

# Student Articles

## If dad can do it, I figure. . . So Can I!

For my first visit to the UAA School of Nursing, I was wheeled through the lobby of the K Building by my father, Bob Swope, who at the time was in his last semester of the BSN Program. It was October 1998, just two months after a devastating motor vehicle rollover accident in Canada left me missing half my right calf. As someone accustomed to running through life as fast as I could, viewing the world at the pace of a wheelchair was certainly a new experience.

At first, surgeons in Canada told me that they weren't sure if I would keep my leg. Later, after they flew me back to Anchorage, the surgeon at Providence Alaska Medical Center told me that I would get to keep my leg, but I would never walk normal again (I was told a lot of 'nevers' those first few months after the accident). I was also told, 'I would never walk without a limp' - 'I would never be able to ride or hike my favorite trails at Angel Rocks' - 'I would never be able to ride a snow machine'. Thus began two years of surgery, debridements and physical therapy as I learned to function with my new disability. At first my goals were small. One week I practiced dangling my leg off the bed, building up to five-minute increments. The next week, I worked on weight bearing on my right leg, accompanied by a deep-seated pain that made my teeth hurt.

Although dad was spending long hours on the floor at Alaska Native Medical Center, as he worked his way through his preceptorship, he came home at night to spend even more long hours taking care of me. In those months of recovery, dad got into the habit of bringing home interesting nursing journal articles for me to read. Soon, I found myself pouring through his textbooks on pathophysiology and microbiology. My experience as a patient read like something straight out of a Hockenberry's Medical Surgical Nursing textbook. Deep Vein Thrombosis? Had it! Straph Infection? Been there! Debridements and Grafting? Done that! The entire time I was experiencing the nursing process first hand, my dad was there showing me the true meaning behind the art of care. Six years later, I am working towards graduating from the same nursing program my dad did and trying to become the extraordinary kind of nurse he already is. We both share the professional goal of decreasing the disparity of health care provided to Alaska Native and Rural communities. Dad works towards this goal as the Director of Home Health and Palliative Care for the Bristol Bay Area Health Corporation in Dillingham. I'm working towards this goal by pursuing research studies into improving public health and pre-hospital care, provided to indigenous cultures.

Today, I still walk with a limp sometimes, but it doesn't stop me from hiking my favorite trails in the summer or snow machining in the winter. Every Tuesday morning, I walk through the sliding doors of Providence, to my Pediatric Clinicals with a smile on my face - mainly because I can walk through those doors in the first place. Sometimes after an especially long day at clinicals or a mind-bending study session for class, I find myself wondering slowly through the lobby of Building K, stopping in front of the graduation picture for the December 1998 cohort, to see my dad's face. Soon my picture will be up on that wall too!

I've been told that dad and I are the first father-daughter graduates at the UAA School of Nursing. I often laugh when I think about that. If dad can do it, I figure. . .So Can I!



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(pictured above with her father, Bob Swope, at the Sigma Theta Tau Induction - April 2004)