

Judy M., a 49-year-old mother of four children, had never been in trouble with law enforcement before November 19, 2006. On that date, she was attending a Cardinals football game at the University of Phoenix Stadium in Glendale, AZ with her fiancé David and a close friend. The Cardinals staff was handing out small pom-poms, and she and David each took two as they entered the stadium. Their season tickets were in the first row of an area known as the “ring of honor”, which is an elevated balcony section with only two rows of seating.

While cheering during the second half of the game, Judy accidentally dropped a pom-pom over the ledge in front of her seat. Within minutes, four police officers arrived at the scene, apparently because the manager of the stadium had called to complain. The officers wanted to speak to her. When Judy and her fiancé reached the aisle, the officer grabbed Judy’s right arm, twisting it behind her back and handcuffing her wrist, saying, “You’re coming with me.” Judy was surprised and pleaded with the officer that she had done nothing wrong and did not understand why he was treating her so roughly. The officer started pushing Judy up the stairs. Startled, she grabbed on to the railing. A scuffle ensued, and she ended up on the ground. Still in shock, Judy grabbed on to the railing with her body and continued asking what she had done wrong.

Instead of receiving an answer, Judy was Tased a total of six times by two DPS officers: twice in both arms, once in the leg, once in the hand, and twice in the chest. She was given no warning that the officers would Taser her before they did so. And because the Tasings came only seconds apart, she was given no opportunity to comply with their commands in between the electric shocks. The first four times, the officers Tased her in dart mode, even though they were less than a foot away. They shot barbed darts into her skin, delivering an electric shock of at least 1,200 Volts through the metal hooks. In addition to the excruciating pain, each shock produced an electrical override of Judy’s nervous system, causing uncontrollable muscle contractions and incapacitating her. In addition, Judy was Tased twice in the chest in “drive stun” mode. In this mode, officers apply the barbed hooks directly to the skin at close range. At one point, Judy was continuously shocked in the chest for six to seven seconds, indicating that the officer had applied the shock for more than one cycle (cycles usually last five seconds each).

The policy that DPS provided to the ACLU did not prohibit officers from using a Taser when the subject did not pose an immediate threat or was not suspected of a serious crime. Nor did the policy prohibit or discourage the use of Tasers to coerce a subject into doing something (in Judy’s case, moving up the stairs). DPS policy also authorized multiple deployments. Since Judy’s ordeal, national law enforcement organizations have identified a need for clearer Taser guidelines. For instance, the Police Executive Research Forum (PERF) has recommended that Tasers not be used in drive stun mode for pain compliance. PERF has also recognized that “repeated applications and continuous cycling of [Tasers] may increase the risk of death or serious injury and should be avoided.” Judy was shocked six times for a cumulative total of over 30 seconds, twice the limit recommended by PERF. We urge law enforcement agencies to revisit their Taser policies so that what happened to Judy will not happen to another unarmed civilian.