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# Nine Years of Hell | news.thesunontheweb.com

*By Charles Huth*

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After nearly nine years and more than a dozen attorneys, a verdict was reached on the Rosie's "East End" Restaurant explosion.

A Dauphin County jury found Handwerk Site Contractors to be negligent in the case and awarded Sharon Kulina a six-figure sum in April.

"Everybody I see is shocked that it just was settled," Kulina said in an exclusive interview with The Sun in October.

Rosie's was established on East Main Street in 1939 and was operated by four generations of Kulina's family.

"We grew up right behind the restaurant," Kulina told The Sun.

Kulina said there was a sales agreement in place when the

restaurant exploded May 21, 2008.

The gas explosion rocked Hummelstown and was heard miles away.

“It’s a miracle no one was killed in this,” Kulina said.

However, several people were injured in the explosion, including riders in a passing car.

Kulina was working in Briarcrest in 2008 and went to her mother’s house for her lunch break that day. She said her mother was planting flowers but stopped to prepare lunch for Kulina’s father when Kulina headed back to work in Briarcrest.

Kulina said the area where her mother was planting flowers was soon covered in debris from the explosion.

Kulina hadn’t even reached the office when her phone rang.

“My mom’s saying ‘It blew up! It blew up! The restaurant blew up!’” Kulina said.

Kulina said her parents saw the whole thing happen from inside their home. Kulina said she turned around and arrived before any of the fire trucks. She said nobody was in the apartments on the site.

“It was all smoke and fire and everything and I ran to my mom and dad,” Kulina said.

“From that day on, for nine years, I went through hell,” Kulina said.

“My whole family did.”

Kulina said she would shake when driving into Hummelstown. She said she is still working on some anxiety issues related to the incident.

Kulina said 14 attorneys worked on the case in some capacity. She

said it seemed like many of the attorneys were overwhelmed by the idea of facing Handwerk's attorneys. Kulina said she had basically given up before finding attorney Hilary Vesell in 2015.

"After all those years, somehow God sent me to Hilary and she stuck by me and she did what no one else would," Kulina said.

Kulina said she had entered offices of previous attorneys in an effort to get updates after her calls went unanswered and unreturned but never had that problem with Vesell.

"Hilary was in touch with me on a daily basis, letting me know what's going on," Kulina said. "She was unbelievable. She pretty much saved my life."

Kulina said one of her attorneys wouldn't let her get legal records. She said Vesell was able to get the records from the lawyer, records that were later used in the trial.

"During that week, she was stupendous," Kulina said.

Kulina said some of the legal records that had been retrieved from her former attorney included evidence that Handwerk had trespassed onto her property.

"It was due to (Vesell) and her fighting to get into that attorney's office that we had the proof we needed," Kulina said.

Kulina said emotional distress was not allowed to be claimed in court because they did not see a dead body. She said it could have been claimed in another state.

Kulina said it was horrible to sit through the closing statement by Handwerk's attorney, who she felt insulted her belongings, including heirlooms from her grandparents.

Kulina said Vesell reached the jury with her closing statement.

“They (the jury) sent Judge (Jeannine) Turgeon a note,” Kulina said. “It was something to the effect of ... ‘are we able to award the plaintiff a higher amount than what her damages are?’”

Kulina said Turgeon told them no but told both attorneys, “I have never had this happen to me before.” Kulina said that felt like the first victory.

The jury found Handwerk negligent in the explosion and voted to award Kulina \$324,726.50, with \$16,000 in damages for trespassing onto Kulina’s property. The same jury ruled that the gas company, UGI, was not negligent.

“I just wanted what was mine,” Kulina said. “I lost ... my residence, which was right behind the restaurant. All my belongings were ruined. Everything at the restaurant was gone. The sales agreement was null and void.”

Kulina said she lost a home which she had inherited to Fulton Bank as well. She said she lived in a studio apartment during much of the lawsuit.

“I just feel the public should know, we had nothing,” Kulina said.

Kulina has bought a home with some of the settlement.

Kulina said she got closure. Kulina said it was difficult to describe the emotions she felt that her parents, who had run the restaurant themselves, could see the verdict.

“(Handwerk) finally accepted it and they had to pay delay damages,” Kulina said.

Kulina said they accepted a smaller amount on the delay damages,

which are separate from the jury awards, so the case could finally be over.

“Justice is served and I’m happy and now I can go on with my life,” Kulina said. “I finally have closure on this.”