

## Sisters Work Together To Heal

By: *MARJORIE TURNER HOLLMAN*

As she stood underneath other members of her cheerleading squad as they demonstrated their cheerleading stunts, Hopedale resident Ryan Farrell braced herself at the "base", along with other girls in her stunt-group. She was a member of the cheerleading squad from Marist College in Poughkeepsie, NY and they were showing off some of their cheerleading tricks in a fund-raising exhibition. Suddenly, the flyer on top of the stunt lost her balance and fell onto Ryan, knocking Ryan to the ground. Little did Ryan or her family know that this apparently small mishap would trigger a series of injuries that would leave Ryan in a coma, with a broken neck, collapsed lung, and bleeding

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on her brain, causing Ryan's Traumatic Brain-Injury.

The incident was 6 years ago, and Ryan is still recovering from the serious brain injury she suffered in the freak accident. After undergoing numerous surgeries to save her life, and extended physical, occupational and speech therapies, when asked what has been the most important therapy that has helped her heal, Ryan stated with clarity, "Everyday life!"

When talking to Ryan, you get the sense of her being a nearly unstoppable force. As she said about herself, "When I was told I might only be able to walk with a walker, that added fuel to my burning fire to recover! I was nearly 19 when the injury occurred, and I don't know what I would have done without my whole family." That "whole family," as Ryan says, resides in Hopedale and includes "My super sister Courtney; my mother Mary Ellen, who works full time and still takes me to all my doctor appointments; and my dad Tony, who is a hard-

working guy who always provides for us. What I've learned is that family is first and foremost. When all is said and done, your family members are going to be there for you."

Courtney Farrell, Ryan's only sister, has taken steps to help her sister and others who suffer from brain injury by participating in the Falmouth Road Race to raise funds for the Brain Injury Association of Massachusetts (BIA-MA). This is Courtney's 4<sup>th</sup> year running the 7-mile race. Participants must raise at least \$900, and each time Courtney has run, she has exceeded her goal. "The first year I raised over \$5000, and this year I've already exceeded my goal," Courtney noted. Although Courtney finished the race August 21, there is still time to donate by going to <http://www.firstgiving.com/fundraiser/courtney-farrell/2016-falmouth-road-race>

Ryan noted, "I'm so proud of Courtney, not just for all the money she's raised, but for the training she puts in to running these races."

Courtney, "my best friend" in Ryan's words, is also working



to complete law school. "What happened to Ryan has made me refocus my goals," Courtney said in a recent interview. "When I graduate from law school I want to be able to advocate for people with disabilities. Because of Ryan, I'm much more aware of how injury can impair someone's life. There are people who take advantage. I want to advo-

cate for them."

Despite the struggles of the past 6 years, Ryan has not given up on her dreams. She explained, "One of my 'Ryanisms' is 'Teamwork makes the dreams work.' I've just finished an internship at WMRC Radio in Milford where I learned a little about everything at the station. My career goal is to be a TV newscaster, to be in front of the camera interviewing people. I got the internship through Mass Rehab, so it's a foot in the door."

[http://www.mass.gov/eohhs/consumer/disability-](http://www.mass.gov/eohhs/consumer/disability-services/vocational-rehab/vr-services-2.html)

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Ryan already has gotten her 'foot in the door' by welcoming the opportunity, through the BIA-MA, to speak at high school assemblies and other gatherings about sports-related injuries. She's also written about her experiences, providing a voice for those who have suffered brain injuries.

Courtney noted that prior to her accident, her sister Ryan was a straight-A student. "She's come so far, but watching her struggle, sometimes I wish it had happened to me. The doctors told her she might not be able to walk again, but she can. I don't know if she'd be doing all she is if she didn't have such a positive attitude." Among Ryan's accomplishments is graduating from college, after taking a year off because of her accident.

When talking to Ryan, you get the sense of being in the presence of an unstoppable force. As she said about herself, "When I was told I might only be able to walk with a walker, that added fuel to my burning fire to recover! I was nearly 19 when the injury occurred. I don't know what I would have done without my whole family."

Best to you Ryan, Courtney and the entire Farrell family. God bless as you all continue to heal and find ways to give back.

