

# 'Miracle baby': 3-year-old Yuma boy survives severe burns, COVID-19 expected to make full recovery

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When you're 3, Band-Aids are "stickers," casts are "gloves," and hospital hallways seem big enough to be roadways, just the right size for Westyn Tudor's fire-engine red tricycle.

Westyn just started riding last week, a milestone in the toddler's progress since Nov. 11, 2020, when he fell backwards into a fire pit, sustaining third-degree burns over 45% of his body.

As he pedals on toward another lap through the Valleywise Arizona Burn Center, sporting Spiderman boots, loose black basketball shorts and a zip-up sweatshirt — "hood up, of course" — his mom, 32-year-old Amy Green, walks close behind, cheering him on.

"Mommy, I don't hurt," Westyn says.

"Well, that's always great to hear," Green replies. She looks to the nurse standing to her left, "I'll never take that sentence for granted."

## **What was once a normal day turned disastrous in an instant**

Always "outdoor kids," Westyn was playing with his twin brother and older sister in their backyard in Yuma on Nov. 11. Green, who had just received a job offer, planned to make steaks and barbeque on their charcoal grill for a celebratory dinner.



Westyn's father, Joe Tudor, was picking up charcoal when Green called him to let him know the kids wanted a fire outside. Calling it "ironic," Green said Joe suggested she wait until he get home to start it, but with the kids begging in the background, Green decided to go ahead and light the fire pit.

Green said she turned her back for "a second" when she heard her daughter scream out for her. Westyn had fallen backwards into the pit, his legs up in the air. In "panic mode," Green said she grabbed him by the ankles and tried

putting the fire out with her own hands, which suffered minor burns as a result.

"I had no idea what to do — the only thing on my mind was somehow I have to put these flames out," she said. "I practically threw him onto the ground to roll him around as fast as possible."

Green called 911 who told her to wrap him a blanket and keep him calm until an ambulance could get there.

## **Life-flighted to Phoenix, Westyn was touch-and-go**

Westyn was initially taken to Yuma Regional Medical Center. In critical condition, he was intubated and doctors started him on ketamine for sedation, but they said Westyn needed a more specialized facility to treat the severity of his burns. With no available helicopters, YRMC immediately took Green and Westyn to Yuma International Airport and took him to the burn center in Phoenix via airplane.

Although the paramedics tried to assure Green that Westyn's vitals were stable on the plane, Green said they later revealed no one was certain he would ever make it to Phoenix.

"I will never forget the looks on their faces as they worked on him in the plane," Green said. "As a mom, you just know, and I knew then they were trying to keep me calm more than anything else."

Just as Westyn arrived at the burn center, it was revealed he tested positive for COVID-19, the flu and strep throat. Not only was Westyn unable to stay in the burn unit until he tested negative, Green wasn't allowed to see him for two days until the hospital administration approved her as a visitor.

Three days after Westyn arrived, his condition decreased to the point of being put on a ventilator. Then he was put on a high frequency oscillator, another

type of breathing machine that delivers very small breaths at a high rate, most commonly used for babies who are not responding to conventional ventilation.

"That was the only time they let me and his dad see him together because they really thought there was a chance he was going to die," she said.



## **Progress was slow, then all at once**

Westyn made it through the rough patch and slowly, but surely, the hospital saw him "come back to life," Green said. Enduring 21 surgeries, Westyn remained on a ventilator for nearly a month before it was replaced with a tracheostomy tube to keep his neck open for breathing. The tube was just recently removed the week of Feb. 12, and Westyn is now breathing entirely on his own.

Though he has to spend most of his day with his arms in the air by way of splints that help him stretch his joints and skin, Westyn can now walk, run

and ride his tricycle for a couple hours a day. He also enjoys coloring and "making a mess" with playdough and sand — both activities that encourage him to use his hands again.

Doctors are constantly walking by his room, which is decked out with balloons and banners; coloring book pages and family photos are taped on the walls, and there are enough stuffed animals to take over half of his bed.

On Thursday, Westyn asked to sit on his blue mat covered in a white sheet. A plastic tray is placed in front of him, accompanied by a Toy Story coloring book and a handful of markers.



As he sits, Westyn is greeted by staff walking by on a first-name basis, almost all noting their excitement to see him up and moving. When two of his favorite occupational therapists stop in to bandage his fingers, only two on the right hand and two on the left now, Westyn guides them every step of the way.

"I think he is going to end up being a physician after this," Green said. "He is always telling them how to do their jobs."

With four months of treatment under his belt, everyone can rely on Westyn to communicate his needs. Occasionally, he jumps in to say "I have pain" or "I hurt."

"Do you have pain or do you itch?" Green asks. Usually it's an itch, she says, which can be "calmed by a cream or two."

## 'They are a part of our family now'



Green said the support from the burn center staff has been "unbelievable."

"There are nurses who would call me on their days off to see how Westyn was doing and to make sure he was alive," Green said. "They never, ever gave up on him. They are a part of our family now."

Kevin Foster, director of the Arizona Burn Center, said they consider Westyn their "miracle baby," adding that the nearly fatal path he went down is uncommon for children who experience burns like his.

"The good news is, once he got better, he got better in a hurry," Foster said. "Whether or not this will leave severe scarring is to be seen as it's mostly genetic, but the cute factor with him is just off the charts, so we aren't worried about that. He's here — that's what matters."

In addition, The Arizona Burn Foundation stepped in to help Green with the costs of Westyn's admission. The foundation has paid for a nearby hotel so the family can remain close by, and when Westyn had to spend his third birthday, Jan. 2, in the hospital, the foundation helped coordinate a safe celebration, as well as getting a care package from one of his favorite cartoon characters, Blippi.

Lori Janik, director of Client Care Services for the foundation, said they also involved the family in one of their virtual camps, providing "a lot of emotional support, connection with resources in healing, and assistance in understanding and processing injury" for Westyn and his parents.



## **'You can't do the 'what-ifs''**

The hospital hopes to discharge Westyn within the next two weeks.

His physical therapy is going well, so the main obstacle in the way of him returning home is eating. Although he occasionally has good days and "eats everything in sight," a feeding tube remains in his nose for the days he won't take a bite, even of the oranges and mac 'n' cheese he asked for moments before.

Green says she's ready for their family to be together in Yuma again, though she knows the aftermath of Nov. 11 won't end with their departure from the burn center. His 21 surgeries will continue to increase throughout his life, but Green said she remains optimistic the camps hosted by the foundation will help them both with the mental and physical toll this experience has taken.

"It's all about the little things now — Westyn riding his tricycle, celebrating because he ate an entire cookie or because he's using both hands to make a sand castle," Green said. "You can't do the 'what-ifs.' The 'what-ifs' are what you won't survive. The little things make you strong."

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