



AMBER

Her daughter's ordeal still has special meaning

By CINDY SIMONEAU
Sunday Post staff writer

SHELTON — Like most proud mothers, Patti Calistro Stiewing of River Road wanted her daughter to be famous. Little did Mrs. Stiewing know when she made that secret wish more than four years ago that her daughter Amber's claim to fame would come through death.

"I was trying to get her established as a child model. She was so pretty with those big beautiful blue eyes and brunette hair that I knew she could easily make it as a model," said Mrs. Stiewing. The 29-year-old mother now recalls that she had barely launched her daughter's promising career when it was interrupted, and eventually shelved, due to the discovery that Amber was suffering from cancer.

AT FIRST IT seemed unfair to Mrs. Stiewing that her daughter, at the innocent age of 3 1/2, had contracted what was later diagnosed as rhabdomyosarcoma, a cancer affecting muscles. Now, more than two years after Amber's death at age 4 1/2, Mrs. Stiewing feels that her daughter's ordeal had special meaning.

"Before she died, even Amber knew she was going to help a lot of people by her suffering," she said.

Mrs. Stiewing is now attempting to fulfill that wish by publishing a book about their experience of dealing with cancer, and more importantly, with the "politics" of doctors who treat cancer victims. She is hoping to develop an audio-visual program to help families and children deal with cancer.

From the first day that a tumor was discovered on the back of Amber's head, to the last moments of the young girl's life and the months after her death, Mrs. Stiewing has carefully recorded and documented everything the two encountered.

"I'VE USED MY journal, tape recordings, photographs, medical reports and correspondence along with numerous volumes of information to put the book together," said Mrs. Stiewing, who finished the first draft recently.

Dedicated to Amber, "her life, her death, and the footprints she left behind," Mrs. Stiewing has taken a stark approach, including numerous upclose photos of Amber's tumor and the girl while she was dying. The book is tentatively entitled "The Story of Amber," and Mrs. Stiewing is meeting with friends to edit the draft, and is seeking a publisher

(See ORDEAL, C2.)