

The “Hot Coffee Case” The True Story Part One

When someone mentions the “hot coffee case”, it is safe to say that most everyone in the room knows exactly what the person is talking about. I



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have heard it said . . . “that was the ridiculous case where the lady was driving and spilled hot coffee in her lap and got millions of dollars”. Is this what you have heard? Who has told you this? Why has the story been portrayed by the media in this manner? Who is behind this story?

The facts of this case tell a different story:

Ms. Stella Liebeck was a passenger in a car driven by her grandson, who pulled to a complete stop to let his grandmother add sugar and cream to her coffee. She was not driving, nor was the car in motion at the time she spilled the coffee. While trying to remove the lid, the 200+ degree coffee (of which McDonalds was repeatedly warned by safety experts as being some 60 degrees too hot) poured onto her lap, burning her inner thighs and groin. A vascular surgeon determined that Liebeck suffered full thickness burns (or third-degree burns) over 6 percent of her body. She suffered burns on her inner thighs, perineum, buttocks, genital and groin areas. She was hospitalized for 8 days, during which she underwent skin grafting to treat the burns. Ms. Liebach sought to settle her claim for a mere \$20,000.00, but McDonalds refused. During the lawsuit, McDonald’s produced documents showing more than 700 claims by people burned by its coffee between 1982 and 1992. Some claims involved third-degree burns substantially similar to Liebeck’s.

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