

Benefit to relieve strain on family battling RSD

By KAREN LANGE

Imagine having a disease so debilitating that the touch of a cotton ball feels like a razor blade peeling back your skin. So it is in the daily life of a 27-year-old Georgetown resident, Jennifer Bamsch Gray, who suffers from Reflex Sympathetic Dystrophy, or RSD.

Little is known or understood about RSD, a chronic neurological syndrome, except the torture it inflicts upon its victims — almost unbearable burning pain, insomnia, rashes, excessive sweating . . . and the list goes on.

Ms. Gray contracted RSD on February 1, 1994, after injuring her knee during a basketball game in her freshman year at Jarrell High School. At first, the pain was attributed to a typical sports injury, but after 18 months there was no sign of letting up.

It took four long, grueling years of constant doctors' appointments and physical therapy before Ms. Gray was finally diagnosed with RSD. During this time she struggled through her freshman and sophomore years of high school before eventually being home-schooled by her mother Charlotte Bamsch, who now lives next door to her daughter and her son-in-law Daniel.

Ms. Bamsch vividly recalls her daughter's diagnosis in January of 1998. It was an unforgettable time that confirmed her family's suspicions, she said, that her daughter's pain was not "all in her head," as countless doctors had suggested.

"In the world of RSD, he's called The Dragon, The Monster, The Fires of Hell. Surely, with a name for him, we would be able to get appropriate treatment for Jen and slay the monster in all our lives," Ms. Bamsch wrote in a piece titled "Jen's Story."

Unfortunately, that would prove not to be the case at all.

The pain continued to spread from limb to limb, claiming Ms. Gray's rib cage, spine, shoulders, hips and face before consuming her entire body.

Twelve years and seven surgeries later, Ms. Gray continues to live in constant, agonizing pain 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. She suffers from hypertension, ice-cold limbs, rashes, skin discoloration,



Jennifer Bamsch Gray with husband, Daniel, and parents Charlotte and Darrell.

migraines, stomach problems and insomnia, which often keeps her awake for days at a time before her body finally succumbs to exhaustion.

life day-by-day. For many, this existence would have taken its toll long ago, but her family remains steadfast in their resolve to meet her needs.

Ms. Bamsch began an on-line support group — rsdparents@yahoo.com — in July 1999 as a way to cope with her daughter's disease. The group has about 150 members from all over the world ranging in age from 5 to upper-30s.

Although some comfort can be found in the support group, Ms. Bamsch admits that "the physical, emotional and financial strain on the person with RSD — the whole family — is overwhelming."

Currently, there is no cure for RSD.

Knowing the difficulty faced by Ms. Gray and her family, relatives and fellow Georgetown residents David and Linda Salyer have taken matters into their own hands to coordinate a fund-raising benefit.

Scheduled for Saturday, October 8, from 6 to 11 p.m. at the Jarrell Community Center, the benefit will include a barbecue dinner, an auction from 6 to 8 p.m. and music. Proceeds will help defray Ms. Gray's medical expenses, which average approximately \$5,000 per month. Contact Cindy Bamsch 863-2925 or Sherin Leschber 863-3727 for more information or to make a donation.

For more information about Reflex Sympathetic Dystrophy, go to www.rsd.org.

BENEFIT

Saturday, October 8

6 p.m. - Barbecue dinner, auction and music

Jarrell Community Center

Her thyroid, vision and immune system have been affected. Her gallbladder has been removed. In addition she has had epidurals, inpatient IV morphine drips, outpatient treatments, hyperbaric oxygen chamber treatments, spinal column stimulator trial and approximately 50 nerve blocks to date. An intrathecal morphine pump trial ended abruptly due to Jennifer suffering a grand mal seizure. There was a time when Ms. Gray looked forward to the nerve blocks because the anesthesia allowed her to temporarily escape from the pain, however, the effects of these are diminishing.

And, if the pain wasn't enough, Ms. Gray lives in isolation, "forgotten by family and friends," Ms. Bamsch said. Long gone is her circle of friends, church companions and daily acquaintances. She lives