

4/8/05

To whom it may concern,

On October 5, 1979 I was involved in a horrible accident that would change my life forever. I was 20 yrs. old and handsome young man with everything to live for. I was working as a mechanic in an oil refinery in New Jersey. It was a dangerous place to work and I was very much aware of this. So much so, that in the weeks leading up to my accident I was dogged by a feeling of impending doom. I had witnessed several accidents, explosions and even a death in the refinery. I even had quite few close calls myself, which only lead me to being more vigilant. October 5th, 1979 was to be our last day in this refinery and I was relieved that we were leaving. The night before we had pulled our crew trailer out and we had only to return the following day to remove some equipment. At the last minute we were requested to do a demolition job in the refinery. It sounded routine enough. According to our work order, there was an old foam pumping station in a tank farm (storage facility for holding oil and gasoline) that was obsolete and needed to be removed. Apparently it had not been in operation since the 1950's. We picked up our utility truck and went out to the work site prepared for our last project at Mobil Oil in Paulsboro N.J.

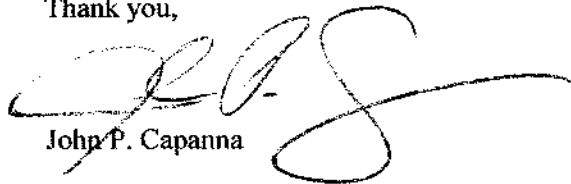
The pumping station was a small corrugated steel building about 12 or 15 ft. square. Inside was a large water pump, which was colored coded red, meaning it handled water. The pump had a suction and a discharge line about 30 or 40 inches in diameter.

Back in the day of its operation it would pump water from a nearby reservoir and mix with bicarbonate of soda to make foam to be used in fighting fires in the tank farm. We policed the area and set to work trying to dismantle the pump by conventional means (using wrenches), but to no avail. The pump was so old and corroded that none of the bolts would budge. We happened to have an acetylene torch on our truck and felt it would be safe to use since this was a water pump. We called up a safety inspector (as was standard procedure when using an open flame in a refinery) and requested a "permit to burn". After a cursory review of the area and some instructions to move some old drums, we were issued the burning permit. I was given the permit as crew chief. I also was given the honor of burning the bolts away with the torch. After about 15 or 20 minutes I thought that I had burned off all of the bolts holding the flange together. But the flange would not separate from the pump. I proceeded to instruct another crew member to go and get a set of brass wedges and a brass hammer from the truck; I was going to use the wedges to separate the flange for the pump. While the other crew member was outside getting the tools, I happened to look under the very bottom of the flange (which was about 10 inches off the dirt floor of the pumping station) and noticed that there was one more bolt that was still holding the flange in place. I cracked the torch open, lit it and went about cutting thru the final bolt. As I did the pipe line exploded. I was hit full force in the face and chest with hot crude oil and burst into flames. My entire body was saturated with hot crude oil. The force of the explosion threw me across the room and into a steel column. Miraculously, I was still conscious and able to jump up and run out of the burning building. How? I don't know, I couldn't see and all I could hear were my own screams of agonizing pain. I was running to jump into the reservoir to put out the fire, but I never made it. Thank God. I was later told that if I had made it to the water I would have probably died from shock and/or infection. I tripped over my own feet and stumbled to the ground. When I did several fellow crew members beat the flames out with there hands. I was thrown into the back of a pick up and driven to the contractor's gate to wait for an ambulance. From there I was taken to a local emergency room where the doctors had no idea what to do for me. They called a burn unit across the river in Pennsylvania (Crosier Chester Burn unit) and were given instructions on how to stabilize me for the helicopter ride to the burn unit. It took about 10 -12 hours for them to stabilize me and I was burning the entire time. (The hot crude oil stuck to me like tar) There was no way to get it off me. The doctors at the first hospital inserted the wrong size breathing tube into my airway. My throat collapsed on the way to the burn unit and I almost died. If I hadn't been conscious I would have died because they had to re insert another breathing tube and I had to swallow it for them. I was in the burn unit for 90 days, given my last rites 7 times, had pleurisy, pneumonia, double pneumonia and endocarditic. It was one complication after another. I under went thirty some surgeries in the burn unit to save my life (almost had to have open heart surgery) and over the next 10 years under went another forty some surgeries to reconstruct my

face, chest, arms, neck, etc. I had to learn how to walk and talk and eat and speak all over again. I had torturous physical therapy where I was stretched to the point where my scars would break open. It was excruciating and at times unbearable. I went thru horrible addiction with narcotics from all the surgeries, not to mention the years of being subjected to humiliation at the hands of Mobil oil corp. while trying to sue for damages. The most difficult part has been dealing with the loss of my face and the reactions that people in society and even in my own family have had and continue to have to me. This is only part of the story that brought me to Bob Barron. My sister saw Bob on a TV special and told me about him years ago. About a year ago my wife encouraged me to call Bob and see if he could help me. My hearing was getting worse even with hearing aids and I had to have people repeat themselves all the time. There was also the fact that instead of ears I had very graphic holes in the side of my head and it was probably the most noticeable of my injuries. Bob promptly called me and we sent pictures and fought with my insurance company for a year and finally were able to get together for the actual fitting of the prosthetic ears.

This has truly been a life changing experience for me and I have yet to feel the full impact that it will have on my life. These changes will, I am sure, affect many people in my life, in a very positive way. Having been through the painful and mutilating process of surgical reconstruction of my ears and the subsequent amputation, I can definitely say that I am very pleased and excited about my prosthetic ears. There are some challenges associated with the wearing of my hearing aids, but the benefits far out weigh any of the obstacles. My hearing WITHOUT the hearing aids improved immediately and my wife was impressed, as was I. For the first time in over twenty-five years, I was able to detect some very subtle, but noticeable changes in my hearing. Sounds that I was not able to recognize even with the hearing aids are much more distinct. One of the most frustrating things about wearing hearing aids without ears is that the sound is all over the place and it is very difficult to hear in crowded places because the sound is scattered instead of being, directed toward the ear canal. With the prosthetic ears, this problem is virtually nonexistent. One of the immediate benefits was the anonymity that I felt in Union Station, on the way home. I did not get as many stares from other people and Sonya also noticed this. I noticed many things after wearing the ears that I had not even thought about before. Such as how much better a hat looks when you have ears and how important the ears are to the overall symmetry of the face. I have to admit that I was feeling a little cynical about this whole process before I actually wore the ears. Now I feel I have been the beneficiary of yet another miracle. Our wedding reception is next Saturday and I look forward to the positive reactions that I am sure my friends and family will have. I am sure that there will be many other benefits, which I will become aware of in the coming days.

Thank you,



John P. Capanna