

VALLEY & STATE

SECTION B
 THURSDAY, 3.3.2011
 THE ARIZONA REPUBLIC
 NEWS.AZCENTRAL.COM

Daughter's organs gave gift of life

Marsha Dyer had an idea for a "good news" story that would mark the fifth anniversary of the worst time of her life.

She's been reading the columns I've done about the 100 or so Medicaid transplant patients who are being denied life-saving surgery by the Legislature and she wondered if I'd be interested in looking at that situation from a different angle.

That is, from the point of view of a family who lost a daughter and saved lives.

"It seems amazing that it has been five years since it happened," Marsha told me. "The first two or three are a blur. Then, slowly, you come out of it. And though you still



E.J. MONTINI
 Republic columnist

grieve, you can find ways to feel better, and you try to do good."

On March 2, 2006, 27-year-old Ashlyn Dyer was on an early-morning run through the Presidio in San Francisco. Ashlyn spent her early years in Phoenix. She was a student at Madison Meadows Middle School and started high school at Xavier.

Then her father, Bruce, was transferred to California and

she finished high school there. She was a star volleyball player, graduating from USC and moving on to an early career as a buyer for Restoration Hardware. She was beautiful, smart, and talented.

Then, on that terrible morning five years ago, a hit-and-run driver struck her as she ran along the side of the road. She was left to die. There was brain damage. If the driver had stopped, Ashlyn might have been saved. As it was, she lingered for 10 days and succumbed to traumatic brain injury.

"Our saving grace was that Ashlyn became an organ donor," said Marsha. "Even though we lost her we knew that she went on to help seven

or eight other people, with her tissue, her skin, eyes, kidney, liver, part of her heart. It goes on."

News outlets in San Francisco picked up on the story of the young woman who'd been run over.

In a local hospital, the family of a woman named Michelle found out that she would receive the life-saving liver transplant. In an e-mail, a family member of Michelle's described the night that they learned she would be saved, writing:

"We laughed, we cried, we reminisced. We were still walking a foot off the ground when the KRON eleven o'clock news

See MONTINI, Page B5

Montini

Continued from B1

came on with their lead story: Ashlyn Dyer, the hit-and-run victim died late yesterday, her family by her side. Her parents were quoted as saying that their only solace was that her organs had been harvested to give life to those in need of a transplant ... Our family sat in stunned si-

lence as we watched this precious woman come alive in our minds. Our euphoria dissolved into a sober reality ..."

Michelle's family learned that there was a makeshift memorial to Ashlyn at the site where she was struck by the car. They left a note that read in part:

"We are deeply saddened by the loss of your beautiful Ashlyn. Please know that a part of her lives on in the life of someone we dearly love ..."

Some time later, Ashlyn's family was at an event in California for donor families. A woman approached them and said that her name was Michelle and that she'd received Ashlyn's liver and a kidney. "Ashlyn and I are getting along beautifully," she said.

Of that meeting, Marsha told me, "It was the most powerful moment we went through."

Marsha and Bruce set up a foundation in Ashlyn's name.

(The website is ashlyndyer

thru.org.)

They've used it to raise awareness and research money for treatment of traumatic brain injuries. They also encourage folks to become organ donors, something one can do by contacting the Donor Network of Arizona at 602-222-2200 or visiting azdonorregistry.org. This month, the Dyers are breaking ground on the Ashlyn Dyer Aquatic Center at Barron Neur-

ological Institute in Phoenix.

"Ashlyn was on her own and was going to lead a great life," said her mother. "And then ..."

She paused, holding back tears, and added, "But, her two older sisters have been strong and have given my husband and me perspective. We have five beautiful grandkids. And we have the knowledge that Ashlyn is living on through others."

Reach Montini at 602-444-8978.