



Laura, left, and sister Amy Hatch

## **Laura Hatch**: AGE 20, REDMOND by sister Amy Hatch

Hope can help us heal. It can give us strength to get through things we didn't know we could survive. Hope can be tangible or unseen. It can be boisterous, or it can be unspoken.

For my sister, hope came in the form of wings: Invisible angel wings.

Laura, my youngest sister, vanished into the night on Oct. 2, 2004, on her way home from a friend's party. She was found seven and a half days later semi-conscious, seriously injured and trapped in her wrecked car in a ravine almost 200 feet below the road. Laura survived what should have been unsurvivable.

For 10 days after she was found, Laura was confined to a hospital bed in Harborview's Pediatric Intensive Care Unit. She had a shattered face, a blood clot in her brain and suffered from severe dehydration. She was too weak to walk and experienced a lot of pain in her legs from nerve damage caused by exposure.

Laura was recently accepted into a dental assistant program, which she will begin in fall 2007. She hopes to become a dental professional one day. When she's not studying, she's spending time with her friends, her family – especially her twin sister, Karen – reading, cooking and playing with her kitten, Itty-Bitty.



Little of what Laura said during those 10 days was coherent. Her dehydration and blood clot made her shift between awareness and disorientation. She was very confused, but she knew one thing for sure – she wanted to go home and she needed help from her favorite nurses to get there.

“Laura began asking for angel wings so she could fly home,” our mom, Jean Hatch, said. “Laura’s favorite nurse in the Pediatric ICU promised Laura early on that she would help her make the wings. She would quietly assure Laura that she was rounding up supplies and that they were carefully constructing the magic transportation that would get her home.”

The plan brought Laura endless joy and comfort. She loved to tell us again and again about the covert operation under way.

“The care and concern shown by the staff was truly touching,” our mom said. “If you took a moment to sit back and observe all the work that was going on and the intensity of the tasks, they had so much to do, and yet we were treated with such kindness that you could almost forget Laura wasn’t their only patient.”

Laura’s second “favorite” nurse was on the 3 West Hospital Neurosurgery floor. The nurse told my mom that she also had been in a critical car accident when she was younger and had suffered some of the same injuries as Laura. That experience inspired her to become a nurse and was specifically why she chose Harborview – so she could be part of the amazing trauma care.

“We were so grateful for this nurse,” Mom said. “As she and Laura bonded, the hospital made sure to see that she was Laura’s nurse whenever she was on duty. In fact, the staff went out of their way to see that Laura was matched

up with all of her favorite nurses when they were on shift.”

Throughout it all, one doctor really won our hearts – Dr. Richard Ellenbogen, Laura’s neurosurgeon and chief of Neurological Surgery at Harborview and a UW professor and chairman of Neurological Surgery.

“He was the first doctor to sit down and talk to us the day she was found,” my father, Todd Hatch, said. “He had this calming presence. He was so patient and reassuring. He spoke to us in layman’s terms, ensuring we felt comfortable and clearly understood everything that was happening.”

Dr. Ellenbogen and the nurses quickly became our personal heroes. I can say that we are all still awestruck at the compassion, skill and energy we witnessed. I personally cannot imagine admiring someone more than I do the nurses and doctors that worked on Laura.

Harborview gave our family hope at a time when it was hard to find. We learned that if you are lucky enough to find hope, you can survive almost anything.

Laura is thriving now, and despite all the challenges she has faced since the accident, she certainly sees her survival as a miracle. But she also acknowledges that she had help from a higher power.

“No one can explain why I survived the accident,” Laura said. “I had angels watching over me to get me through. And then, God gave me the best doctors and nurses. That’s why I am alive today.” ::

Strength