

A mother lives on after the loss of two daughters

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Claire Barnett has spent the past few days at her Queen Anne home, a place of comfort that can, at times, be a place of torture.

The house is filled with the creations of her two daughters, 8-year-old Coriander and 6-year-old Blake. There are drawings and poems, paintings and photos everywhere. "Like wallpaper," one friend said.

And in the center of it sits Barnett, 38, a Seattle physician whose girls died on Flight 261 Monday.

"Their relationship was truly incredible," said Barnett's sister, Emily Barnett. "It was just like magic, really, with the three of them."

The girls were on their way home from a vacation with their father, Dr. David Clemetson, 40; his second wife, Carolyn, 31; her son, Miles, 6; and the Clemetsons' 6-month-old son, Spencer.

"The Clemetson family is not all dead," said friend Mark Malamud, 39, one of many friends who spoke yesterday for the stricken mother. "Claire is still here. She is the part that is still alive."

Barnett was on her way home from a trip to the Bahamas when her mother and sister, accompanied by Malamud, tracked down her connecting flight in San Francisco and flew there to tell her of the deaths. They didn't want her to bear the brunt alone. "She found out at the airport," said friend Susan Hotola, 37, who is married to Malamud. "I can't imagine . . ."

It seems hard to imagine the pain of being home with all the girls' things: their artwork and photographs, their toothbrushes and clothes.

"This is where Claire wanted to be," said Malamud, a friend from Brown University, where Barnett attended medical school.

"Claire is refusing to run away from that love of her children," Malamud said. "She is not going to lose the good because of the challenges and the pain and the difficulty."

Family and friends are "orbiting around her," Malamud said.

"She has felt like she has lost everything, just everything, so I think our goal is just to keep Claire alive," he said. "We are drowning. The wave has come over and no one has surfaced. And Claire is nowhere near the surface."

The girls were described as "glowing, glowing children." Coriander was the more outgoing and energetic of the two, a talkative sprite willing to try anything; Blake opened up slowly and seemed enigmatic.

Barnett met David Clemetson in medical school, and they married after graduation. They had the two girls and divorced three years ago.

Barnett managed her work schedule around the girls - a feat for a family-practice physician - and worked hard to smooth their transition through her divorce from their father and his new marriage.

Together, Barnett and her girls loved to ski, swim, explore museums, go to the zoo and follow the adventures of Harry Potter.

"They were the most wonderful threesome," said Pam Hardman, 42, a friend from Brown who teaches English at Western Washington University in Bellingham.

"She had organized her whole life around the kids and being with them, and now there is nothing," Hardman said.

"There is nothing to compare it to. It is just over. The deepest tragedy I can imagine."

But Barnett is resilient, she said.

"Her love for other people, that will get her through it," Hardman said. "She has been giving support to us all these years, and now she is getting it back."

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