

**Hannah's Celebration of Life
Eulogy on Behalf of the Family:
Janet Smith/Auntie GiGi
April 7, 2012**

Allyson and Greg love that Hannah's name is spelled the same going forward as backward. They like that in the middle of Hannah's name is the name *anna* - the name or its variation of many of their most cherished family and friends. They like that Hannah mean *Grace* and *Blessed*.

In the first week of Hannah's life, Allyson and Greg wrote in an entry on Swedish Hospital's Caring Bridge, "The name we chose – Hannah Vail – has great meaning to us. We loved this name before all of our big first week – and it seems even more fitting now. With so many of us in our family with Anne/Ann/Anna/Ana, we loved all that the name represents. And, as a palindrome, we're hoping for a life of balance in this little one (she sure is teaching us this lesson now!)"

Before sunrise on November 4th, 2010, Allyson and Greg were at Swedish Hospital. Allyson was in labor. Their room looked east toward the Cascades. The Pacific NW was moving into winter and Hannah was moving into this world as Allyson and Greg watched their daughter's birthday begin with a sunrise that stunned them with its beauty. Much like today, a glorious yellow sun was coming up in a brilliant blue sky.

As the sun came up, it was accompanied by the same dramatic wide splash of deep pink, magenta, and brilliant gold that accompanied the sun as it set on her life on March 21st.

Hannah Vail was born at 12:42 pm. Like most babies, she cried when she was first born. After the attending doctor put Hannah on Allyson's chest, she stopped crying and looked deeply into her mother's eyes. This was their first meeting and it was at once the deep connection that Allyson had dreamed of. She felt like this moment with her little daughter lasted for hours. Afterwards, she said to Greg, "She is just perfect. So present. So beautiful." Hannah's mom and dad felt blessed.

And, for the same reasons, they continued to feel blessed – as we all did - with the grace of Hannah's deep being throughout her very short and very amazing life.

Within a few hours of Hannah's birth, one of the attending nurses picked up the baby for her first nursing. She laid Hannah on Allyson's bed and briefly turned away. Within minutes, maybe seconds, the nurse moved swiftly toward the bed, picked up Hannah and ran out of the room.

The next thing Allyson and Greg knew hospital sirens were announcing a Code Blue. Hannah had stopped breathing and the first of what would be countless emergency visits and teams from Swedish to Seattle Medic One to Children's Orthopedic Hospital gathered to save her life.

Within a day, Angela - Allyson's older sister - arrived from California. Allyson told Angela she didn't think she could cope with what was going on with Hannah. She was full of fear, panic and confusion. Angela, who had been through her own challenges with her daughter, Katie Jane, said to Allyson something that she

would never forget. Her sister's words were both profound and prophetic.

"Allyson, this experience is going to teach you patience."

At the time, Allyson thought what many of us think when confronted with a message we don't want to hear: "I don't think I want to learn patience."

She, Greg and all the rest of us would soon learn the wisdom of the Buddhist proverb, "When the student is ready, the teacher will appear." And, as students of baby Hannah, Allyson and Greg - in particular - would soon discover that it wasn't just the lesson of patience that Hannah was here to teach, it was also the lesson of surrender: how to let go of most of what they held dear - their way of life between Seattle and Bainbridge Island, Allyson's job at Islandwood, their Bainbridge Island home, financial security. Their dreams, hopes and imaginings for their young daughter and what their family would look like.

They and all of us would learn how to just be with Hannah. To have our hearts broken over and over again each time she was rushed to the hospital and her life was threatened in order to love more often, more broadly and more deeply.

And, from this, Hannah would create the incredible community of family, friends, and healthcare professionals and beyond who are gathered here today. A community of "Hannah's People".

On Allyson's blog called Riding the Wave she writes of what Hannah's life has taught her and all of us....

*While riding the wave of life
You must also practice
Stillness
So you can flow with
Rather than resist
The wave's motion.
Riding the wave will always take you
Where you need to go.*

On Allyson and Greg's Caring Bridge journal there is an entry made one day after Hannah was born. In keeping with the grace and balance of Hannah's name and what she brought into her life, this journal entry could have been written moments ago:

"We'll never know why Hannah had the seizures and breathing issues.... so many reasons why this might have occurred.

What we do know is that her first week taught us some of life's greatest lessons. Patience... the power of love and hope...the importance of Community coming together to care for each other. We know that we have a lot of people in our lives that care about us – this experience has helped us remember how important all of you are to us. From the bottom of our hearts – thank you."