

## A new start for boy who lost a foot

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It was sickeningly horrible.

On Nov. 27, 1996, 4-year-old Shareif Hall, his mother and older brother were exiting a SEPTA subway station in North Philadelphia to go buy the family Thanksgiving turkey.

But as the escalator reached the top, one of the steps malfunctioned - snaring, mangling and severing Shareif's right foot as his mother screamed for help.

During a December 1999 Philadelphia Common Pleas Court trial, it was revealed that SEPTA had known for several years that the escalator at the Cecil B. Moore Station on North Broad Street needed repairs.

(It also was revealed that SEPTA withheld and tampered with evidence, including taking a photo of an unmatched white shoelace on top of the boy's mangled black sneaker to make it look as if his untied footwear had caused the accident.)

The jury slammed SEPTA with a \$51 million verdict, which both sides settled the following year for \$7.4 million. There also was a massive shake-up at SEPTA, which belatedly has begun a program of inspecting, repairing, and replacing subway station escalators.

As for Shareif and his mother, Deneen, who was awarded \$1 million and the \$65 cost of her son's sneakers, they have deliberately dropped from sight.

The family has moved to another state and is "trying to get on with our lives," Deneen Hall said last week.

Particularly anxious to protect Shareif's privacy, Deneen Hall didn't want to say where she, her three sons and two daughters are living. Shareif, now 10, is mostly doing "fine" - but is still haunted by memories of what happened to him.

"Some days, he just can't get past it," his mother said in a telephone interview. "Other days, I get him past it."

He still has nightmares. "It was so depressing for him at such a young age," his mother said. "Hopefully, he'll grow out of it. I don't know."

Even though he has a prosthesis on his right foot, Shareif has a limp. In public school, he had some problems, feeling like he didn't fit in, so he now attends a private school for children with special needs like Shareif's, his mother said.

At the school, which provides support and counseling, he has new friends and is happier. He's gotten into fishing, and at school, has learned to ride horses and is on the swim team.

"I'm about to get him a special prosthesis for swimming. He doesn't like to swim with his regular prosthesis on, so we're going to make him a special one."

As for herself, Deneen Hall said: "Let's just say some days are better than others."

Shareif has a court-appointed trustee who handles his estate and will continue to do so until the boy turns 18. That trustee approves all expenditures, said Robert Ross of the firm of Kline & Specter, which represented the Halls at the 1999 trial.

"Part of what I've tried to impart to the mother is as he gets a little older to try and establish some relationship with the trustee so when he turns 18, he continues to have them do what they now do," Ross said.

The family has used some of the money to buy "a much nicer house" - but according to Ross' recollection, it was purchased by Deneen Hall "with her portion of the award."

At SEPTA, spokesman Richard Maloney said the transit agency is upgrading its entire subway escalator system.

As part of that program, SEPTA says it has introduced a computerized monitoring system that immediately alerts SEPTA headquarters when an escalator shuts down or malfunctions.

"The new escalator at Cecil B. Moore was the first machine connected to the monitoring system," according to a recent SEPTA report.

The Halls' lead attorney in the 1999 case, [Thomas R. Kline](#), said the other day that this was good news.

But, he added, "They have a ways to go to make good on their promises, and their feet should be held to the fire to make sure the funding doesn't disappear or get reallocated."

"They had no place to go but up," Kline said. "Somebody should say something good when they've made progress, and they have... ."

"But a lot of progress still needs to be made."