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**Fire victim has uphill battle**  
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WILLIMANTIC - David Marshall's life is upside down.

Following last month's early morning fire on South Street that put his wife, Kathy Hill, 33, in a coma, Marshall wants to see the people responsible for setting the fire brought to justice.

"There may be people who know who did this and don't know what's actually happened," he said. "The reality is that person had her heart stop and nearly died. And now, she's unable to communicate with us."

The fire is still under investigation by the state police Major Crime Squad. There were no updates from state police as of late Thursday morning.

Windham Code Enforcement Officer Matthew Vertefeuille said tips have come in through the tip line, but said he couldn't comment further on the investigation.

Hill was transferred to Spaulding Rehabilitation Hospital in Boston last week, after three weeks spent at Rhode Island Hospital in Providence, R.I.

Marshall, 44, said he's okay and he's now waiting, along with Hill's family from New Zealand, for his wife to waken up.

Hill is a University of Connecticut researcher.

Marshall, who also works at UConn, is a postdoctoral research associate. Both work at UConn's Department of Ecology and Evolutionary Biology.

"She's receiving close attention by experts and technically isn't in a coma," he said. "There are no clear words to these things because the terminology is so inadequate. It remains possible that she may never recover her consciousness and open her eyes."

Marshall still has hope.

"Some people make amazing recoveries," he said.

As for those responsible for the fire that destroyed the couple's apartment and displaced another tenant, Marshall said they must be caught.

"This is the most horrible thing I could ever imagine," he said. "Everyone is at risk. It could be someone else's loved one."

"If she doesn't recover she will have been effectively murdered," he said.

Marshall said Hill has recovered from her burns, but " she's been unable to finish waking up."

"We may never know if she is listening to us," he said.

Marshall, who doesn't remember jumping out the third floor window of their apartment, said he also doesn't remember the fall.

"All I remember is being in terror and that I was about to pass out," he said. "It was remarkable that I got out of that window."

He said they were woken up by the sound of the fire alarm before realizing the home was on fire. "I saw fire to my left and smoke in the kitchen. I screamed, It's a fire and we have to get out."

Marshall said he couldn't open the back door to the apartment and said he was panicking in the apartment when he thought of the window in the bedroom. "Why I thought of that window I don't know," he said. "Never for once in my life did I think about fire in that building. I thought I had no hope."

With hot, thick smoke around him, Marshall got the window open and "smashed" to the ground.

Suffering only a broken wrist and a fractured elbow, Marshall said he "seemed to have gotten the most incredibly lucky exit."

"I didn't even hit my head," he said.

Looking back, Marshall called himself a "fool" for not getting Hill out, as well.

"I didn't even get her to the window," he said. "Luckily (Gerard Sinopoli) told the firefighters about Kathy." Sinopoli lived on the first floor of the multifamily home.

"I know she was awake," Marshall said about Hill, adding he was screaming around the apartment before escaping the blaze through the window.

Marshall said firefighters found his wife "just outside the bedroom on the floor."

"It just shows how impossible it is," he said. "She had lots of cyanide in her."

Marshall said he wants to warn others about what they could face from arsonists.

"It won't be my family next time," he said. "This was a thoughtless crime. They are going to do it again and it could be your family."

"It's wrong for them to go free."

Marshall said everyone at UConn and his department has "been supportive beyond my wildest imagination."

While on the phone in Boston, he called his wife a "brilliant, wonderful girl."

"She's an independent, tough person," he said. "We did every single thing together for more than a decade. We are soul-mates."

Hill is in a two-month program, where doctors hope to "maximize as much of her life capabilities as possible," Marshall said.

"We have got to get her communicating," he said. "We are all here constantly with her, basically, all day, everyday."

Anthem Blue Cross Blue Shield had originally given Marshall a "fight" for two days before Hill was transferred to Boston.

"Anthem came down and denied her coverage being moved to Spaulding," he said, adding U.S. Sen. Richard Blumenthal and state Rep. Susan Johnson, D-Willimantic, "leaped into action" to get Hill transferred.

The early morning, three-alarm house fire at 62-64 South Street destroyed the three-story home and also injured seven others.

Six firefighters were injured, including Sinopoli. All were treated and released.

Vertefeuille said there is a \$2,500 reward being offered for information regarding the cause of the blaze.

Those with any information on the fire can call the State Police Arson hotline at (800) 842-7766.

A fund, started by Hill and Marshall's colleagues, has been named the "Friends of Kathy and Dave Fund."

Donations can either be brought to a local Liberty Bank branch or mailed to one. There are three Liberty Banks in the area, one in Storrs, located at 1132 Storrs Road, and two in Willimantic, located at 679 Main St. and 1703 Main St. If mailing, put "Attn: Friends of Kathy and Dave Fund" on the letter and envelope.