

## Horror pics: Scarred for life by soup

Warning: Graphic images. - by [April Glover](#)  
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After a terrible accident at home, mum Toni wants to warn others.

**Here, Toni Teokotai, 35, tells the story in her own words.**

Turning off the stove, I stirred my homemade soup. Delicious! I thought.

The pork, potato and vegies had been simmering all day and I couldn't wait to tuck into something warm.

Outside, the rain was hammering down, so it was the perfect cosy meal. I dished up three bowls for me and my daughters Jayde, then three, and Te-Arna, 18 months.

Then we all sat at a table in the lounge room to eat, with my bub, Arnika, seven months, on my knee. They were such good girls. Te-Arna idolised her older sister and would follow her around the house like a puppy.

So it was typical that when Jayde hopped off the chair and into the kitchen to put her bowl in the sink, Te-Arna was right behind her.



*Jayde and Te-Arna  
Photo supplied*

'Mum, Te-Arna climbed on the oven!' Jayde suddenly cried out. Next thing, I heard an almighty crash followed by a blood-curdling screech. Placing Arnika in her bouncer, I rushed into the kitchen. 'Oh my...' I gasped. The oven, which had only been connected to the wall by the plug, had toppled over – spilling boiling hot soup on my little girls.

My first instinct was to rip off their clothes. I tore Te-Arna's tights from her legs and watched in horror as her skin came away with them. Then I put both girls in a cold shower as they cried in pain, blisters already forming on their delicate skin. 'Help me, please,' I sobbed down the phone to emergency services. 'My girls have been burnt by boiling water.'

Within minutes, the fire brigade arrived. They wrapped Jayde and Te-Arna in a special foil blanket to try and calm their burns. Then two ambulances raced them to Christchurch Hospital, where their dad, Ira, met up with us.

We were told Jayde had 10 per cent burns to her face, right arm and left foot. Little Te-Arna had suffered almost 50 per cent burns to her arms, back, neck and chest. I almost collapsed in horror when I saw their wounds being dressed. Red raw, it looked so painful. I'm the worst mother in the world, I thought.

The injuries were so bad they were transferred to the specialist burns unit at Middlemore Hospital in Auckland. There, 15 doctors were waiting for each of my girls.

'You're going to be okay,' I told them over and over, trying to hide my heartbreak.

Put into induced comas, I felt like I was in a nightmare. Te-Arna was wheeled into surgery for a skin graft, but because she was so young and small, it was touch-and-go afterwards. 'Both girls are very lucky to be alive,' the doctor said.

When they came round, I couldn't even hug them. 'I'm so sorry,' I told them, imagining the journey they faced from now.

After three months in hospital, they were finally allowed home. Te-Arna was wrapped in so many bandages she looked like a little Egyptian mummy. She had to learn to walk again and needed skin grafts as she grew, because the scar tissue didn't stretch.



*Te-Arna was left with extensive scarring, but she was still smiling  
Photo supplied*

As she got a bit older, she wanted to know why she was different from other kids. 'When are the burns going to go away?' she said. 'I don't want this skin anymore.' Other times, my poor girls said other kids didn't want to play with them.

'Be thankful they don't want to be your friends – they don't sound like very nice people,' I told them.

It broke my heart, but I taught both of them to love their skin – burns and all.

Attending the Burns Support Group camp every year helped their confidence skyrocket too. They got a chance to spend time with other kids just like them. And when Te-Arna started at intermediate school last year age 11, she was even brave enough to speak about it in assembly.

Ten years on, they are still suffering the consequences of that fateful day. Strangers stare and Te-Arna will need grafts until she stops growing.

Thankfully, because Te-Arna was so young she doesn't remember the traumatic accident. But for Jayde and I, it's ingrained in our memories.



*Te-Arna and Jayde today  
Photo supplied*

Our cooker is now bracketed to the wall and I urge others to do the same. Always turn pot handles away from the edge too.

I'm so proud of how Jayde, 13, and Te-Arna, 12, have supported each other. They're also amazing big sisters to Arnika, 11, and their brother, Darci, two. It's been a hard road, but nothing will stop them from enjoying every day.