

AMAZING FAITH

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Preserve me, O God, for in thee I take refuge.

I say to the Lord, "Thou art my Lord;

I have no good apart from thee."

-Psalm 16

These were the words that comforted and nurtured Sharon [REDACTED] in her days of woe. She needed such consolation. Lesser tragedies have broken the spirit of others.

In less than six years, [REDACTED] weathered a divorce, the lengthy recovery of a son hit by a truck and the rehabilitation of a teenage daughter hooked on drugs. Through it all she managed to keep her sense of humor and an unflinching devotion to God.

"It was faith in God that got me through it," she said. "Jesus was my rock."

[REDACTED] is 40, a gregarious, smiling woman who admits she loves to hug friends and relatives. A financial analyst at Pratt & Whitney, she dreams of running the Orange Bowl Marathon one day. Don't bet against her. Her determination is awesome.

"I'm surprised she didn't end up in a padded cell," joked son David, 17, who recently received a Pathfinder Scholarship Award for his own determination during recovery.

"She is a woman of strong will," said Pastor Norman Benz of the Maranatha Church of God in Palm Beach Gardens.

"She never lost faith. Through it all she told people about her faith in God and her belief that ultimately he would heal David."

"Other women would have had a breakdown," said daughter Stacey [REDACTED], 20. "But she was very strong. She had God and I think that's what helped her through it."

[REDACTED] still lives in her modest West Palm Beach home of 18 years. In the living room hallway, between the stereo and the television set, is a case full of sports trophies and ribbons, a silent testimonial to life B.A. - before the accident - when David dreamed of winning a football college scholarship.

In a bedroom, she keeps the red-leather photo album with more than 100 photographs she shot of David with her Canon Snappy during his yearlong recovery. A journal, kept in an unassuming spiral notebook, is safely tucked away in a filing cabinet. The Bible is always on hand.

Remembering good times

"I did this for my sanity," [REDACTED] said of the written and pictorial account of hard times. "The doctor said it was a good thing to do because it would show us how far he had gotten."

The album and journal are tributes to the seconds in David's life. The second time he smiled for the first time (during a Tarzan movie), the second time he first brushed his teeth (a month after the accident), the second time he first ate a home-cooked meal (apple pie and turkey for Thanksgiving.)

They are records of low points and high emotions, of confusion and exhaustion and joy. Mainly, they are reminders that life is ephemeral yet precious, a gift to be cherished and revered.

"I'm so tired of having to make decisions," scrawled [REDACTED] one day.

"The pain in my heart is almost more than I can bear," she wrote another time.

"So many questions and so many repeats of the same thing," she said later.

The pain begins

David was 14 when a truck hit him as he rode his bike along Haverhill Road in the late afternoon of Oct. 30, 1985. "' Boy Hit by Truck in Critical Condition," read the headline in The Palm Beach Post. [REDACTED] clipped the story and put it on the first page of the photo album, along with a picture of David in intensive care.

His injuries included five broken ribs, a bruised heart, collapsed lung, dislocated pelvis, a blood clot on the brain and internal bleeding which resulted in 14 transfusions. He was in a coma for five weeks at Humana Hospital.

'Always something else'

[REDACTED] was able to take leave from Pratt & Whitney the first weeks. She slept on the sofa in the intensive care waiting room. She wore scrubbies. When she could she read Psalm 16 to the sleeping David. She sang to him. She prayed.

"They would fix something," [REDACTED] recalled, "but there was always something else. I kept telling myself, 'God has a purpose for this. God has a purpose for this.' I kept seeing him well and I fixed myself on that image."

The medical experts did not offer much hope that he would survive, but this did not dissuade her. She attributes her equanimity during those harrowing days to the prayers from the members of her church, Maranatha, and the support of her employer, Pratt & Whitney.

Thanks for the strength

In her journal, she wrote, "There is so much to be thankful for despite this tragic accident. I'm thankful that so many difficult trials in the past have given me the strength to handle this."

Now she looks back at those five weeks at Humana with a smile of acceptance and relief. "' I told David later that I would eat onion sandwiches so I could breathe on him and wake him up," she said, and both son and mother laughed at the well-worn joke.

David does not remember much of those first weeks, except the nurses' tender care and his mother's constant presence. "' They were very good to me," he said. "' They spoiled me."

The road to recovery

When David was strong enough to be moved, five weeks after the accident, he was transferred by air ambulance to the Spain Rehabilitation Center in Birmingham, Ala. The freshman at North Shore High School checked in with a kindergarten level of understanding. At the end of his four-week stay, he had progressed to a fifth-grade level.

Back home, David returned to school half days in March of 1986. Three times a week, [REDACTED] rushed home from work to take him to therapy at Crippled Childrens Society in Palm Beach. About a month later, he had reached a ninth-grade reading level, an eighth-grade spelling level and sixth-grade math level.

His progress was encouraging, but it wasn't the end of the ordeal for [REDACTED]. In May 1986, seven months after David's accident, daughter Stacey was admitted to the L.I.F.E. drug rehabilitation program in Sarasota, primarily because of alcohol abuse. It was the culmination of many months of problems and worries over her daughter.

Another test of strength

While David was still going through therapy, [REDACTED] drove back and forth every weekend for a year to visit Stacey. [REDACTED] was forced to camp out in a nearby state park because finances were tight.

"To see her there really showed me who my friends were and who cared for me," Stacey said of her mother. "' I was always rebellious. My mother tried to tell me what was right and what was wrong and I did the opposite of what she said. But when I was up there I realized how much I missed her."

Stacey now has a 3-month-old daughter and she is drug free. David's last operation was in December 1988. Today he walks without a limp. He is active in his church youth group and works tending horses at a ranch near his home, the same job he had when he was hit by the truck.

In April, he went with his girlfriend, Cheryl Lynn Culberson, to the prom and he proudly displays their photograph to visitors. This month, in a victory for both son and mother, he graduates with his senior class of Palm Beach Lakes High (the resulting merger of North Shore and Twin Lakes schools) Accepting the change

"Dear David," wrote [REDACTED] in a half-page ad she bought in the school yearbook, "When God sent you to me, I loved you from the start. You were just a ray of sunshine from heaven...In raising you I have learned patience, sacrifice and endurance. You have overcome many obstacles that would have destroyed others."

It took ██████ many months to get through the mourning for the son who was a happy-go-lucky football player dreaming of playing college ball. It's taken David a little longer to accept the change.

"I still miss football," he said. " But I guess that's the way the cookie crumbles."

Yet, he admits he has learned an invaluable lesson about perseverance and love. " In a way, I expected her to always be there, like it was her duty. But I know it was hard for her. It made me happy she was there for me all the time.

Troubled times have taught ██████, too. " I've learned a very deep appreciation for life," she said. " All this has definitely rearranged my priorities. Material possessions are nowhere near as important as they once were.

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- Caption: PHOTO (2C/1B&W)1)Photos by Greg Lovett/Staff PhotographerSharon ██████, her daughter Stacey and son David share a special bond of trust, determination and love. David fought to overcome injuries from a near- fatal accident. Stacey (shown in portrait) survived a battle against drugs. Through it all, Sharon relied on her faith.2)Newspaper clippings and photos document the trauma David ██████ suffered after being hit by a truck. He was in a coma for five weeks after the accident.3)Sharon ██████ never let her family troubles get her down. She prayed. She kept her determination. And she kept the faith.

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