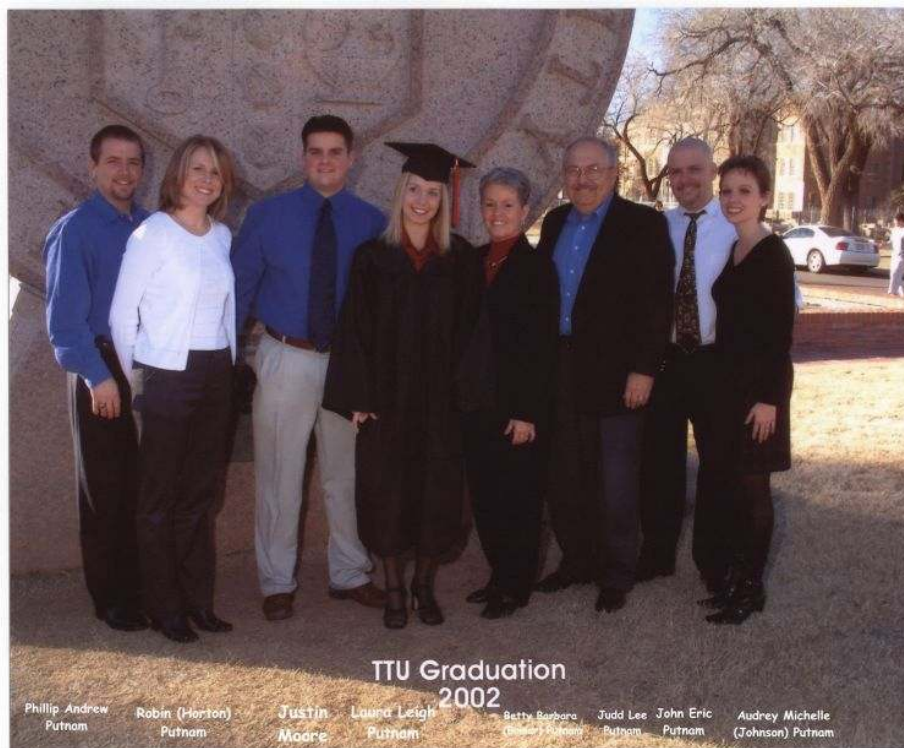


John Putnam's Journal

When Laura was tragically killed by a hit and boater on May 26, 2003, one of the family members who received that most dreaded of phone calls, was her older brother John. This case was especially stressful, as not only the hit and run driver boater was missing, but so was Laura. To help deal with the loss, John began a journal a few months later, where he wrote about what had happened, and what he and other members of his family experienced.

Some psychologists recommend writing a journal as a way to help individuals deal with tragedy, and John's journal carries the reader through the emotional roller coaster some victims may experience. This journal also allows the reader to experience what many call the "forgotten" victims - adult siblings, specifically the adult male.

We want to thank John for allowing us this in depth look into a private family tragedy.



May 26, 2003 (part 1)

Here is what I recall so far -

Monday, May 26th, 2003 - Audrey and I receive a call at our North Richland Hills home around 6:00am. Audrey does not answer the first set of rings. The second time her phone rings she answers. I hear, "Hello. What? O.K. O.K. Do you need us to come over right now? O.K. We are on the way."

I was lying there in bed awake listening. I knew it was my 93 year-old grandfather, surely he had passed away during the night and dad was calling to let us know. When she finished the call I asked her, "Grandpa?"

She said, "No, it's your sister. She is missing."

By now I am out of the bed putting on some shorts and a t-shirt. Audrey is doing the same. All we had was the light from the bathroom coming into our bedroom. I said, "Missing?"

Audrey said, "Yeah, just 'missing'."

As we got in the car and headed for mom and dad's house in Grapevine, my mind was wandering, obviously. 'Missing', missing how? Did she get into an argument with her boyfriend and leave 'missing'? Did she go the bathroom in a restaurant or club and never come back 'missing'? What are we talking about here, 'missing'? I knew she was somewhere down near San Antonio, that was it.

The night before, Audrey and I had been at mom and dad's house for a cook out with friends. We arrived back at our home around midnight. When Audrey and I left at 6am to go back over there, it seemed like it was still dark outside. It may have been earlier.

As we drove over there, I kept saying to myself 'missing', 'missing'. What does that mean? Finally about 5 minutes from mom and dad's house I told Audrey, "I will tell you this. She isn't missing, she's dead." "This is not good", I added, "this is not good."

Audrey was speechless, but she knew too. As we pulled up the hill to mom and dad's house, we could see the unmarked police car with its blue and red light bar in the back windshield. I said it again, "She is gone, she is dead."

We parked and walked with deliberation to the front door. I charged in to find my dad looking as disheveled as I have ever seen a person. His robe was hanging awkwardly and his face was pouring fluids. His eyes were shut and he was sobbing terribly. Mother's shoulders were slumped with her head laying back on them with the same distraught expression as if someone was beating her physically and there was nothing she could do about it.

The police chaplain was obviously waiting for another family member to show up before he left. And as soon as I walked in, he was out the door. As I walked in, I shouted, "What the HELL do you mean 'MISSING'?" I had to yell because everyone was screaming and crying. My heart was beating so fast. My dad fell into my arms and said, "She was in a boating accident, and they can't find her body." All the time, just sobbing uncontrollably. Mother was the same way. We all just stood there yelling incomprehensibly. This was just not happening. Audrey and I, still in the foyer of the house, moved into the family room. Dad sat down and tried to explain what happened. We were in shock. He stood up and started looking for his keys, like he was just going to get in the car and go down there like he was. He started saying, "I have to go down there, I have to go down there."

It didn't take much pleading, in fact I only said it once. "Dad, you and mom get packed. Audrey and I are going back to our place and pack as well. I will come back and pick you guys up and we will all leave."

They easily agreed and Audrey and I went back to our house to pack.

The drive back to my house is not easily recalled. The only thing I remember specifically is thinking, "I am going to live the rest of my life as one of those guys who lost his sister. What is that going to make of me?" I didn't know what I was thinking, for some reason I remember that. I guess I am selfish as the first thing I thought of was myself.

The one thing I did think of was, "It is on." I knew this was going to be as difficult an experience as we had ever faced, times infinity. I also knew my place in the family was to keep my head on straight and do my best to manage the situation with rational thinking. In other words, there would be time for me to fall apart later. Way later. For now though, I had a job to do for my family.

I guess I switched into planning mode. I didn't wonder about the specifics, but I knew there were things I needed to be thinking about as we headed into this ordeal. I almost adopted a sense of thinking in a mind set as if it was already done, and I was looking back on it saying to myself, "I should have done or thought this. What am I going to regret not doing or saying?"

From time to time I tested my thoughts by trying to think about her. Should I be thinking about things we did together? Should I be thinking about the day she was born? Should I be thinking about the last time I saw her? Should I be crying? It just didn't feel right to approach that part of myself. There was too much stuff to begin manufacturing a memory lane with her. I did know that time was somewhere in my life, just not right then. The ordeal was all I could think about. Memory lane would produce itself.

May 26, 2003 (part 2)

I would have to let my brother confirm the following, however I understand it to have occurred this way. Here is how he found out.

Phil had gone to Lake Texoma north of Dallas about an hour and a half for a weekend on the lake with his best friend Steve Zurlis. Mom and dad were unable to reach Phil that morning on his cell phone. Mom just happened to have Steve's mother's number and managed to get her on the phone. Steve's mother then went to the cabin Steve was in and informed him what was going on. It was now up to Steve to wake Phil and basically tell him his sister was dead.

Phil recalls waking up very disoriented. Phil is a very heavy sleeper. Steve managed to get him sitting up and proceeded to tell him what was going on. I wasn't there so I cannot quote the conversation. Apparently it was so unreal to Phil, he thought Steve was kidding him. Phil placed his hand in Steve's chest to move him back and noticed Steve's heart was pounding out of control. Phil took notice of this because Steve has heart problems and even had a heart attack while the two were roommates at Texas Tech. It was then he realized Steve was not joking. Phil gathered his things and hit the road for mom and dad's house. He notified the Highway Patrol he was coming and he would be doing about 90 mile per hour. They pretty much told him to be careful.

I don't recall where I was exactly when Phil called me. We had cell phones with 2 way radios. He radioed me finally and we both were so serious, uncomfortable and speechless. A plan was beginning to form. I told him I would round up mom and dad and we would wait for them to get to the house before we left. He called me several other times before he got to mom and dad's to let me know where he was.

Audrey and I made it back home and packed some things. I honestly thought they would find her before we left Fort Worth and there was a possibility we would not even need to leave. In fact, that is what I thought all the way down there. Any minute they would call with the news they had found her.

Audrey's mother had stayed with us that weekend. We woke her and told her what was going on. We were in shock and not much was said. I can't imagine being in her position that morning. She was the only one that saw us outside of the immediate four and our wives. She couldn't say anything. Not that she had anything to say anyway other than "be careful". We left her there and she went back to Houston on her own. As we parted I asked her to let my neighbor to the east know what was going on in the off chance we were to be gone a while.

By the time we left N Richland Hills to go back to Grapevine to get mom and dad and wait on Phil, I believe it was around 7:15am. The sun was up for sure by now and the nausea that has yet to leave me was burning. It was bad. I think Phil radioed me some time in that trip. We planned on meeting him at mom and dad's so we could all be together right away. We had to do it. The family had to be together as soon as possible. This was so tragic and we were all so shocked and devastated. And it was just the beginning.

Audrey and I arrived back at mom and Dad's I am sure around 7:30am. Mom and dad's stuff was packed and in the driveway. We loaded their stuff in our car and went into the house. They were cleaned up and dressed. Coffee had been made and they were standing in the kitchen. Still swollen in the face from crying. Eyes red and empty. I swear, it was like they checked out. I think mom had gathered some things on the bar that had to do with Laura. I can't remember exactly, maybe some pictures or notes Laura had written her. Laura was always leaving mom and dad notes. I can't remember specifically. We had discussions on where we were going, how many cars we needed and so on. I had never heard of Marble Falls. It was awful.

Maybe 10 minutes later Phil and his wife pull up. I saw him out the window without him knowing it. I remember seeing him and having a feeling I had never had. I can't explain it, but it was so sad. Mom and dad went to greet him at the front door. Audrey and I stayed behind in the kitchen. I could hear them hugging and milling about. I could not make out anything specific. I did not want what was about to happen. I was about to come face to face with my brother for the first time. It was going to be awkward. Sure enough, he comes through the door into the kitchen. We could hardly look at each other. We didn't embrace. In fact, I remember a few moments passing before we even spoke. When we did speak, it was about what we were going to do from here. The plan.

We decided that Phil and his wife would go to their home in Euless and pack. He was to call me when he was leaving and we would catch up to each other on the highway and he could follow me. Mom and dad would ride with Audrey and I. So it was, Phil and his wife left.

Mom and dad couldn't wait any longer, so we loaded up and decided to just go over to Phil's house. I know they wanted to be on the road. We hit the ATM for some cash and proceeded to Euless which is only minutes from mom and dad's. On the way there, I had a revelation. We all needed to ride down there together. It was not fair to Phil to have to follow us for 4 hours and miss out on the conversations that were about to be had. We arrived at Phil's and I told him the new plan. I think he was relieved. Phil and I rode up front. Our wives rode in the seats behind us. Mom and dad climbed in the third row.

As we pulled out, I glanced in the rear view mirror and saw a friend of our family named Michael. Michael and his wife Mary live down the street from Phil. Michael new Laura. He was standing in his drive way and gave us a wave as we left. No one saw him but me. I didn't say anything. He was sad and concerned, I could tell.

I believe it was about 8-8:30am on May 26th. Two hours or so had passed since we found out she was gone. God, what a sick feeling. I remember before we left, my dad asked me if I brought shoes. What a weird question. I had shoes, I just wasn't wearing them. The weather was kind of cloudy and cool. It rained a little here and there on us on the way down to Marble Falls. Dad had received directions from the local police in Marble Falls on how to get there. Somehow we were told that Marble Falls was southwest of Austin. I just hooked it toward Austin with plans to take a right once we made it through Austin and start looking for Marble Falls signs. Completely unaware that Marble Falls was northwest of Austin.

Within minutes of leaving Phil's we were on the Highway. I was speeding, but not like one might imagine in this situation. Dad was concerned I was speeding in an effort to get there as fast as possible. He said to me from the back, "I don't care if we get there at noon or 3." I acknowledged him and let him know I understood.

We took Interstate 35W out of Ft Worth. It was quiet almost all the way. I could see mom leaning into dad's shoulder with his arm around her. She cried quietly all the way down there. I was still thinking they were going find Laura any minute and call us with the news. Every time mom's phone rang, I was sure that was the call. It never was. I remember being aggravated because conversations would take place in the back and I couldn't hear them. I kept asking them to speak up and repeat things. I was so agitated. We weren't in church yet, speak up.

We may have stopped once or twice for gas. Eating was out of the question. We all felt so sick. We didn't even talk about food. The second time we stopped, we were south of Austin. We were heading south looking for a highway we were never going to find if we kept going. The directions we received were terribly wrong. On a whim, Phil asked the store clerk where Marble Falls was. She thought about it a while and started spouting off about how we needed to go back north and take Highway 290 in Austin north towards Llano and follow the signs to Marble Falls. Still not realizing that Marble Falls was northwest instead of southwest of Austin, I again became irritated. I told Phil to leave her be, she didn't know what she was talking about. Dad decided to buy a map. Sure enough, we had gone was past it. We turned around and finally actually headed toward Marble Falls.

Then something really weird happened. We got back on Interstate 35 going north this time. We had about 10 miles to go before we picked up Highway 290 to head northwest toward Marble Falls. I came up on a green mid-sized sedan. There was a sticker in the rear window. It was the kind of sticker that parents put in their rear window that has the symbol of their kids sport. Like a volleyball or basketball or something. The stickers usually have the child's name on the bottom with their team name over the top. They are pretty common. Anyway, this one catches my eye because the sport symbol is a soccer ball. I played all my life and enjoyed coaching my son's team. No big deal. My eyes ease down below the soccer ball to the child's name. "Laura". O.K., that is a bit odd that I would see something like that right now. Next my eyes move up to see the team name above the soccer ball. "Angels".

I didn't freak out or anything. I didn't even mention it to anyone else in the car. Up to that point in my life, I didn't really believe that sort of thing could happen for a reason. I subscribe to the notion that sometimes amazing coincidences occur. I was also very wary of my senses becoming overly acute to finding my sister in symbols and looking for signs of her all around myself to make myself feel better. At that moment, I dismissed it and told myself I was not going to live my life looking for stuff like that. Telling myself she is showing herself to me. I just wasn't going to do it.

I believe it was around 1:30pm when we finally found the lake house at Horseshoe Bay where we were told to converge. We pulled up in front of the house and all got out. Dad had us all huddle up and he said a short prayer. He could barely talk. He didn't know what to say. He just asked for strength mainly. We broke up and headed for the door. We were about to face a group of people none of us knew. This was Laura's life we were entering.

We walked in the door and everyone there just sort of stared at us. I don't know who was hugging who. We knew Justin who is Laura's boyfriend, and Justin's dad Al. That was about it. I believe there was about 10-15 people there other than our family. I can't imagine how that group felt. I painted a scenario in my head of what they might have been thinking when we showed up. I figured they felt like here they are, all already in the house consoling each other. Each family member accounted for. And here comes Laura's family, one member unaccounted for. There had to be a feeling of responsibility in there some where. I don't know how to express what that feeling was like.

Laura's boyfriend looked like hell. I tried to at least speak to him. Just to break the ice and let him know we were with him. I didn't really think he would imagine we would be mad at him. But it was a possibility if we were totally irrational. All he could say to me was, "She meant everything to me." Over and over. Nothing else.

The lake house was so nice. They had a wet dock out back for their boat and jet skis. There was a deck above the dock for sunning and such. They had a pair of super high powered binoculars set up and fixed on the search area. An older gentleman named Jerry Cypert escorted myself and some others out to the deck and sort of gave us an update of what was going on and what had happened as well as a lay of the land.

The story was finally presented to us for the first time. Laura and her boyfriend had been spending the Memorial weekend with Laura's boyfriend's cousin and his girlfriend. The four had spent Saturday the 24th down near San Antonio floating inner tubes down the Guadalupe River. A popular Texas pastime. That night, they spent time in Gruene where Justin says he proposed to her informally and she accepted. Apparently, they made their way back to Marble Falls sometime Sunday. Sunday night the four went to Chili's in Marble Falls for dinner around 10pm. After dinner it was back to the lake house. Laura supposedly took a nap. Around 12:30am or so, all but the cousin's girlfriend decided to head out on the water for some music, drinks and star gazing. Not a damn thing wrong with that. A couple of hours later, she was gone.

Having finally received an outline on what happened, we began wondering what next. Do we sit around here and look through binoculars and hug each other? What do we do? I knew I didn't want to be there. It was getting to the point where Phil and I needed to be alone. We have such a rich bond, our time together was what we were counting on. This was all so new and bizarre and shocking, we didn't know what to expect. We had no experience in missing person recovery in a marine environment. There were a lot of questions and a lot of learning about to happen over the next 14 days.

At some point, the game wardens showed up to question Justin and his cousin. Mainly Justin's cousin because Justin was just so out of it.

Justin's cousin apparently goes by the nickname of Pepper. Pepper took a pretty nasty gash on the back of his head and had some other superficial injuries about the arms and upper body. We stood back while the wardens asked him more questions. He had certainly been through a tremendous experience, however he seemed put out by having to keep answering questions. His mother was there and she helped him answer them. I hate to put it in writing when I am not impressed with some one, but my first impressions of Pepper were not good. The guy takes my sister out on a boat, boat gets hit and she is killed. Pepper to this day has never spoken a word to my brother or myself. Not that I need him to. Hell, I don't even want to talk to the guy. It just seems odd.

The older gentleman, Jerry, offered to take Phil and I and our wives out to a place called "the point". This was a strip of land about wide enough for a dirt road that went out about a quarter mile into Lake LBJ. At the end of the strip was a lighthouse. The accident sight was about 200 yards off that point. We drove out there and parked and walked out to the lighthouse. The wardens were dragging the lake. Jerry gave us more details on exactly where the impact happened and so on. He was a very kind man, soft spoken and gentle natured. He was perfect for the role of explaining to Phil and I what happened. We really liked and respected him. He was awesome. Thanks Jerry.



Jerry somehow disappeared, even though he was standing right behind us. We stood up on a bench and looked out toward the accident site. It was tough. Trying to imagine what happened to her. Where was she? It was so surreal. Sickening. I cried there a little bit. All the way down to Marble Falls, I pretty much held it in. Holding it in caused this terrible head ache. I didn't want to cry in front of people because I didn't want strangers coming over and putting their hands on me, hugging me and consoling me. Telling me it is alright to cry and such. I know it is alright to cry. I cried there a little with Audrey. Eventually, we stepped off the bench and headed back toward the car. Phil stayed behind.

Now is a good time to mention that Phil's relationship with Laura was different than mine. He had a closer bond with her. He looked out for her and protected her. They even lived together in Lubbock while she was in school and he was working out there. He stayed out on the point a little while longer and we waited for him. He was talking to her. Asking her to go ahead and come up so we could go home. We had no idea what was in store for us.

May 26, 2003 (part 3)

I can't recall what we did exactly after that. We must have gone back to the lake house, Jerry was still with us and we needed to drop him back off. It was nice to be away from mom and dad for a while. They had others around them now, so we got a little break. Mom I believe was o.k. with it, but I think dad was irritated with the whole setting. He is the kind of person that would be better off alone in this situation. Maybe coming in late to the scene, he felt like he had no control. It wasn't his house, it wasn't his town, it wasn't his lake. It was his daughter though.

Dad gave Phil his credit card and asked us to go back into Marble Falls and get 3 hotel rooms. No problem, mom and dad stayed at the lake house. We headed back to Marble Falls which was about 5 miles from the lake house. We were standing in the lobby at the check in counter trying to get 3 rooms with dad's card. In today's world, fraud is a big player. There was some definite confusion on the clerks part in that who was who and who was paying for what and so on. We were dancing around letting her know who we were to the point I again became aggravated. I said out loud to Phil, "Just tell her who we are and what we are here for and let's get on with it." Phil sort of let me have control of the situation and I explained to her that we were the family of the woman they were searching for up on Lake LBJ and so on. The clerk basically dropped everything, handed us our card back and swiped 3 sets of room keys and we were done. We got the rooms lined up and took our stuff into each of them including mom and dad's.

Audrey and I went to our room. It was time to make some phone calls. By now, word had begun to creep out up in the DFW area. For the first time I came to realize what was going to be the hardest thing in the world to do. Tell people. I called a few people and absolutely fell apart. So did Audrey. I don't know why that particular aspect is so difficult. Telling people hurt worse than anything I had ever done and anything I have done since. Maybe someday I will understand that.

We received a call shortly after that from mom. She stated that she and dad had decided to stay at the lake house. So, we cancelled their room, gathered their things and headed back to the lake house to drop their stuff. We made some excuse to leave and went back to the Hotel for the remainder of the day. Luckily there was an extremely nice Chili's attached to our hotel. We headed there for the evening.

Chili's became a very special place to Phil and I and our wives over the 2 weeks we were there. First of all, it was attached to the hotel we stayed at. Second, the food was good. It had a beautiful patio overlooking Lake Marble Falls. And the beer was cold.

As we visited the soon to be sacred Chili's the first night, it was very uncomfortable. We still had not eaten all day. The opportunity to have a cold beer was about to present itself and I honestly did not know if it was appropriate or not to try to relax in that manner. Were we compromising any respect towards our sister by maybe backing away from the situation a bit and easing off of the tension? That question was soon answered with an order of 4 beers. Big ones. This was familiar territory and my mood changed. I was looking forward to some bar time with Phil and discussing things in more detail. We ordered some food, but none of us ate. I can't remember one thing we discussed, but I know we were there a while and the conversation was rich. We still didn't know what we were doing, but at least we had some time to get that straight.

We went back to our rooms after closing Chili's and it was time for me to tell my son's mother. Carol was my ex-wife and my son lived with her. I got her on the phone and told her she needed to leave Alan in the living room watching TV and go to her bedroom because I had something terrible to tell her. Once we could talk, I told her what happened. She was so upset. She, after all, had been sisters with Laura for 5 years or so. Laura was an angel to everyone. I told Carol not to tell Alan yet and that she needed to compose herself when she went back in as to not let on to him. We did agree however that if the opportunity came up for her to tell him, she would. Otherwise, I or we would tell him when I came back. As it turned out, about 4 days later the opportunity presented itself and Alan knew. But, for that night he didn't.

Audrey spent time talking to her family. We were both crying on the phones. Eventually, we went to sleep. The first and longest day was over. You would think the first day would be the hardest. Wait until the second day.

May 27, 2003 (Part 1)

Day 2 - Tuesday, May 27th, 2003 - We had found out the previous day that the boat Laura was on was impounded by Texas Parks and Wildlife Game Wardens in Kingsland which was on the north end of the Lake. So, Tuesday morning Phil and I and our wives met in the lobby of our hotel and decided to load up, grab something to eat and head over to the lake house. Once at the lake house, we did the normal greetings. The "How are you doing?" and such. I was curious if dad slept or not. From what I recall, he did. Mom and dad carry around pill boxes with vitamins and prescriptions. I am sure there was something to help them sleep. I did my usual, I slipped out to the sun deck for a look through the binoculars. Justin was out back with his brother-in-law. They had a table full of flowers and were making a wreath. I barely said hello.

We got directions from the older Jerry on how to get to the impound. It looked like it was about an hour away. We were supposed to meet the wardens at 1 pm. The media was meeting the wardens at 1:30pm and at this point, mom did not want to see the media.

Not wanting to chance being late, our family all left for Kingsland and the impound. We arrived very early. We stopped and got some gas and some soft drinks and went over to the impound and waited. Right at 1 pm everyone started to arrive at the impound. The group included several (maybe 5 or 6) game wardens, Justin's family and Pepper's family. Everyone piled out of their vehicles and we stood around and watched the wardens unlock the storage unit the boat was in. They hooked it up to one of their trucks and pulled it out into the open.

There it was. I had my camera and immediately started taking pictures. Pepper jumped up in the boat and started going through stuff. The wardens had advised the boys were able to collect their personal belongings. Clothes, tools, ice chest etc. I was taking pictures and moving all around the boat. I glanced in it. I thought the boat that hit her came directly across the boat she was in without any angle. That was wrong. The initial impact from the boat that hit her was directly into the driver's seat. The driver's seat was approximately mid-vessel and all the way to the starboard side of the boat. Right where she was sitting. However, the path of the boat was at an angle such that the exit was over the bow just to the port side. It was an open bow vessel, used mainly for cruising. After I realized what the path of the other boat was, the scene drastically changed for me. Now I could really see the path through her boat. Low and behold, the chair she was sitting in was torn from its pedestal behind the driver panel and was now sitting in the front of the boat. Her seat was badly damaged. You could see where something had hit the back of the chair and torn a large hole in it. As well, the contour of the chair was pushed forward and you could tell it had been hit hard.





I guess mom was asking the wardens some questions and she must have snapped. I was on the other side of the area we were in from her when I heard this awful screaming. I knew it was her. She was wailing uncontrollably and it was loud. From what I understand, she damned God for real. This made Phil uncomfortable and he went and sat in the car. I took more pictures.

While I was on the port side, I caught part of a conversation between Pepper and one of the wardens. There was a blue flannel button down oxford style shirt on the floor of the boat. Pepper picked it up and it was in pretty bad shape. While Pepper removed his water logged cigarettes from the shirt pocket, the warden asked to look at it. Pepper offered it up. The warden was in the process of spreading it out carefully and he asked Pepper if this was the shirt he was wearing at the moment of impact. Pepper responded that it was. Since I was standing there, I continued to listen. Once the warden had the shirt spread out, you could see a pattern of white flecks. The warden could tell immediately that the flecks were fiberglass and had to have been from the other boat. Once the warden made that comment, I could easily see what he was looking at. You could tell by the marks almost exactly how the boat hit Pepper. It was amazing. The warden asked Pepper if he could keep the shirt as evidence. Pepper again obliged. I followed the warden to his truck where he bagged the shirt and wrote something on it and sealed it. I remember thinking to myself what a waste of time. How on earth is this going to help. I almost thought it was the wardens way of putting on a little show for us so we would think they were doing something. As we came to find out much later, that shirt was very valuable to the investigation. Again, I was wrong.

By now, people were hugging and consoling each other. Mom had regained some composure. The thought crossed my mind that maybe we should not have come. Looking back, we had to do it. It made it real for mom for sure. Big Jerry was shooting some pictures and perhaps even some video. I noticed a group of wardens standing off to the side in a small huddle. I thought they were just shooting the breeze while we looked at the boat like at a museum. Then I noticed that one of the wardens had his hand on one of the other wardens shoulder. The other warden had his head down and I could tell he was crying. Man, I instantly realized that I had these guys all wrong. This warden was upset and the pressure had apparently gotten to him. What a profound moment for me personally. Suddenly, I felt more secure in the situation and not quite so alone. Alone in a sense that the authorities were essentially handing us a boat and telling us Laura was dead. Thanks for coming to Marble Falls, drive safe. That was not it anymore. The warden himself had succumb to the emotion and it was a good sign. They were deeply concerned.

Another small instance occurred at the boat as well. The girlfriend of Pepper, whose name I never got, was standing on the driver side of the boat near the initial impact. Pepper's girlfriend did not go out on the boat that night because she did not feel well. As she stood there with Pepper, I overheard her tell him that if she had been with them that night, she surely would have been sitting in the bow of the boat on the port side. At that moment I could see it in her face. She knew that her decision to stay behind probably save her life. She panicked with emotion suddenly and started crying. I turned and walked off.

After a few more minutes, the wardens were back to asking Pepper and Justin more questions. By then we had all gathered around. I listened in. The wardens were encouraging the boys to stay behind and talk to the media about the missing boat. The idea being that the public responds better to pleas from family as it makes it more personal. Both boys declined. I believe the declination came from the feeling that if we went on TV it would cheapen our situation. The media has such a bad wrap these days from exploiting situations like this, I am sure they were timid. I stepped in and asked if they were not going to make the statement, who would. Suddenly Pepper's mom is asking me if I want the boys to make it, or if I want to make it and so on. I simply looked at the warden again and he responded that he would make the statement on our behalf, but it would lack the impact.

Since the media was on the way, we all loaded up and left the impound. Plans had been made for us all to go out to the point. I didn't really want to go, but it wasn't something I was dreading. I didn't mind going to the point. I preferred to go with just my family members. Not a crowd. This time we had a crowd.

When we left the impound it had to have been around 1:30pm. By the time our family arrived at the point it had to have been around 2pm or so. Everyone else was already there. They were waiting on us to show up. I didn't realize what the purpose of the visit to the point was yet. I thought we were all just simply going out there. Not the case.

The wreath was the reason we were all there. They had made a wreath that we were going to float out into the water. Each of us were handed a single long stem rose. We all got into a circle and held hands and I believe Justin's dad, Al, offered up a word of prayer. The wreath was placed in the water and ceremoniously each person went to the edge of the water and threw their rose in. One at a time people went to the edge, stood there in a moment of silence and tossed their rose in as if to say good-bye.

There in lies the problem. That is what brought me to my next bit of frustration with the whole situation. I know the group meant well. They are not a malicious group. It was just an ill-timed somewhat forced ritual. Almost of the feeling like, this is what happens on TV and in the movies. The problem was, Laura had not been gone more than 36 hours or so. We didn't have a body. We didn't have all the details. We hadn't even begun to discuss funeral plans or anything. And here we were having this ceremony to say good-bye. I was frustrated because it was not time for that. I am not sure what it meant to the others, but I was not alone with that feeling. Everyone went to the edge and wept, some kissed their rose and gently tossed them in. I couldn't bring myself to do it. I wanted to cry, I may have. I was crying for the fact that I was not ready to say good-bye. Unfortunately, crying in that situation was going to bring some unwanted consolation from strangers. Something I was despising at the time. Finally everyone except myself, Audrey and Phillip had tossed their roses in. Without saying a word to Phil about the situation and my feelings, I watched him walk to the edge and without hesitation he angrily threw his rose in the water and turned his back on it. I knew we were on the same page. Finally after a long time, Audrey and I did the same.

We all stood around in silence in various places on the point. Some by themselves, some in pairs. Eventually, the rest of the group decided to leave our family alone there. Phillip had wandered out to the lighthouse again. It was about 150 yards away from where we had assembled. Dad wasn't there the previous day to see Phil spend time there himself. For that reason, dad was real concerned for Phil. I had to explain to him what he was doing and we need not step inside that boundary. Nevertheless, dad stood watch over him for a while. Mom and Robin went back to the car. After about another half hour, dad suggested that I take the girls back and he would stay there watching Phil. I could then return for them later. I didn't think it was a good idea. I knew Phil was where he wanted to be. Without offending dad, I had to convince him to leave Phil alone. He did and we waited a little longer.

Unbeknownst to us, a local TV station arrived and was getting ready to run some footage from the point for a story they were doing that night. Mom misconstrued the presence of the media as being there to hound us for information. She yelled to them to leave us alone. The reporter advised she and Robyn that she was there to simply film a piece with the wardens and wasn't even aware that we were there. Robin came back and told me what happened. She said the reporter would like a statement from the family if possible. She wanted us to make a plea to the public for the driver of the other boat. Dad turned to me and told me to go do it.

I went back down to the entrance of the point and introduced myself to the reporter. They wired me and within minutes we were filming. I thanked the wardens for their support and basically asked someone to come forward with information regarding the boat that hit and killed my sister. We were done in less than 5 minutes.

By then, Phil was on his way back and we were all geared up to head back to the lake house. In the mean time, one of the other wardens came over to thank us for making a public plea. He implied that it was very helpful to their investigation to have a family member do it. Mom began asking him questions I knew he could not answer. Eventually I interjected the conversation and thanked him for his help and pointed out the reporter was ready for him. I think he knew what I was doing and he was relieved for the assist. I love my mother do death, but she was so mind scrambled by the ordeal, she just didn't realize the core mechanics of the situation. She just wanted answers to questions that were not ready to be answered. At that point, she probably expected to get her daughter back if she fought hard enough. It was sad to see her like that. She was understandably out of her mind.

We loaded back up in the car and went back to the lake house. We had to drop off mom and dad. Phil and I were so on the same page it wasn't funny. We quickly came up with a reason to leave and go back to the hotel. The second day had been as bad if not worse than the first. We were ready for a shower and a few hours at Chili's. The day was about to get a little better for us. I will tell you this, the stomach pain was still there in full force. It was sick.

May 27, 2003 (Part 2)

Once back at the hotel, we showered up and made a couple of phone calls. I was trying to get Audrey's dad in Houston to do some research for me about how bodies react underwater. I figured there had to be some research out there that could reasonably give us a time line on what was going on with her. Let's see, a 23 year old female, 5'2", probably 100 lbs, less than 5% body fat, eaten within 4 hours, moderate amount of alcohol, water temperature 65 degrees at bottom, 70 feet deep. DO THE MATH! What are we looking at here. He didn't understand what I was asking him to do. I again became frustrated and told him not to worry about it. Eventually he must have understood. He later placed a call to a guy in Galveston who gave him some numbers but they were based on salt water and there was really nothing there. I gave up on it.

We headed down to Chili's for some dinner and drinks. We were eating now. It was about 36 hours since we initially found out. Although the stomach issue was still a player, we were starting to settle into having to think about this all the time. That night we sat out on the patio and had an excellent view of Lake Marble Falls from about 3 stories up. Our conversations that night were very intense. They ranged from how we felt about the wreath floating and how we felt about the participants in this, to did what the boys were saying really happen that way and why are we not helping look.

We had started discussing crazy scenarios. It is not that we felt like the boys were lying, it was just an open minded brainstorming session. It started off with a question of what if this were not an accident. After running through what we had seen and heard, that scenario became quickly dismissed. Next came a portion of the discussion which really made us think about the account of the accident. Our concern was, did the accident really happen where they said it happened. The game wardens and local law enforcement were basing the accident site on some numbers they crunched. The numbers had to do with what time the 911 call was placed, how long it took the boat she was in to come ashore, wind speed and direction that night, the type of boat and its above water profile and so on. I was concerned that the searchers were in the wrong place. The one variable I saw that could be wrong if someone was lying was the time of the 911 call being minutes after the impact. According to the boys, the boat hit them, they realized Laura was gone, they had a short exchange with the other boat and immediately called the police. Our "what if" came from that scenario. What if the boys decided before they called authorities, to clean up their own scene first. Perhaps out of fear of trouble with the authorities if there was a case of beer on the boat and they were both pretty well lit, they took some time to get rid of some stuff. Not too far fetched. But, if that were the case, then the numbers that were run by the experts would be wrong. If they were wrong, then they quite possibly could be looking in the wrong spot. So from that, we decided to attempt to find out if there was a cooler on the boat. If so, what was in it. Reason being, we knew our sister. If we had been there, there surely would have been a cooler full of beer on that boat and we fully expected there should have been one there. If not, then the story might not have happened the way it was explained. As it turned out, the following day Phil spotted the cooler at the lake house and opened it up. True to form, it was full. After that we no longer focused on the accounts being false.

Another conversation had to do with the search itself. We were concerned that not enough people were looking for her. They had stopped dragging the lake and the divers had left for good. Maybe 3 times a day, a single boat would run a perimeter and that was it. I thought that if this search was going on land, there would be a thousand people out looking for her. Since it was marine, no one was looking for her. We decided the next day we would rent some jet skis and look for her ourselves. We asked the bartender at Chili's for a phone book so we could make some calls for jet skis. They obliged. Shortly after we got some numbers, the manager appeared with one of the waitresses. The waitress' husband worked at the rental facility at Horseshoe Bay. She gave us his number and told us to call him. Great.

Once we were done with Chili's, Phil and Robyn took off for Wal-Mart. We didn't have anything. We needed bathing suits, aqua shoes and a slew of other things. Audrey and I went on to bed. Our plan was to get up around 8am and get to the marina early. By God, we were going to find her ourselves.

May 28, 2003

Day 3 - Wednesday, May 28th, 2003 - Wednesday morning the plan was to get up at 8 and go. We must have stayed up later than we thought. We didn't leave the hotel until around 11am. We were concerned that dad was not going to be completely on board with the idea of us taking jet skis and looking for Laura. Our plan included Phil, Audrey and I renting jet skis and going on the water and Robin taking the car back to the lake house and then telling dad where we were. That way we were already doing it. As it turned out, he appeared pleased with the idea. He too was probably concerned that no one was looking for her.

We arrived at the marina around noon. It was open for business but it was deserted. We made our way to the rental cabana. The prices were posted on the wall for rentals. I found the jet ski prices. It was an unexpected \$110 per hour, per ski. Oops, maybe we would not be renting jet skis. I think at that moment we looked at each other and recalled seeing a rental place we could get a canoe. About that time, a young woman appeared that was obviously an employee of the marina. I had spoken to her earlier that morning and told her we were coming in. She greeted us. I told her that I did not realize the expense involved in renting jet skis and I was afraid we would not be able to get them. She advised us that we were not going to be charged for them. What a surprise. The manager soon appeared and let us know what was going on. Not only were they essentially letting us have the skis, they wouldn't even let us pay for the gas. They had also already warmed two of them up for us. So, we filled out the necessary paper work, fitted for life vests and got the run down on how to drive these things. I had never driven one before.

Just before we pushed out, the local sheriff showed up. He had apparently gotten wind of what we were doing and sort of stopped by to check us out. He was a giant man. Very nice. He very respectfully offered his condolences. He told us he was on the water in a boat within 10 minutes of the 911 call the night of the accident. He did not really say he was on board with what we were doing, however he did indicate that he understood. He told us to be careful and that if we did find her to be prepared. It was not going to be pretty. I told him we were not looking to find her and jump in and save her or anything. He said if we did find her, stay far away and call them. If we found her, the scene would need to be processed as a crime scene. All in all, we understood that if we found her it was going to be very shockingly gruesome. The sheriff gave us a topographical map with the GPS coordinates of the accident site as well as the primary search area. He showed us where we were and where to look. He again expressed emotion about our situation and we said goodbye. The marina manager told us they closed at 7pm and would we try to be back by 6pm or so. What a nice group of people. They pushed us out and we were off.

It felt really good to be on the water. I know Phil was in a good place mentally. I had tears in my eyes at one point. Just the thought of possibly finding her ourselves really made us feel better. At least we were doing something. It only made sense to be out there looking for her. And it made us feel like we were close to her. I figured if she could see us she would be proud. All in all, it was a task. It was something to do.

It took some time to cruise out of the marina and we eventually made it out to the point. We stopped and got out our map and oriented ourselves. This lake was not familiar to us and we were not sure where everything was. It was a small lake. After a little studying we figured it out. We discussed a plan on where to go and what to do. The real mission for us was probably more of a peace of mind mission. The kind of peace of mind that you only get by looking for yourself. Half of the lake was pretty populated and had regular activity. In that case one could assume that if she surfaced near these areas, someone would see her. However, the other side of the lake was relatively undeveloped and what was developed was clearly low end weekend stuff that looked like no one had been there in months. That was where our concern was. What if she were to surface under someone's boat dock that was not going to be at their place for another 3 months. If that were the case, we would essentially be sitting around waiting for some anonymous family to decide to go to the lake and find her for us.

We started the search on the undeveloped side. We looked in every cove, under every dock and tree and bush out there. We moved along the dam and on around to the more populated area. We covered the entire perimeter of the primary search area. It took about 2 and a half hours. We went back to the marina. Robin and dad showed up and we had a bite to eat in the marina restaurant. We told dad what was going on. He seemed ok with it.

After lunch we decided to go make one more run on the search area. To change perspective, we searched in the opposite direction this time. Again, it was about a 2 and a half hour project. We finished around 5:30pm and thanked the guys at the marina. We bought some t-shirts just to spend some money with them. They told us we could use the skis again the following day.

We went back to the lake house for what was becoming the ritual. We exchanged briefly with the folks and headed back to the hotel. Shower and an evening at Chili's. We were surprised when we found out our cousin, who is Laura's age just showed up. She is my dad's sister's granddaughter. I haven't seen her in years. She explained that she was upset and the next thing she knew she was in Marble Falls looking for us. I am sure she was relieved to find us. She went with us to Chili's. After being at Chili's a short time, mom and dad showed up. Dad advised that we all needed to pay out and go back to the hotel lobby and have some quiet time or something. There was a huge misunderstanding going on. Phil and I felt like dad was not happy with us seemingly enjoying ourselves in a bar when there was so much sacrifice and misery to be had out of respect to our dead sister. That may have been as angry as we had ever been. We went to the hotel and everyone sat down and mom got to carrying on with Sarah about what a great person she was and such. We were standing in disbelief. Finally Phil blurted out that he hadn't eaten and if anyone was interested in talking to him he would be at the bar. Wow. I was anxious for dad's reaction with intentions of speaking on Phil's behalf if necessary. Dad's reaction was of surprise. I could see it in his eyes. It was like he realized he accidentally interrupted what we were doing. He apologized and we all went back to Chili's. What a misunderstanding. He had no problem with where we were. He thought we were done eating and about to leave and go to bed. All he was shooting for was a little time before we turned in. He didn't realize we had just sat down. That was that.

May 29, 2003

Day 4 - Thursday, May 29th, 2003 - Our cousin had stayed the night at our hotel. The following morning Phil and I along with our wives left to go to the Horseshoe Bay marina again to get the jet skis and start looking again. We could not wake up our cousin. We stopped by the lake house to see mom and dad. We picked up some 2 way radios to use on the lake. Phil and I each had one and there was one left at the house. We made it back to the marina and the staff there again was set up for us to get out on the water. I believe we left around 10am or so this time. We made it back out to the point and started our usual pattern. By this time, we were becoming more comfortable with the lay of the lake. We had been out on it long enough now we kind of knew where things were and which direction was north. Actually, we had been in the Marble Falls area four days now and we were becoming more familiar with the area and beginning to feel settled in. I recalled driving down to Marble Falls that first morning and thinking to myself that "Marble Falls" would probably end up being a hellish place in my future life without Laura. I just assumed that would be the case. However, by now we had met some of the local people and they had all been so supportive of our family, it was easy to have a positive feeling about the area despite the horror of the tragedy. As of the time of this writing, I hold a nice place in my heart for the people of that area.

We spent the usual 2 hours or so on the water. Arrangements had been made back at the lake house for us to have lunch with mom and dad. The people that owned the lake house next door to the one that Laura had been staying did an amazing favor for our family. They were friends with the family that owned the lake house where Laura had been staying. The owner flew down from Lubbock and unlocked his house so we could use it. Wow. Mom and dad moved in. That had to be a good feeling. A little stretching room and a place to be by themselves.

We had agreed to take the jet skis back to the lake house for lunch which we did. The group there had set us up very nicely in the second lake house. People were bringing food from all over just to help. We were set up to have a private family lunch. Participants included mom, dad, our cousin, Phil, myself and our wives. We ate and enjoyed some small talk. Once lunch was over, we cleared the table and dad was set to talk to us about funeral arrangements. Up to this point we all knew she was dead, we just had not really discussed it openly. Especially funeral arrangements.

Dad started off by telling us that he and mom had discussed it and they were considering cremation. This really set my heart at ease. All along I had been thinking to myself that if the family opted to have an open casket, I was not going to the funeral. Closed would have been ok, but talk of cremation really shed a new light on how to handle this. Before we could respond, mom and dad adamantly stated that it was a family decision and if we were not on board, it was certainly open for discussion. There was no discussion. We all immediately showed support and that was pretty much the end of that. Dad spoke of having some of her remains placed in lockets and some spread out at our family farm owned by my brother. The rest, he said, he wanted placed in the casket with his mother, Aliene. She was our tremendously beloved grandmother that passed away when Laura was about 8 years old. That was tough. It was such the right thing to do, but to think of the magnitude of respect shown to both women was heart wrenching.

Other topics had to do with what kind of music we wanted. Where we wanted to attempt to have the service. Whether or not we would have a visitation. Who would preside and so on. It was decided Audrey and I would be leaving to go back to Fort Worth by Sunday at the latest. We had some things to tend to including bills, our own as well as a couple for mom and dad. Audrey's best friend and her fiancé had been keeping an eye on our house for us, checking our mail and feeding our cat. We were going to go to the church, florist and funeral home to get the information on cremation, urns and the details regarding what we needed to do. The meeting ended around 2 or so. Phil, Audrey and I went back out on the jet skis for a couple of more hours.

Once off the lake for the day, we headed back by mom and dad's to let them know we were done and going to the hotel. Our cousin had left with instructions to drive to Oklahoma and tell my dad's sister that we were all ok and we would see her soon. My dad's sister is in very poor health. Somewhere in the days events, it came to pass that one of Phil's dear friends and his wife had loaded up from Dallas and were on the way to our hotel. This is about the time I started to realize that our family had seemingly left in the middle of the night in some way. That first day we left a huge group of people behind that cared about us and essentially disappeared. Basically, before anyone outside our family knew what was going on, we were already in Marble Falls. Eventually, I guess it just got to some people and they couldn't stand it anymore. They had to see us.

We eventually made it to Chili's. Wendel and Ann showed up shortly thereafter. We spent the evening with them going over all the details of what was happening. It was nice to see them. We found out then that the rest of Phil's friends were on the way as well and we were expecting them some time on Saturday.

May 30, 2003

Day 5 - Friday, May 30th, 2003 - We were not going to be able to use the jet skis this day. This is when the weekend crowd starts showing up and the marina was going to need them. We hooked back up with Wendel and Ann and went to mom and dad's lake house. Mom's childhood friend Sue Ann and her husband had made it down with some clothes and such. It was nice to see everyone. Plans were made for Phil and Wendel to take the girls down somewhere near Fredricksburg to a game ranch for a tour. Basically something to do other than sit around all day. I had no interest in going. Audrey and I went back to the hotel for a long afternoon nap and some TV.

Later that afternoon it was agreed that we would meet Phil and that bunch at a steak house in Marble Falls. Audrey and I cleaned up and went over there. We arrived first. Unbeknownst to us, this is perhaps the most upscale restaurant around. It was well out of our price range so we sipped on a beer at the bar and waited for the others. Once they showed up, plans were made to move on to somewhere else. I guess at that time, Wendel and Ann decided it was time to go back to Dallas anyway, which they did. We headed back to Chili's. What a surprise. I don't know how, but that Chili's really provided a nice place to be at the end of the day. The food was always real good, the view was nice and so were the people. No wonder we kept going.

May 31, 2003

Day 6 - Saturday, May 31st - The weekend was here. That was pretty unbelievable. Everyone was getting anxious for Laura to come up. Everyone, I think, had ways of convincing themselves that each day they woke up was going to be the day. I on the other hand had convinced myself that it would be over 3 weeks based on a similar story the wardens shared about a boy drowning on Lake Travis and coming up in some 27 days or so. Everyday I woke up I toiled with the notion that she would not come up for a while and what if she is stuck on something and may never come up. It was a real thing to consider that we may never get her body. What would that be like? More sick feelings.

Eventually, several more of Phil's friends showed up. We met them at Chili's and headed over to the lake house to see mom and dad. We had to spend time getting them caught up on the events at hand. It was an emotional time for mom and dad. Audrey, for the first time, really fell apart. She was crying uncontrollably and you could see what happens to a person after 5 days of holding it in.

I can't remember exactly what we ended up doing after that, but we eventually ended up back at Chili's for dinner. Everyone attended dinner that night. Mom, dad, Justin, Justin's mother, and the rest of the group. We sat there for a couple of hours. The restaurant was crowded. Once we were finished, everyone that was staying at the lake house left and we made our way to the outside patio bar area. Justin and his dad eventually came back.

While we were at the bar, something pretty remarkable happened. A young man approached me and asked if I was part of the family of the girl who was missing on Lake LBJ. I told him who I was and he offered up his sympathies. It was nice. Up to this point, I was not having any success in gathering what people would say to me and somehow feeling good about it. Everyone wants to say something nice to soothe your pain, but it is just difficult. This young man, however, had something to say. Within minutes and very casually, this fellow told me how I had been feeling up to this point, how I felt at that exact moment and even how I felt like I was going to feel later on. He told me how people were treating us and how that felt. Things we could expect as we continue through this ordeal and what like might be like way on down the road. This guy was saying it all. It just flowed out of him. Come to find out, he was only about 2 weeks older than Laura. His father had killed himself in front of him when he was about 13 years old and he was very wise in that respect for his age. We told him about Laura and what kind of person she was. It was hard to leave him, he was very pleasant to talk to.

After we left Chili's, we all went back to the hotel. Phil and all his friends stayed up talking for a while in one of the hotel rooms. Audrey and I went to bed. We were going to be leaving the next morning to go back to Fort Worth. I was ready to get out of there for a while anyway.

June 1, 2003

Day 7 - Sunday, June 1st, 2003 - We all got up and met around 10 to go to breakfast. Phil and his group and Audrey and I. We were going to go to a little hometown café for breakfast. Once we arrive there, the line was out the door. We decided to grab some fast food and get on with it. Audrey and I were packed and ready to go.

After eating, we went back to the hotel one more time to say formal goodbye's before leaving. I was just about to pull out when dad called Phil. Phil handed me the phone and I knew what was coming. Dad says he wants me to come by the lake house before leaving. I was already anxious to hit the road and the lake house was 5 miles the wrong direction.

We got to the lake house and went in. Mom was gone and it was just dad. He asked me if I still planned on going to the church and funeral home. I said yes. He told me to make sure I get all the details and literature to bring back down in a couple of days. I said ok. That was it. Why we could not have done that on the phone was a mystery. Everything as a whole was aggravating me anyway, why should this be different. As usual I was wrong. Dad had innocently asked me to come by without realizing, probably, that I was one second from heading north. He was sweet natured at that moment and just didn't know.

Audrey and I went back out to the car and perhaps one of the most bizarre things to ever happen, happened. I was still thinking about the soccer ball - Laura - Angel's bumper sticker from day one off and on throughout the week. However, this event was even more pressing in the proof corner that Laura was with us and had her little finger in what was going on, as mom put it once.

We got in the car and I turned it on. The radio station we had been listening to had a song playing that I recognized as being sung by Christopher Cross. The song was just finishing and within less than 10 seconds, it was over. Audrey looked at me and commented on how she had forgotten all about that song. I didn't know the specifics of the song, not even the title. I just recognized the artist. I asked her what about it. She said the name of the song was "Think of Laura". I was shocked to know there even existed such a title. We were pulling out of Horseshoe Bay by then and I could not wait to find out more about this song. If Laura was "doing" something, apparently I needed to be aware the song existed, but apparently that was not the time for me to listen to the whole thing.

Once on the road, it took us about 45 minutes to get back in cell phone range. Neither of us had checked our voice mail in a week. As we plowed through them, writing down numbers and such, we were getting a list of people we needed to call. The first call I made was to a musician friend. I asked him if he had ever heard of a song called "Think of Laura" by Christopher Cross. He said "no" and I asked him to burn it off the internet and meet me at my house if he could when we got back into town.

After we arrived home, some of our neighbors stopped by to see how we were doing and what was going on. They had mowed our yard for us. After a while, Audrey's best friend and her fiancé came by. We did some minor housekeeping, laundry, dishes, went through the mail, paid some bills and a little work in the yard.

My musician friend showed up with the CD and our paychecks from work. He stayed for a while. He offered to bring us some dinner which turned into us going to his house for dinner. It was really nice.

We finally arrive home late Sunday night. Once home, I remembered I had not listened to the song yet. We hurriedly grabbed the CD and tried to get our CD player to work. It didn't so we went out to the car. I didn't know what I was about to hear, but I was excited. The CD began and the first words came from a synthesized chorus, almost heavenly angelic type sound saying "Think of Laura". It blew me away. Every line of the song was perfect. I was beaming, I could not stop smiling. It was perfect. Audrey on the other hand cried. We sat there and listened to that song for at least 45 minutes over and over. Nothing but the glow of the light from the car radio. I was so happy to hear something like that. It was beautiful. I could not wait to share it with the rest of the family. For days after that, I could not get the song out of my head. If this was my sister making me feel better, it worked. I can't sing and I would do anything to be able to, but nothing is nicer than a good song to speak for you sometimes.

Every once in a while, I'd see her smile,

And she'd turned my day around.

A girl with those eyes, could stare through the lies,

And see what your heart was saying.

Think of Laura, but laugh don't cry,

I know she'd want it that way.

When you think of Laura laugh don't cry,

I know she'd want it that way.

A friend of a friend,

A friend 'til the end,

That's the kind of girl she was.

Taken away so young,

Taken away, without a warning.

I know you, and you're here,

In every day we live.

I know her and she's here,

I can feel her when I sing.

Hey Laura, where are you now?

Are you far away from here?

I don't think so, I think you're here,

Taking our tears away.

Think of Laura, but laugh don't cry,

I know she'd want it that way.

When you think of Laura laugh don't cry,

I know she'd want it that way.

And there it was. The perfect song. When we went to bed that night, I could hardly sleep. The song was going over and over in my head. I would wake in the middle of the night singing it in my head.

June 2, 2003

Day 8 - Monday, June 2nd, 2003 - Audrey and I got up and headed out for the day of lining things up. We went to the bank and to mom and dad's. We had to stop by the assisted care home my grandparents were living in to pay their rent. From there we went over to the funeral home. The lady that helped us there had already received some calls from people wanting to know if any arrangements had been made yet. She walked us through what all was going to happen. She

gave advice on ordering death certificates and such. There is an application type form that mom and dad had to fill out for the death certificate. We got brochures with information on urns and accessories. From there we went to the church. They had heard already as well and were honored we would have the service there. Finally we made it to the florist. The florist actually knew Laura because her daughter went to high school with her and the cheered together. I told her that once mom was back in town, I would just send her over and they could work out the floral arrangements.

We went by Phil's house to drop off his paycheck to his wife. She had come home with mom's childhood friend Sue Ann the day before. Another set of mom's friends, Michael and Mary from the day one story, lived down the street and deeply cared for our family and especially Laura. They came down. I remember trying to be pleasant with them because I knew people were not going to know what to say to us. I could not even get Michael to look at me. I was seeing people hurt more than I had ever experienced in my life. This man and his wife were absolutely devastated.

We had done all we needed to do. We had made plans to meet one of our good friends for dinner that night. He and his girlfriend showed up. This man is one of the toughest people I know. He has struggled all his life and prevailed. He told me after a while that night that he has never cried so much in his life as he had cried that week. The whole night, his girlfriend, who is just as close and dear to us as he is, just sat there with a constant stream of tears running down her face. It was so sad to see them this upset.

June 3-7, 2003

Days 9 through 13 - June 3rd-7th, 2003 - Audrey and I got up and headed back down to Marble Falls. Phil had been down there for the past couple of days out on the lake looking for Laura by himself. That was good for him. He really liked being alone and thinking about her. I am sure he was talking to her.

When we arrived at the second lake house, mom was there with her long time friend who had come down to stay with her a while. We took them out to the car to listen to the CD. Later I took dad out there to hear it. Finally I took Justin's dad to hear it. It was sad. Justin's dad played it for Justin. I am sure that was tough.

The owner's of the lake house where Laura had been staying were there by now. The remarkable thing about their presence was, they had lost a son the year before in a tragic car accident. Their son was the same age as Laura. Here we had two sets of parents with this burdensome coincidence. There was no question the two mothers were going to instantly claim a sisterhood. The men were fine together. The owner's made dinner for all of us. Cook out style. It was very nice. We had made plans to go to dinner with them on that coming Friday night, but they ended up leaving early. From what I understood, it was too much for the still grieving mother of the son who was killed.

Phil had kept going out on the lake every day. The second day I was back, we all went back out courtesy of the boys at the Horseshoe Bay Marina. It was very windy that day and the lake was rough. We only went out for a very short time before we packed it in. I decided that would be the last time I would go out looking for her. I was satisfied she was not already up somewhere hiding. As well, I came to realize that when she did come up someone would find her. After several days of looking it was easy to understand what the wardens were saying. One time I saw a white object about the size of a salt shaker floating about 80 yards away. If she came up, they would easily find her. There was also some indication that the warden service was becoming a little uneasy having us out there all the time looking. The wardens working the case in the field were pretty cool about it, but the higher ups I don't think were happy about it. One of the days I came across some wardens dragging the lake. Out of the blue, they were out there dragging. I went over to them to see what was up. They had always been glad to talk to us before, but this time they seemed put out. That was another reason that contributed to my decision later to stop searching.

One of Laura's cheerleading buddies' dad was a member of the Dallas Dive Club. They were very anxious to come out and dive for us. After arrangements had been made with Texas Parks and Wildlife, the ok was given for them to come out. They came out on Saturday morning, day 13 and dove all day. There was some hope in the air, but it was cautious. The conditions just were not right and there was really nothing they could do. Mom was really distraught by this. Little did she know, she would not be that way for much longer.

The people of the Marble Falls community were amazing. We had become pretty good friends with the manager and staff over at the Horseshoe Bay Marina. They had given us so much, yet when we would talk to them you could see they were miffed about what to say and appeared to have pain in their hearts as well. I know they wanted to do more, they absolutely embraced us.

The manager and his staff at the Hampton Inn where we stayed that 2 weeks were exactly the same way. They would not charge us for the rooms and would not allow us to pay for anything. The manager was very nice. There was one particular desk clerk that we could tell was very bothered by what we were going through. I could see the tears in her eyes when we would run into her and the way her head tilted and the look in her face. She wanted to do more. She prayed for us and we developed a very close relationship with her. At some point we absolutely insisted to the manager that we pay him something and he adamantly refused.

The manager and staff over at the Chili's were wonderful too. Every time we went there, the manager would come over and we would talk to her for a while about what was going on. She had lost a brother in the past and had felt what we were feeling. She was very understanding and made sure we knew they would take care of us. The bar staff there was nice as well. They would let us stay a while after closing while they cleaned up. And thanks to the waitress who helped us with the jet skis. Every time we came in, it was nice, it was like they always had a table waiting for us.

Other people who helped us included a massage therapist who we went to see because 2 weeks in a hotel and on a jet ski made for a tense back. She interviewed us prior to the massage and found out who we were. She too would not accept money for the work. She had lost a brother just months before to cancer and had similar experiences with strangers. All she asked was that we pass it forward. She cried when we left.

It is amazing to be in a relationship with total strangers that could possibly have that high level of caring in it. I also realized somewhere in there that people lose loved ones unexpectedly all the time. In fact, it was now becoming apparent that more people lose someone like that than don't. It is an almost anonymous and very somber club. It is like these members move among the rest of us without our knowledge, until it is your turn to join. Then they let you know they are there. Everyone in it understands what it is like to be in it. As well, they all understand what it is like to be around a new member, like us. The bottom line was, everyone wanted to help, no matter what. I don't know if it is just the Texas Way, or if it is the lost loved one's way or if it was Laura's Way.

As I started to realize what was going on with the people around us, I couldn't stop thinking about the people we left behind back in Fort Worth and Dallas. I hinted to dad off and on that we needed to get back. I could tell he did not want to stay there anymore, but he didn't know what to do. He could not really rationalize leaving without her. I worked on him a little. He finally came to us and said he wanted to leave on Sunday, June 8th. A couple of times he hinted he was ready to go sooner and I told him to get his stuff ready and we would be home in a couple of hours. He always declined. I did keep telling him about what I thought was going to happen when we got home. How I thought there were going to be people that have been waiting for two weeks just to see us. How those people were hurting just as much as we were because not only did they love Laura, they loved us. To imagine what we were going through probably hurt the people around us tremendously. I felt like we needed to get back there and start working with those people, letting them see us and touch us. They needed that so they too could start healing somehow.

All in all, the end of the second week seemed to take a long time. But, I am not as patient as the rest of my family. I was content to go home and wait for the call from the wardens and we could then go back down if need be and take care of what we needed to. I wondered sometimes about what would have happened if she had not been missing. What if she was killed, but we had her body right away. We would have had to instantly plan a funeral and instantly come face to face with friends, and instantly say goodbye to her. I was slowly recognizing how, although we were facing the worst tragedy of our lives, we were afforded an opportunity to deal with it in a setting way different than most people. We had time to get over the initial shock without even saying the word "funeral". We were far enough away from our normal lives that it all seemed like a dream. This disgusting feeling would probably not be in everything we saw back home as bad as if we had experienced it all in our own back yard. We weren't forced to deal with the people around us right away, at a moment that we probably would not have been able to handle it. It gave us time to prepare what and who we wanted to be when we said goodbye to her. Time to think about her without the burdens and formalities of planning funerals and such. In that respect, I believe we were fortunate.

June 8-19, 2003

Day 14 - Sunday, June 8th, 2003 - Two weeks had gone by now. Still no Laura. I was getting more and more worried she may be lost or stuck on something. We had not approached the amount of time I speculated it would take, but I always doubted myself and feared we would not find her.

The previous night, mom and dad asked us to come pick them up from the lake house around noon. I got a call from them around 10am that morning. Mom said they were ready and could we come over. Audrey and I jumped out of bed, dressed and hit the road. Before we left the hotel, we spoke to the manager one more time. Told him we were leaving and tried to somehow thank him for what all he had done for us. There was no way.

Phil's wife had come back down to the area a couple of days prior so we now had two vehicles. We hooked up by phone with Phil and agreed to meet down the road somewhere for lunch. We picked up mom and dad, filled up with gas and headed home.

We met Phil and Robin for lunch and they followed us the rest of the way back to Fort Worth. Audrey and I dropped mom and dad off at their house. They had not been there in 2 weeks and this was going to be tough. We pulled down the driveway to the back of the house. Mom got out of the car and immediately lost it. She just wandered around in a daze crying. She had so many memories of Laura there it was clearly too much to handle. Dad tried to console her but this was something that had to happen. She had to do this and we had to let her. I unloaded them quickly as I could not handle seeing her this way. All I wanted to do was get out of there and get home as soon as possible. We dropped them off at almost exactly 4:30pm and probably left about 4:40pm with the sounds of mom crying ringing in our ears. I was ready for another small break from the family for a while.

Audrey and I got home about 5:15pm. I had some yard work to do and Audrey worked on the inside of the house. We tried to relax. We had a couple of drinks and dinner. We had planned on going back to work the next day. No later than Tuesday for sure. I was still of the opinion she would not come up for another week at least, maybe two. Finally about 9pm we decided to clean up and go to bed.

While in the shower, I received two phone calls from mom and dad. Before I called them back I had a feeling. Dad answered the phone and said they had found her. My verbal response was that it was great. I was so relieved. The fear of never finding her was gone. We were not going to have to go through life without having found her. That was an enormous weight off our shoulders. That phone call was as profound a moment as the one we got about her missing. Now we were able to move on to planning the funeral and moving toward some piece of closure. We told them we loved them and discussed working or not that week. I decided not to. Beside, what was I going to do. We had a lot of planning.

About 15 minutes later, Phil called me. He asked if I had spoken to mom and dad. I said that I had and the line became silent. We both instantly fell apart crying. All we could say was we would talk to each other the following day. That was the worst I had felt up to that point throughout the whole ordeal. We were her brothers and this hurt like hell. It was almost like it was official now, she was gone. I felt lost and empty. I had said several times before during the previous weeks that I was preparing to find a place in my heart and life big enough to hold this gigantic hole. This was the worst, the first time Phil and I spoke after we found out we had her body.

It was so bizarre again, that certain events unfolded this way. We had been down there for 2 solid weeks. According to the wardens, they found her around 6:30pm. Exactly 2 hours after we dropped mom and dad off at their house. Mom contended that Laura was just waiting for us to leave before she surfaced because she did not want us there. I am not saying it did, and I am not saying it didn't. It was just another amazing thing. But those amazing things were becoming harder and harder to explain.

It was like she died and left this world but not without helping us from beyond. She gathered us all up and on the way to Marble Falls she showed me that she was an angel in a bumper sticker. And she also said, "Oh, by the way, could you play 'this' song at my funeral." And, "Oh, by the way, spend 2 weeks down here in this beautiful place with privacy and deal with the shock of my loss." And, "Oh, by the way, when you are ready to leave here, I am going to wait until you are home and then, I am going to come to you so you can get on with it." And that was not all, there would be more to come.

The decision had been made that the funeral would take place the following Saturday, June 14th. Somehow the events lined up such that we would have Laura's funeral the day after Phil's birthday and the day before Father's Day. We had planned on doing a slide show with some pictures of her throughout her life. It was going to be shown before the service with 8 or 10 songs we picked out. Something for the early comers to watch while they waited. We ended up finding some 250 pictures for that. Phil put together a video using the song "Think of Laura" that we going to present as our eulogy. Our cousin Laura Putnam Jenkins was going to sing "How Great Thou Art". We had planned on getting a bag piper to do "Amazing Grace". Between all that and the flowers, and a visitation, there was a lot to do.

We spent the week getting everything taken care of. Audrey and I had a bunch of family coming in. So did the rest of our family. People were dropping off tons of food and flowers to mom and dad's house. Every time I went over there, there were guests there in some capacity. Mom was so busy putting things together. Dad went to work a couple of times.

Plans had been made for mom to have a visitation that coming Thursday the 12th. I can't say Phil and I were completely on board with that scenario, however we realized it was very important to mom. Our only main objection to the idea was asking our friends to drive out to Grapevine on Thursday night and grieve with us and then come back on Saturday and do it again. However, most of mom's world was in Grapevine. So we did it. I am glad we did. I didn't really know what to expect but I ended up seeing people I hadn't seen in many, many years. It really made us feel good. Two hours we stood there and received people. Some I knew, some I didn't. Some smiled and offered condolences and others were

speechless. A couple of times I had people who were violently obsessed with finding the person who killed her. I was surprised at those people. But nevertheless, it was a trip down memory lane for sure. It is quite possible I saw over 90 percent of all the people I have ever known. A friend of mom's had made a memorial for Laura for the visitation. The urn was there, but Laura was not in it yet. Some of her sentimental things were there, cheerleading stuff, Zeta stuff, pictures, a dress she wore when she was about 2 years old. I had never seen a memorial like that for someone I cared about and loved. It was sad. I imagined if she could see that or not and if she could, was she sad too.

After it was over, some of Phil's and my friends were going down the street to a restaurant and bar I go to often. I had told the staff there we would be bringing in about 20 to 30 people. When we showed up, the manager had compensated some appetizers for us and paid up to \$100 towards our tab. It was nice. I remember thinking, the visitation is over, which I was dreading and we are now within less than 36 hours of having the funeral. Almost three weeks had passed now and I was ready to get the funeral behind us.

The funeral was about how you would expect it to be. Some 1,200-1,400 people attended. That figure came from the church. Capacity was 1,200 and a lot of people had to stand. The service was video taped. I have a copy but have not watched it. No special reason, I just don't watch a bunch of video tapes.

The following week, after the funeral, we went back to work. I remember finding Phil sitting in his truck about mid-morning on that Monday. He was in tears. He couldn't figure out why he was at work. We all still had folks in town. Throughout the week people went back home. Finally on Thursday morning I believe Audrey and I said so-long to the last of our guests. That should have been around the 19th of June. That afternoon I got a call from dad. He said they had found the boat. Here we go, begin the second chapter in this ordeal...

September 18, 2003

(June 25, 2003

Boat Found Likely One Involved in Fatal Hit-and-Run

AUSTIN, Texas -- Texas Parks and Wildlife Department game wardens have seized what is believed to be the boat used in a Memorial Day hit-and-run on Lake LBJ that resulted in the death of a 23-year-old Lubbock woman.)

Audrey is doing good. She and I have an even closer relationship now with all of this. Me personally, I am sad. I know there is nothing I can do about her being gone, however I also know I have not done anything to accept it yet. There is too much other stuff going on to let the fact she is gone sink in. I know she is gone, I just haven't dealt with it yet. I will though. I will lay her to rest in my heart when the time is right. I appreciate the kind word regarding strength. When this all began and the shock was so terrifying, I certainly worked hard to get mom and dad through it. They made it and are relying on each other more now. Both are back to work and dad is extremely preoccupied with the investigation and case itself. That takes his attention away from the devastating loss. We keep an eye on them both. My brother was very close to her and he is having a hard time. He lost a lot of weight but appears to be gaining it back. He is sad, almost like he can't imagine not seeing her again. He has a lot of those "Why?" questions. Why did this happen type stuff. But, this is something we have to do. I admit I look forward to the day that the legal circus is over and we can all just fade into the rest of our lives and try to get use to the new normal.

(With John's permission, during the rest of his journal, there are sections that have been edited from publication on this site. Most families of hit and run victims will experience shock, followed by unbearable grief, and then anger. John freely express' his frustration and exasperation with the defendant, the boat owner's, and the judicial system that has the responsibility to prosecute those responsible. In our litigious society, it is better to side on caution than risk saying something that lawyers may decide might be libelous.)

And to think, whoever was driving that boat probably watched us at some point on that Monday. Either watched the searchers, or us. They had to get up that morning and probably hear about it from some of the people staying at the Dawson home and then that sorry ass had to act surprised. Probably talked about how awful that was. I wonder how close I have been to that person without knowing it. I wonder if I saw that person and did not know that was the one. I remember Phil and I would often sit in silence, whether it was on the lake looking for her or sitting in Chili's, and after a while one of us would say, "Everyone is a suspect to me." It was what we were both always thinking. I wonder if at some point that sorry ass was within our eyesight.

But for now, we will do what the authorities are telling us to do and that is to be quiet, be patient and wait. One way or the other, when this is all over, I will speak for my sister. Mom has expressed a sort of spite towards the media. I am sure it is drama more than hatred. I, on the other hand am maintaining an open line of communication with a reporter in

the Dawson's home town of San Antonio. I will get my opportunity one day to say to the people of San Antonio that this is what happened and these people are sorry asses.

Something very sad came to mind the other day. I believe I was driving home when I had this thought. Laura for sure would have had children. I can easily day dream about them and what they would have looked like and so on. I can picture them at family functions and different occasions. Then I realized that the person that killed her also killed those children. They died when she died. That makes me sick. We actually lost more than just Laura, we lost her children too.

Mom went to Marble Falls over the Labor Day weekend by herself. She told me she wanted to spend some time with Laura. I understood what she was saying. I am afraid to try to talk to Laura too much. Sanity being the risk here. But mom is that way. Once she returned, she told me how she and Laura got up real early and went out to the point to watch the sunrise. And then, somehow mom locked her keys in her trunk and mom said that Laura was sitting there just laughing at her. I mean mom was talking as if Laura was standing right there in the flesh and blood. I can't say that it didn't concern me. I am concerned about mom talking like that to outsiders and them getting the wrong idea. I am also concerned that mom might lose it all together.

December 29, 2003

(10/2/03

Major Break in Laura Putnam Case

Llano County Sheriff's Dept.

Arrest Made In Fatal Boating Accident

28-year-old Robert Napier Corrigan III was arrested on yesterday in Frio county and booked in the Llano county jail, charged with failure to stop and render aid. He posted \$100,000 bond and was released Thursday afternoon. Corrigan is reportedly a real estate agent in San Antonio. He was arrested without incident while dove hunting. One law enforcement officer said of the arrest, 'It was almost as if he were expecting us.'

(Oct.

13,

2003

Man Indicted In Hit-And-Run Boat Case

The following news release is from the office of District Attorney Sam Oatman.

Oct. 8, 2003, the Llano County Grand Jury handed down an Indictment against Robert N. Corrigan III, charging him with Failure to Render Assistance, a Texas Parks and Wildlife felony, which carries a possible penalty of from 2-10 years in the Texas Department of Criminal Justice and a possible fine of from \$2,000 to \$10,000. Corrigan is still out on a \$100,000 bond which was made after his arrest. Arraignment before the 33rd Judicial District Court will be the next step and that date has not been set. District Attorney Sam Oatman stated, "All evidence involving this accident was presented to the Grand Jury. Their decision to indict involved only failure to return to the accident scene. The case is still under investigation concerning what actually caused the collision and whether Corrigan or anyone else was criminally responsible. If any new evidence is found or evidence we already have can be developed further, it could result in an additional felony charge, provided such evidence is enough for a Grand Jury Indictment." This news release serves as the extent of comment about this case at this time.)

(edited).....Since the Grand Jury hearing, we have been to a couple of pre-trial hearings and some depositions have been taken. We are still waiting to find out more. It appears that Kosurek and Corrigan are hiding something and we don't know what it is yet. What ever it is has cost Laura her life and it is so important that they feel the need to over lie about it. Even when it looks like they are clearly busted. There is something else going on.

I have been notified that I will be given an opportunity at trial to give a victim impact statement. Since this is where I am in the journal, I am going to work on it here.

Defendant,

Be advised that at this particular time in my life, I have no desire to make a "victim impact" statement to you. I hold a very dark and awful place in my life and my spirit for you. However, I was given an opportunity to give a speech at Laura's funeral last year and did not take it. I regret that now. So here I am forced to contemplate what I would say to you. I am forcing myself to come up with something that will somehow make you and all those associated with you

understand how bad you have hurt our family. Forced to come up with some little statement that will make you feel at all responsible for what you have done. I don't think that is possible.

For myself personally, I have managed to define this past year as dealing with two distinctly separate ordeals. The first ordeal is losing my sister. It would be nice to have spent the last year coping with her loss in a peaceful manner. Somehow it does not feel right to come up here and tell you how much I miss her and how you ruined our lives and about how I am sad that I will never see the children she would have had and the pain it causes knowing that they are gone too. That is personal and will remain so. Those painful emotions are private and none of your business because you did not know her. See, the first ordeal began with a phone call on May 26th, 2003. How can I call myself the victim in this first ordeal. The victim is in an urn on my parents mantle. We have yet to lay her to rest. She doesn't get to make a statement and I would not attempt to make one for her. The first ordeal was an accident. A boat accidentally ran over my sister and killed her. I have come to realize over the past year that accidents happen to people. I know this because of the support we have been given by those around us who care about us.

We are all here today thanks to you and those associated with you. The second ordeal is why we are here. The second ordeal has to do with your behavior and unwillingness to accept responsibility. The charge is failing to stop. And to this day, after all that has been discovered about that night, you have still failed to stop. Since I am a victim of you failing to stop, that is why I am here. The fact that you have made our family suffer and endure this investigation this past year in this manner. Instead of laying her to rest, we have had to do this. Because of you and those associated with you, this is what we have been doing this year. It is bad enough that you knowingly left the scene that night. Left us to wonder who on earth out there ran over Laura and just left her there. A couple of days after the accident, my brother and I were sitting on water. We had spent the morning searching for her body. We discussed how we wondered if the boat driver was still there at the lake, somewhere. Was that person perhaps even watching us? Since we did not know who it was, everyone was a suspect. I sometimes think that life would have almost been easier if we would have never found you. Do you know why? Because I never would have expected anyone to be so terribly disrespectful even after being caught.

Once the boat was found, we finally felt like there would be some closure on the way for us. Why would I not think that? Naivety on my part assumed that since the boat was found, the driver would naturally come forward and take responsibility for the accident. More wrong I could not have been. Instead we waited three and a half more months before you were arrested. All that time we had no idea what was going on. We woke up every single day wondering what was going on. Because of you and those associated with you, this is how we lived our lives. I could not understand why. All we needed was someone to come forward, take some responsibility and let us move on. Instead we are doing this.

Once you were arrested, naivety once again visited me. Again I assumed that you would now come forward and take responsibility for the accident and my family would be able to put some of this pain away. Again we were disappointed. Because of you and those associated with you, we had to keep going.

Not because of the accident are we here. We are here because of your behavior after the accident. Because of your behavior and the behavior of those associated with you, our family has spent the past year in a constant state of stress and pain. My biggest concern regarding this second ordeal is that you and those associated with you are going to walk out of here without taking any responsibility for what you have done to my family. If you would have just stopped that night, we would not be doing this. If you would have just come forward even in the following days, we would not be doing this. If you would have come forward at any point ever, we would not be doing this. If you would have ever just taken responsibility, we would not be doing this.

Laura is gone and we will deal with that pain for the rest of our lives. Your decision to slap us in the face afterward has brought us a whole different kind of pain. That is what this is about for me. If you would have just taken responsibility for this a long time ago, you would have spared us a lot of pain. Instead, your actions are telling me and my family that you are not going to take this seriously. That unwillingness to cooperate on you part tells me that you do not think my sister's life was important nor do you think that our family's feelings are important. That was a big mistake on your part. Some day, you had better come to realize that. I guess we can all learn one lesson from Laura, live life to the fullest because you never know when someone is going to kill you.

(cont)

March 16, 2005

(Man admits guilt in Lake LBJ boat death

Web Posted: 10/23/2004 12:00 AM CDT

John Tedesco

Express-News Staff Writer

LLANO — More than a year after Laura Putnam drowned in the dark waters of Lake LBJ as a sleek speedboat sped away, the man accused of leaving her behind stood in court Friday, admitted his guilt and apologized to her family.

"Mr. and Mrs. Putnam ... I want to give you my condolences," said a subdued Robert "Triple" Corrigan III, a 29-year-old real estate salesman who lives in San Antonio.

He professed sorrow for their loss and pain and said they were in his prayers.

Corrigan pleaded guilty to failure to stop and render aid and was given a six-month jail sentence, 10 years deferred adjudication and a \$10,000 fine by District Judge Guilford Jones.

By rolling the dice and entering the plea before the judge, Corrigan dodged a jury trial or a plea bargain with Llano County District Attorney Sam Oatman, avenues that could have resulted in a prison sentence of up to 10 years.....)

That was to be my victim impact statement had I been given the opportunity to give it. A lot of time has passed now. The original trial was set to go off in April of 2004. It was delayed and didn't happen until November of 2004. Corrigan surprised everyone and entered a guilty plea. So, none of the evidence was presented. Seems even more like he got away with it. I don't think he was counting on the judge sentencing him to some jail time though. County jail time, not prison. As a result I wasn't able to be there.

We did get to sit in on some depositions in the civil matter. Corrigan was supposed to be there at 10am that morning. He showed up about a half hour late. He is so cheesy. He looked like a cross between a used car salesman and a manager of a low-grade topless bar. He sat there and pleaded the Fifth Amendment for about 45 minutes. Our civil attorney started off with some serious questions, then shifted gears and started asking him stuff like, "Do you make it a habit of getting drunk and running over people in a boat and killing them?" And, "Just how many people have you killed in your life?" That was probably the only time he had to sit there and face that type of ridicule in front of us. It was bittersweet.

Then after Corrigan was deposed and left, the attorneys pushed the chair he was sitting in out in the hall stating they were disgusted by it and didn't want it in the room.

(edited)

The Dawson's insurance company settled the civil matter. We never heard from them again. Not that we would want to but the bottom line remains, this group as a whole will never ever take one single ounce of responsibility for this. I think they still can't believe that this was even an issue.

It is nice to move on though. I remember during the criminal investigation becoming very irritated by the not knowing part of it. The only thing I would think sometimes is that there will be a period of time down the road when this will all be over. Well, here it is. Finally.

Audrey and I have a new baby and are hoping for another one soon. My only major concern in life regarding losing Laura is this. One day, my children that were born after the accident are going to come to me and ask what happened. They are going to ask me about her. The will have seen pictures of her and such throughout their very early lives. I am sure that when they are barely old enough to understand what happened that someone, probably my mother will tell them. They will go to Grandma's house and there will be pictures and so on. But eventually, as they grow older and become more mature, it will hit them and they will want to know the real story. They are going to want to know the real Laura and what she meant to their father. They are probably going to ask their mother why dad never talks about her to them. What am I going to say? I am able to talk to anyone about her at anytime, no problem. But, I lose it terribly at the thought of having to figure out how to pass her legacy on to my children who will have never known her. My problem is, I don't know how I am going to get it out. Just thinking about it brings me to tears. And I'm not talking little tears. It

blows me away emotionally to look at my son and think that someday I'll have to tell him about her and what happened to her and our family. That is reality.

I miss you little sister, and I hope to see you again some day. The future without you seems so sad, but I have to change that for the sake of my family's future. We'll move on. Spirit.

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