

## Ami's Compassion Continues to Benefit Others

"They didn't know each other. In fact, they never met.

But they had a lot in common.

Both of them were 26 years old. They both loved to ski and play soccer. They worked hard and filled each day doing the things they loved.

And both of them had plans. They had high hopes for the future.

Those plans changed, however. The young man was in a high-speed head-on collision, and lived. The young woman had an asthma attack, and died.

They never met, but eventually their paths did cross.



Ami Abad's close family acted on her wish to be a donor. From left are: Dick, Allen, Connie (seated), Ami and Ariel.

### SPECIAL OUTLOOK

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On March 29, 2000, nearly three years after the accident that put his life on hold, Mat Martin underwent a [surgical procedure](#) that would change his life – again.

It was only six weeks earlier that Amaryllis "Ami" Abad experienced the asthma attack from which she would never recover.

But it was how she lived her life, her very special outlook on life, and her family's adherence to her legacy of compassion that would give Mat the physical ability and the optimism to resume a life that had been interrupted too long.

### ALWAYS HELPING OTHERS

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"Ami was a very active person," said her mother, Connie Abad. "She tried everything, from musical instruments like the organ and the violin to sports – she liked to ski and play soccer and she loved baseball; she'd be happy about the Mariners' season.

"She may not have been the best at everything, but she always wanted to try."

Ami's special gift was caring. "About everything and everybody," Connie quickly adds. "Since high school until the day she died she worked part-time for the University of Washington concession stand, mostly so she'd be able to offer jobs to those who needed them."

At another workplace, Ami also went out of her way to help those who needed it. Connie explains that as a bank teller before being promoted, "Ami would try to speak Tagalog, our Filipino language, so that she could help the older Filipinos do their banking without struggling with English."

Ami worried about such things and how they affected people. Connie, who with husband Dick Abad emigrated 30 years ago from the Philippines to Seattle where Ami and brothers Ariel and Allen were born, elaborated: "Ami worried about everything. And she was a friend to everybody. In fact, she worried about others so much that she would tackle their problems, even if it upset her own life."

"You could always count on Ami to be there when you needed help," youngest brother Allen wrote for the Tissue Center's 2001 calendar. "Even though she is not with us anymore, she will always be looking after us."

## WHAT'S IMPORTANT

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"Ami had asthma and was allergic to a lot of foods," says Connie. "We think what happened was she ate something she was allergic to, because she got hives and her throat closed up, making breathing difficult. Unfortunately she didn't have an epinephrine shot then, and by the time the paramedics got there, it was too late."

Asked what led to the family's decision for tissue donation, Connie explained: "I had long included donor status on my driver's license. Ami and I had talked about it and she fully supported the idea of donation."

"I never wanted any of my kids to suffer, so if Ami's donation could help others stop hurting, I was in favor. Ami would agree."

Subsequently, Connie has become a vocal advocate for donation, telling friends to alert their families of their desire to be donors and giving copies of the calendar to people to encourage donation. "It's a way to help people," says Connie. "And what's more important?"

Certainly, that was Ami's philosophy. As Connie adds, "Donation is really an extension of Ami's life. It makes her life even more meaningful to know that she's still helping people, just like she always did."

## MAT'S STORY

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"It's been a very hard four years, very trying," said Mat Martin's longtime girlfriend, Darcy Alderman, about the time that has elapsed since Mat's 1997 accident. Both admit, however, that their lives would be even more difficult were it not for Ami's donation.

Now, Mat can walk without limping, without extreme pain. Now, he can be optimistic. He can even make plans.

In fact he's already realizing some of those plans: in September he began work as a technical designer at Boeing after a year of training. He's excited about life in a way neither he nor Darcy could imagine before Ami's donation a year and a half ago. Before then, Mat had gone through 13 operations and still couldn't envision a bright future.



Mat Martin is one of 20 tissue and cornea transplant recipients whose lives were changed by Ami Abad.

## THE ACCIDENT

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Driving back from a midnight service call as a diesel mechanic, Mat was injured in a head-on collision at Tiger Summit near Seattle. "I got out of the vehicle on my own, walked 10 feet on adrenaline and fell down on my back," Mat remembers. "My left leg was lying across my chest. Dazed, I threw it down to where it should be." Fortunately, that instinctive action did not result in a severed femoral artery.

One of the first on the scene was a former emergency medical technician who carefully straightened the leg and applied a tourniquet to stop profuse bleeding from the knee. Most fortunate of all, the people in the other vehicle weren't seriously injured. Police and paramedics arrived and drove Mat to [Harborview Medical Center](#); an airlift was unavailable.

Mat's parents were notified. "I called his company," Darcy remembers. "Its first radio dispatches reported Mat had died. We went to Harborview and were told Mat just had a broken leg. Unfortunately, we found out it was more serious when the doctors updated us; they were great at keeping us informed."

## THE INJURIES

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The impact had driven Mat forward so hard that a bolt on the steering wheel tore through his knee and opened a hole in his thigh so big that "the doctors could stick their hands inside," Mat notes.

His left femur was fractured into three pieces. His injuries also included a chipped left kneecap and cartilage loss, broken right ulna, a broken right hip from the force of his body against his wallet, and many facial cuts. He still occasionally finds tiny glass shards surfacing in his scalp.

Surgery the night of the accident took nearly nine hours: the femur was "nailed" together, the ulna reassembled with screws and plates, the hip set, and other wounds cleaned and stitched. Mat was hospitalized for 14 days.

Then his recovery started: two months in a wheelchair, physical therapy eight hours a week, then crutches for three months and tentative walking. "The doctors at Harborview did a great job," said Mat. The knee, however, was still extremely painful.

## SOLUTIONS

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Several arthroscopic knee surgeries followed without success, unlike follow-up surgeries on the hip and ulna. Mat tried to work, but the knee wasn't up to the job's demands, and pain persisted.

Enter James D. Bruckner, M.D., and associate professor of orthopedics at the University of Washington. After arthroscopy, injection of a synovial fluid substitute, and shots to stimulate cartilage growth, "Dr. Bruckner gave me three options," Mat recalls. "To be put on a transplant list, to do nothing and suffer, or fuse the bones – there'd be no pain but no movement, either. I chose the transplant."

The procedure is called a [refrigerated left femoral condyle transplant](#). Simply put, a bone and cartilage allograft is transplanted into the damaged area. Because the refrigerated allograft can be stored for only a limited time, the patient's name and size specifications are placed on a list at the Tissue Center to await an appropriately sized donation. In Mat's case, Ami's donation was a good fit to replace the damaged portion of his knee.

It worked. "I could feel the difference right away," says Mat. Now, after months of grueling rehabilitation and normal exercise, the knee is no longer painful and doesn't give out anymore.

"I'm ready for new challenges now," Mat says. "I'm going to start skiing again next year and get back in shape to play soccer. Dr. Bruckner says that with muscle development in the next couple of years, the knee should be better than before the accident."

## THOUGHTS AND GRATITUDE

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"I wondered where the graft was coming from," Mat admits. "To be honest, a transplant bothered me at first. I wondered about the donor — that was going through my mind."

All he knew was the donor age and sex. Months later, he guessed that Ami was the donor, when he read her story in the Tissue Center calendar in which she was featured, as he was. With the Abad family's consent, the Tissue Center confirmed his speculation.

"Seeing Ami in the calendar," observes Darcy, "really helped Mat and me. Knowing how loved she was and how her family helped shape the wonderful person she became...well, it just helps knowing that."

Adds Mat, "There isn't a day that I don't get up and thank Ami and her family for the chance that I'm receiving."

*Editor's note: It is the practice of the Tissue Center to maintain confidentiality for both donors and transplant recipients. We encourage patients to express their gratitude to the donor families through letters, without revealing their identities. We offer those letters to the families, and if they choose to respond, we relay communications to recipients. Occasionally, after they have exchanged letters, face-to-face meetings are arranged. In this instance, Mat's hunch resulted in his learning the identity of his donor, but not until we had permission from Ami's family to confirm his guess. Both have appreciated the understanding and comfort that their interactions have brought them.*