he did.

- Go to the [WorkSafe BC Website](#) to schedule a "Young Workers Speakers' Presentation" (they are free to schools and PACs)
- Go to the BC Fed Health and Safety Centre to schedule a free session for your students on young worker rights under Workers Compensation Act BC and Occupational Health & Safety or "google: BC Fed Health and Safety Centre".

Questions on the Video

1. What are your thoughts about the video?
2. Were you surprised to learn that there are still serious accidents in our workplaces?
3. Do you know anyone who has had a workplace accident? If yes, what happened?
4. What were the causes of Matthew's accident? What steps should have been taken to prevent the accident?
5. Matthew says that young workers need to understand that if they don't feel safe, they need to say *no*. Are there times in the workplace when this is not true, and you should keep working even if you don't feel safe?
6. Matthew says that young workers have a right to a safe workplace, the right to be properly trained and the right to ask for training if it is not provided. Do you agree that this is reasonable? Defend your answer.
7. If you refuse unsafe work, is there a chance that you could lose your job?
8. Many people think that the workplaces that high school students typically work at (retail, fast-food, restaurants, gas stations, coffee shops, etc...) are never really hazardous places to work. Matthew's story shows that even one of these workplaces can be dangerous to workers. Pick a workplace that you know teenagers work at in your community, and think of 4 possible hazards at that place of work.