

Community support for girl stirs Gates family

By Rob Cullivan
Staff writer

GATES — It was only Lauren Volpe's second day on the job, and she already felt outclassed by the non-professional working with her.

"Betsy's a better nurse than I am!" exclaimed Volpe, a licensed practical nurse who was awed by the tender and knowing care extended to her patient by Betsy McCabe, the patient's grandmother.

McCabe shrugged off such compliments, continuing to talk about her comatose granddaughter, 10-year-old Angelique Ramos, better known as "Angel" to friends and family alike.

"I feel we have to be very careful when we talk around her because she can hear what we're saying," McCabe said about her granddaughter as visitors streamed in and out of McCabe's Ford Street home Sunday afternoon, April 12.

"There's days — some days — when you think she's just ready ..."

McCabe's unfinished sentence embodied a hope shared by Gregory Veltz, Angel's former classmate at St. Theodore's School, 170 Spencerport Road, Gates.

"Your coma Easter egg is cracking," Veltz wrote on a card he sent Angel this year. The card — along with scores of others sent by classmates and friends — is taped to a window in Angel's room.

Angel suffered severe brain trauma when her grandmother's car was struck Aug. 9, 1990, by a car whose driver failed to stop at a stop sign. The little girl was sitting in the back seat, strapped in by a seat belt, when the other car crashed into the McCabe car's rear passenger side.

Since that day, Angel has been tended by her grandmother, who is her legal guardian, her grandfather, Jim McCabe, and her uncle, James McCabe, the grandparents' son.

"At the time of the accident, she never moved a finger," Betsy McCabe said. "She (only) moved her eyes."

In December, 1991, Jim and Betsy McCabe moved Angel into their Ford Street home after living in Schenectady for 15 months while Angel received care in a physical-rehabilitation facility. While there, Betsy McCabe became adept at operating and monitoring various types of medical equipment, including the ventilator that helps Angel breathe and the electric wheelchair in which she often sits.

Moving Angel to their home entailed renovating the McCabe's garage



Joanna Alberti (left) and Angel Ramos share a special moment during one of Joanna's regular visits. Erik Kunkel/Photo Intern



Angel has received more than 1,000 cards from well-wishers, including her former schoolmates at St. Theodore's School, Gates.

into a bedroom and customized bathroom. Painted in royal purple — Angel's favorite color — the room has become the center of the McCabes' life.

Both grandparents spend most of their time looking after Angel, and are aided by their son, James II, who works at Delco Products Division of General Motors in Rochester. His father and mother are Delco retirees.

The family credited Delco and parishioners at St. Theodore's for contributing several thousand dollars for the garage renovation.

The McCabes also expressed gratitude to several area clergy and religious for stopping in and attending to

their needs. Indeed, to list the number of people the family named as their benefactors would probably take a slim book.

"It's so overwhelming the way the people have supported us," Betsy McCabe remarked. At the time of the accident, she noted, many people warned her that community support would be plentiful at first, but would wither as time went on. That prediction has proven false, she emphasized.

One priest who has become a friend of the family and a regular visitor to Angel is Father John Carriero, a guidance counselor at McQuaid Jesuit High School. Father Carriero learned

of Angel's plight when traveling in 1990 with friends of the McCabes to Medjugorje, site of reported Marian apparitions.

"He's been a big source of comfort to us," Betsy McCabe said.

The priest returned the compliment. "These three people are saints," he said of the McCabes. "They really have sacrificed their whole lives."

Although Angel is still considered to be in a coma, she now kicks her legs periodically, smiles on occasion, and responds when her grandmother pours cold water over her arms to stimulate her. A teacher visits once a week and uses a computer to work on improving Angel's sensory responses, the McCabes said, noting that they share shifts with a handful of therapists and nurses who come to the house each day.

Like husband, Jim, and son, James, Betsy McCabe continues to hope Angel will someday be able to dance again in front of her mirror as she did each day before the accident.

"There's days when we get really discouraged," Betsy McCabe admitted. "And yet, there's people in your corner."

EDITORS' NOTE: Donations to help the McCabes cover medical expenses may be sent to the family at 97 Ford St., Gates, N.Y. 14606.

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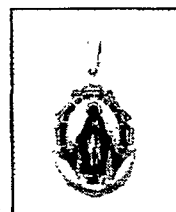
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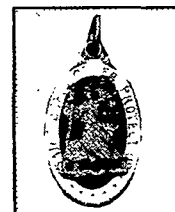
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