



Dear  
Change,

Hello and how are you? I just wanted to write you a quick letter to thank you for everything you did for me while I was in the hospital. Not only did all your treatments help me, but so did your kindness, caring, and beautiful spirit. Every time you came, I would improve. The doctors all thought they must have done something right, but it was you... all that you were doing for me. Laying alone in a hospital bed is not only despairing and lonely, but also very painful. Your visits always helped in all aspects. You helped my mother, too, and she really did need that. I can't ~~say~~ ever thank you enough for everything.

With love  
Livy

## Ivy's heart: part I

*By Edward Hannigan on December 19, 2004*

IN A TIME AND PLACE WHERE HOPE IS SOMETIMES ALL PEOPLE HAVE, one family faces a second Christmas not surrounded by the lights of a Christmas tree but by the lights of a critical care unit room at Palomar Hospital. As dark and bleak as that room can be, it's filled with a family's love and devotion and hope for their daughter. A horrific car wreck on Interstate-15 at Gopher Canyon a year ago has tested the Temecula family in ways many of us hope to never imagine.

Ivy Kensingler, 20, who was on her way to classes at California State University, San Marcos, remembers a car — but cannot identify it — that caused her to swerve. Losing control of her car, she careened across the freeway and off the side of the 15, rolling and tumbling down the embankment. Then her seat belt released, ejecting her from the car.

Ivy suffered life-threatening injuries. Even now, more than a year later, her condition is critical but stable.

Instead of being home for the holidays, Ivy, a Temecula resident and graduate of Temecula Valley High School, is in the only home she has known for more than a year —

a bed in the CCU at Palomar Hospital. This is a story about a young woman and a family's strength. It's a story about a community member. It's a story that could be about anyone of us at any time, given a bad turn of luck. This is the first part in a three-part series about Ivy and her fight to recover her life on her own terms.

Ivy's a slight, petite girl, but her strengths are much larger than her frame would let you believe. Her sometimes hard-edged approach might need polish, according to some, but the message is very clear when delivered. And she's always been this way — her mother, Kathy, related a story about Ivy's first slumber party, where, 7-year-old girls being girls, one of her guests began to pick on another guest, a heavier child. Ivy told her that she had to leave if she was going to ridicule someone and sent the tormentor home.

This sense of right and wrong, this sense of fair play, seems to be everywhere in Ivy's life. Professors speak of her admonishing classmates when their intolerance showed, her parents speak of her encounters with the handicapped children her mother worked

with and her defense of them when harsh comments would fly.

Ask her mother about Ivy and the response is the same. "[Ivy is] a very strong-willed, determined woman with a strong sense of right and wrong. Very straight-edged, and [she] has never been involved in drugs or alcohol. She's always been a good student, a very compassionate, faithful individual. She has constantly stuck up for the underdog...

"The fact that she seems to be the good kind of person makes this story so much more tragic.

Ivy was born in Poway on May 11, 1984. The family moved to Temecula when Ivy was about a year old in 1986. Hers is a true local family — her father, Michael, was raised in Escondido, while her mother was raised in Poway. Her family still lives in Temecula; her mother, until recently, was employed by the Temecula Unified School District. Her father commutes daily to a semiconductor company in Arcadia. Her mother is a petite woman, youthful-looking with an easy smile. You can see the unrest, the exhaustion, in her eyes, though, and you can also see in those same eyes that she'd do it all again for her daughter.

Ivy's uncle, Richard, says that even as a child, Ivy was definitely "her own person" and still, even after a year in the CCU, "brighter and more together than most who have not been through what she has been through."

The family had seen the stresses many others face before Ivy's father found his new

job only two months prior to Ivy's accident. Some home remodeling, started before he was laid off from his job in the semiconductor field, stayed unfinished while he looked for work. Employed, he hoped to be able to finish some projects around the house. Ivy's accident has changed that agenda, and its importance, profoundly.

Ivy's accident has even brought family members closer together — her uncle Richard plays guitar at her bedside and has even brought a singer to accompany him. With the relative distance between his home in Ramona and Ivy's family in Temecula, his visits before the wreck were not as often as either side would have liked. In a way, the wreck has brought family members even closer together.

Ivy has a second family — an online family of friends at a message board for fans of the band AFI — they're known as the Despair Faction. Ivy is more than a fan of the AFI; she's one of their biggest supporters. And her online friends support her. Ivy has several she had never met in person come to visit her in the hospital. One came from as far as Scotland, making a point to make a side trip while on business on the West Coast. The posts about her elicit comments of love and support from all over the world, and they protect Ivy as a family would. The band has done its part as well — she's spoken to the lead singer, gotten a shirt that he wore in a concert and some of the band's CDs, and the band has even tried to come visit her, although the plans went awry at the last moment.

A friend of hers on the Despair Faction boards remarked: "Ivy and I stayed up on probably more than one occasion posting back and forth on the old board until 1 or 2 a.m. Those nights helped me realize that she really is an incredible person with an incredible heart and that she's stronger than almost anyone else I've ever met, which is why there isn't a single doubt in my mind that she can overcome the situation she's in now."

Her friends made her a DF doll, complete with a black t-shirt, the chrome rim sunglasses and a pierced ear. She holds it occasionally as tenderly as we would hold a child. Ivy misses her DF family greatly, but when she says she will be back online soon, you know she will.

Her professors at California State University, San Marcos, speak highly of Ivy. They tell of a young woman hard to miss. Prof. Karen Schafman, Prof. of Dance in Visual Performing Arts at CSUSM, taught Ivy in the spring of 2003 and the following fall as well. She speaks of Ivy as an exemplary student, someone very sensitive to diversity and tolerance and very passionate about life and the arts. When Schafman visited Ivy at the hospital she held her student's hand and says she could feel that "strong energy" that Ivy exudes and was even reminded by Ivy to "drive safely" on the way home. One cannot visit Ivy without seeing what Schafman saw — "seeing her will, her courage and her sense of humor." She loves music and loves to sing, and the arts mean a great deal to Ivy.

And she's not changed in that way — she is still that very determined young woman. Ivy plays a large role in her medical care — a sign above her bed directs the medical staff to the statement that "Ivy knows Ivy better" than anyone else.

She seems a bit embarrassed about talking through a device that allows her to speak aloud instead of having her mother read her lips. She claims it is "not her voice." Ask her parents about the voice they hear, and they're elated to hear it.

Ivy's hospital room is fairly unique for a CCU room. Her love of Halloween shows on the walls, only to have space taken away for the AFI posters and faxes and letters from those encouraging her, supporting her. These come from all over the world; from DF members she's never met, even one at the UN; from people who have heard of her story and from her family. She misses her cat but knows that the hospital room would drive her cat crazy even if it could be smuggled in. Gifts and objects of affection from supporters are everywhere. The staff shows a true affection for her, and she for them.