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ger nails," Susan Garr said. "Melissa remembered a special symbol the two of them shared in the halls of school. Danielle brought in pictures of homcoming this year, and Melissa recalled all of her friends' names who were in the pictures. So we're pretty confident. Her memory seems to be pretty clear, right up until the accident."

Also clear is how Melissa's age and a remarkably positive attitude are playing prominent roles in the miraculous progress she's making.

"She's driven," Mike Garr said. "She's a 16-year-old who wants to rejoin her classmates at school and get on with her life. I think she'll push real hard."

Everything isn't perfect, of course, and the road to recovery remains long. There are times when Melissa thinks she is in her bedroom at home, rather than a hospital room, a kind of confusion that Mike Garr said is normal for patients recovering from severe head trauma. The pain in her lower legs continues to be a setback toward her goal of walking again.

### Answered prayers

"It's a guess whether she'll ever come back and go to school, or drive," he said. "I hope she can."

But it is becoming evident that anything is possible, especially when seemingly everybody in Farmington and Farmington Hills was, and is, praying for her.

"A lot of people have been affected by this recovery," Mike Garr said. "So maybe, the master plan was to put her on the brink and allow people's faith and belief to bring her back."

And Melissa's mom and dad had plenty of company in helping accomplish just that. According to Susan Garr, there isn't enough time to thank everybody who said or did something to help Melissa. She tries, though, starting by praising the two lifeguards who at least gave her daughter a chance.

"They're like angels," she said. "I have been thinking about them a lot, especially recently. We're so grateful that they were willing and so able to provide help to her when she needed it."

Also on her "thanks" list: the employees of the City of Farmington Hills, where Mike Garr is employed; congregation members at area churches who put the teen on their prayer lists; and the Farmington Community Chorus. Even people from as far away as England, Bolivia and Africa have been praying for Melissa.

"They have been an extended family to me and Melissa during a really difficult time," Susan said, choking back tears. "They have sustained me. They are wonderful people."

### Special care, caregivers

Susan talked about there being "more involved here than medicine" in Melissa's comeback. But, spending a few hours in the rehabilitation wing pro-



**Comeback trail:** St. Joseph Mercy Hospital staff members Samantha Larkin, left, and Debra Heffner have Melissa grab a cane in order to stretch and strengthen her arms. The exercise is one of several in the beginning stages of her rehabilitation.

vided insight that medicine also had a lot to do with it.

Nurse Judith Holbrook, pushing Melissa in her wheelchair from Room 1130 to a physical therapy session down the hall, told the girl to keep smiling, and to "remember that money" that her mom stuffed into the dollar jar.

In the session, physical therapists Debra Hoffner and Samantha Larkin tried to keep Melissa's spirits up while running her through an assortment of exercises intended to strengthen her arms, improve hand-eye coordination and enable her to tolerate again being in an upright position.

For about 11 minutes, Melissa, strapped to a tilt board, played catch, tapped a balloon back and forth and matched picture cards on a large board.

"We're working on scanning with her vision and working with her hands at the same time," Larkin said. "And getting her used to having weight on her legs again."

Melissa tolerated standing at a 70-degree angle on the tilt

board, which impressed the therapists.

"That's the highest you've stood on the tilt table Melissa," Larkin said. "Very good!"

With oxygen tank in tow, Melissa then was moved down to an office, for a private session with speech therapist Judy Mikola. Melissa was given information about a certain scenario (ticket booth, popcorn, seat) and asked to identify it (movie theater).

Mikola also showed flash cards and tried to get Melissa to verbally fill in the blanks, which she did. ". . . Touch your, what's this word? C-H-I-N."

### Taco, please

While his daughter was in Mikola's office, Mike Garr shook his head in awe at the commitment of the medical staff at St. Joseph's, as well as at University of Michigan Medical Centers in Ann Arbor, where Melissa spent the first weeks of treatment following the accident.

"I'm very pleased with the care and concern of the staff," he said. "It takes a special person to do that and attend to somebody's needs. It's a thankless job 350 days out of the year."

After returning to her room from therapy, another nurse chatted with Melissa while getting her into a more comfortable position.

"Call me morning, noon or night and I'll get you that taco," she said. Melissa's wish for a first meal (the doctors hope to remove the feeding tube in the next couple weeks) is Taco Bell fare, washed down with a slurpee drink.

No one yet knows when, or if, those cravings for Mexican fast food will be satisfied. But even if they never are, Mike Garr said Melissa's miracle has taught others just how fragile life is, and to live each day to the fullest.

"Use your time wisely," he said. "That's the message I learned."



**A mother hopes:** Melissa's mother, Susan Garr, cherishes any hand gesture or recollection her daughter provides. Those moments provide hope for her daughter's long-term recovery. "It just warms my heart," Susan said.



**A father's faith:** Many people have been affected by Melissa's miraculous improvement, which her father Mike Garr attributes to prayers made on her behalf from family members to people as far away as Bolivia. "So maybe, the master plan was to put her on the brink and allow people's faith and belief to bring her back," Mike said.

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**Encouraging words:** Susan Garr listens as Melissa tries to speak by pressing her finger against a tracheotomy opening in her throat.