

offensive line out to eat at the end of the year. His teammates opted for Roy's Restaurant and he said the meal set him back \$7,000 - but it was fun, and of course he was on the receiving end the next year. Things were going just fine; he loved the camaraderie with teammates and the continual challenge of perfecting his skills. Now he faced a whole new set of challenges.

Seeking Justice

The Justice Coalition began working with Richard soon after he got out of the hospital. Not only did he have to learn how to cope with his disabilities, he had to face all the ensuing issues involved in seeing his assailant brought to justice. He says, "the Justice Coalition was always there when I needed them, always letting me know what was going on with the trial, my rights as a victim, and other things I didn't know."

From all accounts, Tyrone Hartsfield had followed Richard and his friend from a San Marco nightclub and tried to kill him in retaliation for an altercation at another club four months earlier. Following a month-long investigation, JSO detectives arrested Hartsfield in October 2008, and the trial was held last November. Key evidence was obtained by Stephan Wilson, a friend of Hartsfield who wore a wire and recorded a discussion between the two about "getting their stories straight." After deliberating three hours, the 12-member jury found Hartsfield guilty of attempted first-degree murder and on Dec. 17 he was sentenced

to life in prison without parole. Richard takes no joy in the conviction, but he knows they got the right man.

Everyone in the courtroom was touched by Richard's impact statement to the judge at the sentencing phase of the trial. "I am not only physically scarred but emotionally as well. My ability to live out my dream of playing football has been snatched away from me. All of my hard work, blood, sweat and tears seem to mean nothing any more. Playing for the Jaguars was a dream come true and I looked forward to an exciting, fulfilling career."

He said he always loved to play basketball, "to slam dunk the ball, but I can't do that any

probably affected the most. They look up to me and when they saw what happened, they took it really hard. My mother had to see her son lying in a hospital bed, near death. Until the day I die, my loved ones and I will have scars from what was done to me.

"What I have had to go through, I would not wish on my worst enemy. I feel that nothing on earth can give me the satisfaction I seek for what was done to me; however, I ask that justice be served."

Despite testimony of Hartsfield that he did not shoot Richard and witnesses who insisted he was a "wonderful" human being, father and friend, Judge Mallory Cooper handed

mother, Shirley, played piano and sang - all of which had a strong spiritual influence on his life. "I've always believed in God, couldn't have done anything without Him," he says. "I've not been a saint, but I never lost faith in God or even questioned Him about what happened to me. My relationship with God is stronger now, and when I'm speaking, I tell about when I was alone in my hospital room, I would read my Bible and felt a peace after I started doing that."

He speaks to various groups in the community and says, "I go where my heart leads me, and I speak from my heart - I don't write things down. I feel more comfortable that way. I

Talking to young people, he offers the same advice he gives his nephews: you can do anything you want to do. It takes a lot of hard work, but anything that is easy is probably not what you need. He urges young people to make good choices in life, watch what they do and who they hang around with. And he emphasizes how important it is to learn from others' mistakes - his own, or their parents' or friends' mistakes.

Richard and his fiancé are making plans to get married soon. He jokingly says he's learned to say "OK - whatever you want." He has renovated his house to some degree, but he doesn't want to alter it too much. He works out doing pushups and lifting weights (he's back up to pressing more than 300 pounds), so with his upper body strength he can maneuver himself from his wheelchair to couches, his bed, tub, and so on.

He is a realist, a positive person who hates to be sad. He doesn't want sympathy. Recently a woman came up to him in a department store and started crying as she expressed her sorrow about what happened to him. He appreciated her thoughts and concern, but didn't want to be pitied.

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more. Any sports I play will have to be from a wheelchair. My body will forever be disfigured; the use of my lower extremities is gone. When I get married, I can't stand and watch my bride come down the aisle. If I have boys someday, I won't be able to teach them how to play football." Richard was overcome with emotion and he struggled for composure.

He said, "Everything I do has had to be altered and I have to constantly worry about my health. My family has also gone through a terrible time. My nephews who live with me were

down the maximum sentence for his crime. State Prosecutor Bernie de la Rionda described for the court Hartsfield's extensive criminal record - something the jury had not heard before - beginning with his assault at age 17 on a school teacher and including jail/prison time for everything from violent assaults to dealing drugs.

Getting on with life

So Richard's life has taken an unexpected turn, but he plans to make the most of it. He was raised in church where his

add God to everything I talk about. He's the only thing that has kept me sane. I would have gone crazy without Him in my life."

When asked if speaking to a group comes naturally to him, Richard said it's something he's had to learn. "An offensive lineman never gets to speak - everyone wants to hear from the quarterback, but I was always the class clown; I like to make people laugh. I'm 6'7" and 350 pounds, so I'm accustomed to people looking at me. My whole life I was stared at, so I'm used to it."

THINGS YOUR BURGLAR WON'T TELL YOU:

• Of course I look familiar. I was here just last week cleaning your carpets, painting your shutters, or delivering your new refrigerator.

• Hey, thanks for letting me use the bathroom when I was working in your yard last week. While I was in there, I unlatched the back window to make my return a little easier.

• Love those flowers. That tells me you have taste ... and taste means there are nice things inside. Those yard toys your kids leave out always make me wonder what type of gaming system they have.

• Yes, I really do look for newspapers piled up on the driveway. And I might leave a pizza flyer in your front door to see how long it takes you to remove it.

• If it snows while you're out of town, get a neighbor to create car and foot tracks into the house. Virgin drifts in the driveway are a dead giveaway.

• If decorative glass is part of your front entrance, don't let your alarm company install the control pad where I can see if it's set. That makes it too easy.

• A good security company alarms the window over the sink. And the windows on the second floor, which often access the master bedroom-and your jewelry. It's not a bad idea to put motion detectors up there too.

• It's raining, you're fumbling with your umbrella, and you forget to lock your door - understandable. But understand this: I don't take

a day off because of bad weather.

• I always knock first. If you answer, I'll ask for directions somewhere or offer to clean your gutters. (Don't take me up on it.)

• Do you really think I won't look in your sock drawer? I always check dresser drawers, the bedside table, and the medicine cabinet.

• Here's a helpful hint: I almost never go into kids' rooms.

• You're right: I won't have enough time to break into that safe where you keep your valuables. But if it's not bolted down, I'll take it with me.

• A loud TV or radio can be a better deterrent than the best alarm system. If you're reluctant to leave your TV on

while you're out of town, you can buy a \$35 device that works on a timer and simulates the flickering glow of a real television. (Find it at <http://faketv.com/>.)

• Sometimes, I carry a clipboard. Sometimes, I dress like a lawn guy and carry a rake. I do my best to never, ever look like a crook.

• The two things I hate most: loud dogs and nosy neighbors.

• I'll break a window to get in, even if it makes a little noise. If your neighbor hears one loud sound, he'll stop what he's doing and wait to hear it again. If he doesn't hear it again, he'll just go back to what he was doing. It's human nature.

• I'm not complaining, but why would you pay all that money for a fancy alarm

system and leave your house without setting it?

• I love looking in your windows. I'm looking for signs that you're home, and for flat screen TVs or gaming systems I'd like. I'll drive or walk through your neighborhood at night, before you close the blinds, just to pick my targets.

• The secret word is hope.

• Avoid announcing your vacation on your Facebook page. It's easier than you think to look up your address.

• To you, leaving that window open just a crack during the day is a way to let in a little fresh air. To me, it's an invitation.

• If you don't answer when I knock, I try the door. Occasionally, I hit the jackpot and walk right in.