

Rochester Woman Celebrates Faith, Recovery After Crash

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Brasher's Recovery

Chelan Brasher poses for a portrait at Fort Borst Park on Friday in Centralia.

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Nine months ago, Chelan Brasher was in a hospital bed after she ran out in front of an SUV at the southbound onramp to Interstate 5 from Harrison Avenue in Centralia.

Today, the 19-year-old from Rochester has physically recovered well and is back to doing what she loves — working out six days a week. However, she is still wrestling with forgiving herself for causing the accident.

“I’ll always feel bad,” she said. “It was my fault.”

Brasher said she wasn’t paying attention to her surroundings when she left Thorbecke’s FitLife Center at about 6:15 p.m. on March 11. She had forgotten her keys at Thorbecke’s and had gone back for them, putting her behind schedule. Then she started running to get to class at Centralia College.

Brasher said she was wearing headphones and doesn’t remember looking for traffic.

“My head was going a million different directions, and I just was not thinking and using my head,” Brasher said.

She ran out in front of a 2000 Ford Excursion driven by a 16-year-old boy. Time seemed to slow as she watched the grill of the SUV come toward her.

It hit her.

The next thing she knew, she was lying on the ground on her stomach.

She tried to get up.

An off-duty emergency medical technician, who was nearby when the collision happened, told her to stay down.

A man from her church was there, and when she heard his familiar voice, she felt calm. At that point, she wasn't in pain; her body just felt hot from the waist down.

An ambulance came. An EMT she knew was working. Having another familiar face there was comforting as she was transported to Providence Centralia Hospital. Then she was flown with her mom to Harborview Medical Center in Seattle. Her father drove up separately.

Brasher said she stayed at Harborview for about 10 days. Her pelvis was broken in multiple places and one of her scapulas was cracked.

Her doctor said her good physical condition contributed to her injuries not being more extensive, Brasher said.

She worked with a physical therapist for about two months.

"I kept a good attitude, but inside I was just so frustrated because of where I was I was so athletic ... it set me back so far," Brasher said.

But she said she was lucky it wasn't worse and that she didn't have to start all over.

She was in a wheelchair for about eight weeks. She advanced to a walker and then to two crutches and then one crutch. She has been crutch free and back in the gym for about five months.

She's not working out as hard she used to be and is cautious to not fall because she could snap the screws in her pelvis.

Even if she doesn't get back to the level of working out that she was previously at, she said she's OK with that because she lived through the accident and wasn't injured more severely.

She is back to coaching gymnastics as well.

There was a month during her recovery when Brasher said she was depressed, but with the support of her friends, family and church, she overcame that.

"Big kudos to my mom and dad. ... My mom was by my side for three months; (she) never left me," Brasher said. "When I'd wake up in a lot of pain in the night, she'd be there."

Doctors said she may get arthritis in her pelvis sooner than if she hadn't been injured, but other than that, she isn't expected to have any major complications later in life because of the accident, Brasher said.

For that, she's grateful.

"The whole thing was a big lesson that I had to learn and you only get one shot at life," Brasher said.

Before the accident Brasher said she wasn't on the "right road" and was really "wrapped up" in herself. The crash humbled her.

"(God) let me get hit by an SUV that knocked me off my high horse," she said. "He didn't let it be so bad that I be discouraged by not being able to do what I love again, which is just work out like crazy, and he didn't allow for (the driver) to live with killing somebody."

While Brasher hasn't met or spoken to the driver who hit her, she said she knows people who know his family and asked them to relay to them how sorry she is for not seeing him coming.

But forgiving herself isn't easy.

"For me, I might forgive myself, but I'm never ever going to put it out of my mind because I don't want to ever go back to where I was that day, and I learned from it so I won't forget. Forgive myself? I'm working on it," Brasher said.