

COURTESY OF SHANNON HEFFELFINGER
GAMMA PHI BETA Sorority sisters (from left) Melanie Rogge, Laura Cockson and Shannon Heffelfinger smile for a photo taken in October 1997. Cockson, a UNL junior, died Saturday after the car in which she was a passenger was struck by a vehicle operated by a man now charged with drunken driving.

I will remember you

Death may take the friend, but not the friendship

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I hold a picture in my head of my good friend Laura, one of the most beautiful women I've ever known. She's sitting on the floor of our bedroom, her legs crossed. A curling iron sits in her hand as she brushes her light brown hair. It's shiny, and when the light catches it just right, it almost looks blonde. Her blue eyes sparkle.

They are the bluest eyes I've ever seen.

She knows her parents and two sisters Sarah and Erin will arrive any minute, and she's trying to hurry. But she knows her efforts are fruitless.

"If I have an hour to get ready, I'll take the full hour," Laura said Saturday morning. "And if I have 20 minutes to get ready, I'll still take an hour."

She said that every morning. Laura was never on time. It was our biggest conflict, if you call it that. Laura was carefree and laid back. She got there when she got there. I'm always anxious and usually five minutes early.

I laughed on Saturday when she jumped up and rushed into the bathroom. I didn't know it was the last time I'd laugh with her.

I didn't know the only thing Laura Cockson would ever be early for was her death.

A drunken driver slammed into Sarah's car late Saturday night. He killed Laura and sent her two sisters to the hospital in critical condition. Laura's mom said it wasn't fair. She wondered how it could happen to someone as "perfect" as Laura. I sat and watched the scene at the hospital early Sunday morning, and I wondered the same thing.

I hope all the people who knew Laura realize what a privilege they had. Laura loved life. She had big ideas, and she saw almost all of them through. She was intelligent, graceful and classy.

She made me laugh. She planned to study occupational therapy but she

sometimes joked about becoming a travel agent. She spent hours booking flights and hotel rooms, searching for the best deal for our spring-break trip scheduled for next week.

We were going to California. Laura picked Los Angeles after much debate because she wanted to be an audience member on "The Price is Right." With our friends Brenda and Melanie we planned the best way to "be the next contestants on 'The Price is Right.'"

It's ironic that Laura could make me laugh like few others. I never cried more than once or twice in front of her. But from the time Brenda and I ran into the emergency room and learned the fate of our friend, I have cried with a hurt I never before felt.

Monday night, I left Gamma Phi Beta Sorority with four of my closest friends — four of Laura's closest friends — and we just drove. We drove all around Lincoln for an hour. We talked, and we remembered Laura. We laughed about funny things that Laura did. We went to a restaurant and ordered fattening food, because as Becky said, "Laura would have wanted it that way."

It felt good to

laugh. But in the middle of the laughter, I suddenly realized one thing. I never said goodbye to Laura.

One week before she died, I sat in my room with Laura and Brenda. It was a Saturday night. We had planned to go out, but a snowstorm kept us inside. We sat and talked. At the time, I was a little bored. But I'm so thankful that, for some reason, we stayed home.

Ironically, we talked about death. We wondered what happens when you die. Can you see everyone? Do you know what they're feeling? Are you angry for their suffering?

Laura said that when she died, she wanted to come back and tell everyone what it was like. She never planned to lose her life to an out-of-control driver one week later. But then again, maybe that conversation wasn't such a coincidence.

Melanie said maybe this had been planned for a long time. And thinking back, it almost seems like it was. It seems like someone was preparing Laura and the ones she loved. In the last few weeks, she spent extra time with some of her close high school friends. She was closer to Jim, her

boyfriend of eight months, than ever before.

She suggested to her mom that their entire family come to Gamma Phi's Mom's Weekend, including her dad and youngest sister, Erin, a high school sophomore.

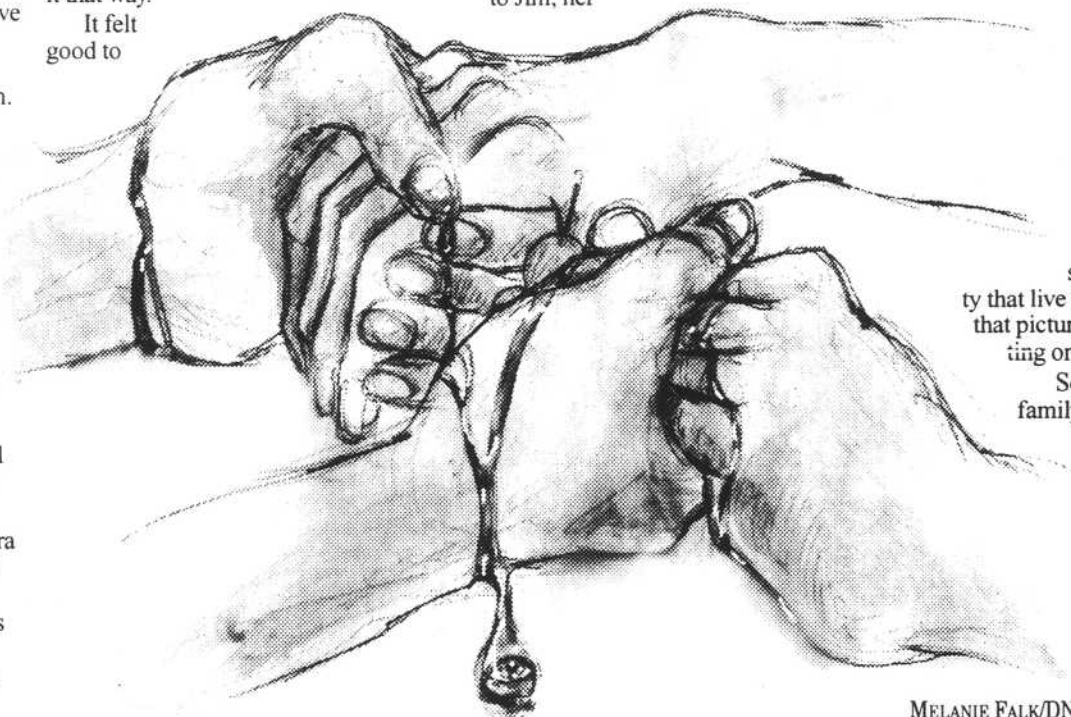
Is that what it means to say goodbye to your family, your boyfriend, your friends?

If I could have five minutes with Laura, I know exactly what I would say. I would tell her how beautiful I think she is and how I'm sorry that I never noticed her eyes sparkle. I would tell her how I can still hear her laughing and see her pretty smile. I would tell her how I miss coming home after class, opening the door, and seeing her mess all over the floor. I would tell her how I loved talking to her about our "old-guy" boyfriends.

I would tell her how I can't hardly stand to walk into my room now. How it seems so empty even though all of her things are still there. How I can't sit on her bed and put my makeup on in the morning like I used to. How Janet, our roommate, and I haven't slept in our beds since Friday night.

And I would tell her the lesson I learned in the past three days. I would tell her nothing is more valuable than a friend, and nothing is as priceless as a friend like Laura. It can't erase the memories of her radiant smile and vibrant personality that live in my heart. It can't erase that picture in my mind of Laura sitting on the floor in our room.

So Laura, as hundreds of your family members and friends attend your funeral today, I want to take this chance to say goodbye, however impersonal it may seem. And I want you to know that even though I'm saying goodbye, I will never forget you, because even death can't end a life like yours.



MELANIE FALK/DN