

In September 1994, Jennifer Thompson ate some of Schwan's products tainted with salmonella bacteria. Now, more than three years later, she still suffers from the physical aftereffects and she's suing the company, in effect telling them ...

# I scream FROM ice cream

STORIES BY DAVID JOHNSON OF THE TRIBUNE

**O**ROFINO — At first glance, Jennifer Thompson looks like a typical 17-year-old. But on the inside, she continues to suffer.

Pain and physical discomfort aside, Jennifer says the isolation and uncertain future trouble her the most — that and the realization she's been robbed of her teen-age years.

"I've had no life since this happened. I can't see any good in this."

She's had four surgeries, including one to remove her gall bladder. Arthritis in her joints and lower back make it difficult to walk. Chronic gastro-intestinal problems continue to plague her.

All because she ate some ice cream.

A junior at Orofino High School who has missed nearly 350 days of classes since she was in the eighth grade, Jennifer is one of the few victims still seeking a legal settlement with the manufacturers of Schwan's Ice Cream.

A trial date has been scheduled for May 5 in federal court at Moscow.

The Minnesota-based Schwan's Sales Enterprises was the subject of a nationwide product recall in

October 1994, when its ice cream was found to be tainted with salmonella enteritis bacteria.

For Jennifer and her family, notice of the recall came too late. She and parents, Dennis and Sherry Thompson, and her older sister, Shelly, already had eaten most of the three gallons of Schwan's ice cream they purchased on Sept. 12, 1994.

They all got sick, with Jennifer stricken most severely.

"I remember screaming. Nothing I did would make the pain go away."

Doctors scrambled for more than a week to diagnose the problem, eventually doing exploratory surgery. But no cause was found.

Finally, a lab technician ran a test by chance. It revealed the salmonella poisoning. All the family members were immediately placed on antibiotics. Everyone except Jennifer started to improve.

The family went home befuddled about where they may have picked up the salmonella bacteria. They got rid of more than half the food in the house.

Then, shortly after the diagnosis was made, recalls Dennis, the distinctive yellow Schwan's truck re-



Tribune/David Johns

Jennifer Thompson of Orofino, now 17, still struggles with a variety of physical ailments in the wake of the salmonella poisoning she claims she suffered in September 1994 due to eating tainted Schwan's Ice Cream.



## Scream

From 1A

turned to their home. Instead of selling them more ice cream, the driver told the Thompsons about the company's recall and the potential for salmonella poisoning.

"The driver told us outright, 'I'm sure you got it from us,'" Sherry says. "And after all this time, Schwan's will not admit anything."


Thus, the lawsuit.

Schwan's is represented by the Boise legal firm of Eberle, Berlin, Kading, Turnbow and McKlveen. A spokeswoman says it's the firm's policy to not comment on pending litigation.

David Jennings, vice president of administrative services for Schwan's, says the company has already settled with thousands of customers nationwide after it was determined the salmonella probably got into a batch of Schwan's ice cream mix when it was hauled in a truck that had earlier carried raw eggs. Jennings also declined comment about the Thompson suit.

All four Thompsons are named in the suit. The Thompsons' attorney, Nick Chenoweth of Orofino, is asking for monetary damages for each family member.

"The plaintiffs suffered physically and emotionally as a result of consuming the defective and unreasonably dangerous product placed into the stream of commerce by the defendants and ... these conditions are ongoing and expected to continue into the future and will in all likelihood continue for the rest, or at least some of, plaintiffs' lives," Chenoweth

  
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wrote in the complaint filed in U.S. District Court at Moscow.

Dennis and Sherry Thompson say the biggest concern is their youngest daughter's well-being.

"The main thing is for her to get better," says Sherry. "This is the time of her life when she should be having a good time."

In addition to the exploratory surgery, Jennifer underwent a second surgery to remove an infected gall bladder. After that, doctors operated a third time to remove a metal clip that had come loose after the gall bladder operation.

She underwent knee surgery recently after experiencing chronic pain. She's also been seeing a counselor.

All that aside, Jennifer admits she's not looking forward to testifying in court. For that matter, she confides, it's become increasingly difficult to look forward to anything.

"I guess the biggest thing in my mind is, will there be a day when I

wake up and don't have pain?"

Prior to the fall of 1994, Jennifer was an active young teenager, playing softball, basketball, volleyball and swimming.

"I was outside all day long during the summer."

She hung out with her friends and otherwise spent her days having fun.

"Right now, I can't even make it through a full week of school."

"Even when she goes to school, she comes home exhausted," adds her mother.

Despite all the absences, Jennifer continues to get As and Bs in her classes and is on schedule to graduate next year. That's a credit to her determination to make the best of a bad situation, say her parents.

"And the school district has been very good," says Sherry.

While she's maintained her academic progress, Jennifer says her social life continues to dwindle.

Her friends were initially at her side and seemed to understand

her difficulties. "But now, when my friends want to get together, I never know if I can ... because I might be sick."

As she's become more isolated from her peers, says Jennifer, she's turned more to her parents for comfort and support. And while her parents are always there, Jennifer reasons that this should be the time in her life when she becomes less dependent on her family and begins to exercise her own independence.

"It has changed our whole world," says Sherry. "For me, as a mother, there's nothing worse than seeing one of your children suffer and you can't make them better."

Jennifer wants to attend college, get a degree in education and teach first-graders. And yes, she does eat small amounts of ice cream again, but not Schwan's.

"It's hard for people to understand how I feel," she says, "because I look like a normal kid on the outside."