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### **She wins sex harassment suit, is still angry**

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For years Trish Fulkerson complained that she was being sexually harassed at work -verbally and even physically.

It was tough to get anyone to believe her.

Then last week she finally got through. A federal jury awarded Fulkerson about \$1.5 million - \$758,000 in actual damages and \$750,000 in punitive damages.

But she's still miserable, angry and upset.

"I still feel ashamed about being touched and it won't go away. I'm a changed person. I still have trouble being around people. I can't get close to anyone."

She stops to deal with her tears.

"Someday I might be able to forget this, but now I'm still having nightmares."

Arden Borgen owns the south Des Moines factory where Fulkerson worked, and he says he'll appeal the verdict. But he doesn't want to talk about it.

"It's not right for me to try and deal with this through the press, because the truth needs to eventually prevail through the legal system."

According to court records, this goes back to summer 1999, just days after Fulkerson started her new job at Borgen Systems, a company that makes glass refrigerators for grocery stores. She was the only woman working with about 40 men.

She was hearing things that made her uncomfortable. Then it got worse. The words were directed at her. She was being called a whore, a slut and a bitch.

But she couldn't quit. She's single with three kids and she was making good money -about \$10 an hour. More important, it was the first time she had health benefits.

So she kept going. She worked her 40-hour day shift and a lot of nights and weekends for the overtime.

The harassment didn't let up. It got worse.

She was called the f-word and everything else. She complained to her supervisor and to the plant manager and nothing happened.

Guys in the factory had photos, calendars, posters and banners of women in thongs, naked, in all kinds of sexually suggestive poses.

She complained to the company vice president, and eventually some of the banners and posters came down. The photos stayed up.

A co-worker touched her crotch and she complained to Arden Borgen about that and everything else. He promised to take care of the problem. The company put a warning note in the offender's file -"We do believe . . . there was unwanted physical contact which is in violation of our sexual harassment policy." About six months later they started sexual harassment training.

Things lightened up for a while, but long term, nothing changed.

She kept going to work and trying to deal with it. Since a lot of the harassment happened in the break room, she started taking her lunch break outside the building. It didn't help.

Fulkerson, now 38, kept filing complaints. She kept getting more angry and depressed. Sometimes she cursed right back at the guys. She didn't sleep at night and couldn't eat. She says she was short-tempered, mean to her kids, and she chased away her friends.

"I was unhappy and I wanted everybody around me to be unhappy."

Then in April 2001, after two years on the job, she bottomed out. Fulkerson gave her two weeks' notice.

"But I went home that night, looked at my kids and realized I didn't have a choice. I knew what it felt like to send these kids to bed hungry. So I tried to take back my resignation, but they wouldn't let me."

For the past two years she's been fighting this, and last week the case went to federal court. After four days and eight witnesses, the jury believed Fulkerson and gave her the \$1.5 million. Federal law caps punitive damages at \$50,000 and Borgen will probably have to pick up the tab for Fulkerson's lawyers -Paige Fiedler and Tom Newkirk.

So on the money front there's a lot to feel good about. But emotionally, Trish Fulkerson's life is a mess. She cries all the time, her hands shake and, she keeps saying: "I still haven't gotten an apology."

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