

## THE DANCING QUEEN



When Laurie Anderson was a young girl, she was vibrant and full of life with a spitfire personality. She took tap and ballet classes, was involved in gymnastics, and became a high school cheerleader. No one could have dreamed what her future would hold.

**“Everyone can make plans, but we all have to change them some-times,” says Debbie, Laurie’s mom.**

The Andersons experienced a life-changing day, and nothing has quite been the same ever since.

June 24, 1990, was a rainy, cold day. Seventeen-year-old Laurie decided to take a drive with her boyfriend (who she had been dating for a little less than a year) before her shift at the fast-food restaurant where she worked, but she never punched in again.

Between 6 and 7 p.m., her parents were at home and noticed a life-flight helicopter fly over their house. They commented to each other that St. Vincent Health Center must be on trauma duty, as they watched the chopper veer toward the hospital. About 15 minutes later, their phone rang. A nurse was on the other end telling Debbie that her daughter had been in an accident.



Laurie’s boyfriend had taken an S-curve a little too quickly, entering the opposite lane. With an on-coming car headed directly for them, he swerved but over-corrected and hit the ditch, sending the car flying up a tree. Laurie was ejected and pinned.

**“It was truly an accident. He may have been going a little too fast, but we all do.”**

Laurie suffered from a damaged liver and a traumatic brain injury, which caused lack of oxygen to her brain and has caused severe disability for Laurie. She has a permanent feeding tube and a tracheotomy tube to help her breathe. During her three week stay in intensive care, her doctor told her parents that he saw no hope by looking at her MRI and implied that she would be a ‘vegetable’ for the rest of her life.

Debbie knew her daughter understood what was happening around her, because when she had visitors, her heart rate would increase. She asked Laurie’s boyfriend, who had been treated and released from the hospital, to visit, hoping that his presence would motivate Laurie to wake up. He visited a few times, but after learning that there would be no charges filed, he stopped coming to visit.



**“I didn’t expect Laurie’s boyfriend to stop his life for her, but it hurts that he never kept in touch.”**

The Andersons had to make a decision. They knew their options. There were group homes available, but the Andersons didn’t believe a group home was the right fit for their family.

**“She was my child, and I was bringing her home. That was it.”**



Laurie first went to a rehabilitative center, which gave her parents time to renovate their home, making it accessible and safe for Laurie. Debbie visited Laurie every day, arriving by 10 a.m. and staying until bedtime. Over Christmastime, Laurie smiled. Her doctors compared reports of Laurie's brainwaves before and after the holiday. Before Christmas, her brainwaves were nearly a straight line, but after the holiday, Laurie's brainwaves showed low peaks.

After nearly a year at the rehabilitative center, Laurie came home, but she required 24-hour monitoring. In-home nursing staff were needed to help take care of her. When a shift was not staffed, Debbie picked up the slack, often working nonstop to make sure her daughter was well cared for.

**“I set the standard of care, and I expect no more or no less from Laurie’s staff. I’m a little obsessive compulsive when it comes to Laurie, and it’s been the good continuity of care she’s received that has helped her stay so healthy.”**

Once the Andersons met the million dollar mark with their private pay insurance, they were allowed to seek assistance from agencies. They began utilizing services at three local agencies, including EHCA.

One of the perks Laurie took advantage of from EHCA was the Camp Glinodo pool. Anyone receiving services from EHCA could go to the camp’s pool for the day, and Debbie often took her daughter. At first, she was unsure Laurie would be able to participate due to her tracheotomy, but they were taught how to use a water walker, making it safe for Laurie to enjoy the pool. She liked it so much, they eventually installed a pool at home.

Laurie understands what is happening around her, and she can communicate “yes” and “no” with facial movements. She laughs and cries at appropriate times. She also has some movement in her left leg.

About eight or nine years ago, Laurie joined EHCA’s MOVE Program, which gives her the opportunity to enjoy group activities with others who have disabilities. MOVE stands for Making Opportunities for Volunteerism and Exploration.

**“The MOVE Program has given Laurie more independence and some companionship. The staff at EHCA really focus on Laurie’s abilities.”**

Laurie’s accident changed her life, but she is happy and content now. She is able to go on outings with her MOVE peers, and has even participated in the Partners in Dance performances, embracing her love for dance.

**“When Laurie dies, I’ll put three dates on her grave: her birthday, the date of her accident, and the day she dies. I lost my first daughter in 1990, and I brought home a new daughter.”**

**“I remember standing around Laurie’s bed on her 21st birthday, and I kept thinking, ‘This sucks. We should be buying her drinks at the bar.’ It just wasn’t right.”**

**Laurie’s cousin, Barb**

