"Please come to the hospital right away," the intensive care nurse said over the phone. "Paralysis is moving up your husband's body. He may have to go on a respirator."

I had left my husband at the hospital four hours earlier, thinking he would be home the next day. He'd been admitted with a case of food poisoning. The nurses and doctors didn't seem concerned. But by the time I rushed back to the hospital after getting that call, he was paralyzed from the mid-chest down - all from a poorly cooked chicken dinner.

Several day earlier, my husband, Scott, and I had gone to our favorite Italian restaurant. I ordered the ravioli, he asked for a stuffed chicken breast. Within five days, Scott started to experience cramping, diarrhea, vomiting, fever and muscle aches. We assumed it was the stomach flu. But when he started bleeding from the rectum, we went to the doctor immediately. After being treated with antibiotics, his condition seemed to improve.

But our nightmare was only beginning. As Scott began to deteriorate again, the public health department - which investigates all suspected cases of food poisoning - identified his infection as Campylobacter, a foodborne bacterium. From the timing of his illness, they traced it to that stuffed chicken breast. Yet even after Scott started an urgent course of antibiotics, his bowels and bladder began to shut down. I rushed him to the hospital, and soon after leaving him there, received that chilling phone call from the ICU nurse. The Campylobacter infection, for unknown reasons, sent his immune system into overdrive and eventually caused spinal cord damage.

Found on virtually all chicken in Canada, but easily eradicated through proper cooking, Campylobacter is causing more infections than the more familiar Salmonella or E.Coli. In 1996, Canada recorded 12,801 cases. For the most part, people who come into contact with Campylobacter develop profuse diarrhea, abdominal pain, headache and fever, but it has also been associated with meningitis, convulsions, arthritis and the autoimmune disease Guillain-Barre syndrome.

Still, the severity of Scott's reaction stands out as a rare case. In the weeks following his hospitalization, my husband slowly recovered and was able to walk. But today, more than two years later, he still suffers fatigue, sexual dysfunction and severe muscle spasms that keep him up at night. Scott receives physical therapy to help maintain his current level of functioning, but doctors have advised us not to expect any improvement. Our lives are changed forever.

It's hard to know who's to blame. We are suing the restaurant that served the chicken; in turn, the restaurant is suing the grocery chain that sold the chicken produced and the producer is suing the trucking company. Now I never take a chance on poorly cooked food, either in a restaurant or at home. If a waitress brings me lukewarm food when it's something that should be served hot and cooked through, I send it right back.