

Jennifer Fourchalk

Jennifer Fourchalk didn't think working in a pizzeria was a dangerous job, until a serious accident at work cut off three fingers of her right hand.

"I had just turned 19, discovered the bar scene, and had just started my working career at a pizzeria," says Jennifer. "I started as waitress, then after a year started to do some cooking."

Jennifer didn't get much training, but she didn't think her job was too difficult. "It was a lot of fun," she notes. "We used to dance and goof around a lot."

She was having a regular day at work on October 7, 1999, when she went to prep her dough. She placed it on a machine that would knead and flatten the dough through rollers pulled by a chain. As the dough went in, she noticed that the roller had dough stuck on it so she reached in to clear it. "The chain pulled my hand in," she says. "I didn't really feel it. When I pulled my hand out and looked at it, I could see my fingers were missing. I could see the bone in my finger and all the muscle."

Her co-workers didn't know how to react, and she was losing lots of blood. When the ambulance arrived, Jennifer says she felt scared and alone.

Rushed to hospital, she had three surgeries and months of physical therapy to get used to having only a thumb and one finger on her right hand.

"I still have nightmares about it," she says. "I was in therapy, I slept with the light on. I couldn't be alone. I woke up many nights screaming and crying. My mom spent many nights in my room trying to get me to sleep."

Jennifer is also embarrassed about the appearance of her hand. "I hide it. I try not to talk with my hands, but it's hard, because hands are what people notice. They're always moving."

Jennifer used to play the guitar, but can't bring herself to play these days. She also used to get regular manicures, and was proud of her sculptured nails. "It may be just fingers but it's a part of yourself," she says. "I don't know any other girls who've lost their fingers."

"I should have been trained better," she says strongly, and advises all young workers to ask to be trained extensively, no matter what job they're doing. "If you don't know a machine and they expect you to use it, just say 'No, I will not touch that machine until you train me properly how to clean it, how to use it, all the different parts that are on it.'"

Not one day goes by where Jennifer doesn't think about what has happened to her.

As she covers her right hand with her left, she adds, "If you don't know your rights, you can get into danger."

