

Shooting survivor works to overcome injuries, pain

RUTH LIAO Statesman Journal

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The bullet that tore through Alicia Hoppe in late March did more than rip through her internal organs.

It damaged her life, as well.

Hoppe has become an expert at undergoing MRIs and CT scans and filling out prescription forms. She refers to her purse as a pharmacy.

Hoppe is back to work part time, but complications from the shooting have sent her in and out of the emergency room and made for frequent doctor visits.

“It’s really turned my life upside down, that’s for sure,” she said.

More than five months have passed since the night of the shooting, but Hoppe still vividly can recall the details: She was walking to her car in the 500 block of Gerth Street NW when a man confronted her and demanded her purse.

Startled, Hoppe turned around to face him and when she refused to comply after he asked her again, he shot her.

The bullet narrowly missed vital organs. Doctors have repeatedly told Hoppe that she is lucky to be alive.

After the shooting, Hoppe spent several weeks in the hospital, and then recuperated for another four weeks in Bend, where her mother’s family lives.

Hoppe thought she could then return to work without any problems, but the pain began.

“It’s right where the bullet is,” Hoppe said. “I can’t feel the bullet, but that’s where the pain is radiating from.”

Hoppe regularly visits a urologist and a neurologist and attends physical therapy to strengthen her muscles. Heavy lifting is out. Sitting can make her uncomfortable.

She’s been hospitalized several times with complications. The gunshot wound continues to cause problems -- her urethra was torn apart, and she keeps a tube connected to her bladder in her back, under bandages.

Doctors told her they hope her urethra will heal -- after surgeons removed the bullet, fluids from her kidney drained directly around her internal organs before doctors spotted that problem.



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West Salem resident Alicia Hoppe does physical therapy in June with Ariel Salzman of PT Northwest. Hoppe was shot by an armed robber outside her West Salem home in late March and is in chronic pain from a bullet that remains lodged in her spine.

Suspect

Police describe the man as white, in his late teens to early 20s, 5 feet 7 inches to 5 feet 11 inches tall, with a thin to medium build.

On the night of the shooting, he was seen wearing a dark hooded jacket with the hood up and a cloth covering the lower part of his face.

A \$1,000 reward is being offered for information leading to an arrest and conviction.

Anyone with information can call Detective Jamie Vasas at (503) 588-6050, Ext. 7153.

She has since moved out of her West Salem home into an apartment. She said even asking for help from friends and family to help her move was challenging: Hoppe always saw herself as independent and headstrong.

Hoppe estimates she'll have to pay at least \$5,000 out-of-pocket. She's covered by health insurance, but already has paid more than \$1,000 in expenses.

And she knows with each doctor's appointment, referrals to specialists, constant pain medication and antibiotics will continue to add more costs.

More frustrating to Hoppe is the fact that the crime was committed by a stranger.

"It was completely random. I don't have a clue of who this person was," Hoppe said. "I just happened to be walking out my door."

The suspect remains at large. Salem Police Department recently offered a \$1,000 reward for anyone with information leading to an arrest and conviction.

"He's part of my daily life. I try not to focus on him and try to focus on trying to get myself better and moving on," Hoppe said. "My biggest fear is that he does this or something worse to someone else."

Hoppe said she hopes someone can step forward with information, because she could have been dead-- and police would be searching for a murder suspect.

Before the shooting, Hoppe had just started a job she loved.

She lost about 130 pounds during the previous year and began dating again. She felt good about her relationship with her children and felt all her numbers were lucky.

Hoppe tries to look on the bright side: since the incident, she's quit smoking and gotten to know which friends can rely on.

More importantly, she's felt closer to her family -- especially after recuperating at home.

Her two sons, who are 7 and 9 years old, live with their father in Salem. They were not with her the night of the shooting -- another point she's thankful for.

"This is definitely an event that threw a big wrench in everything that was going in my life," Hoppe said. "But I've just got to move on and get past this. Sitting around and feeling sorry for myself won't do me any good.

"I just have to be positive and know that a positive outlook promotes healing."

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