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Armstrong remembers his angel

By Andrew Astleford

Posted: May 20, 2010

Lance Armstrong will honor his angel today.

His tribute will be a small black-and-yellow sticker affixed to his bicycle -- "I ride for LaTrice Haney" -- honoring local nurse LaTrice Vaughn, who guided him through his darkest hours at [Indiana University Cancer Center](#) during his testicular cancer care. Armstrong's message will be seen throughout Stage 5 of the Tour of California, a 121.5-mile journey through the San Joaquin Valley to the Sierra Nevada foothills.

When they met 13 years ago, Armstrong was a rising star whose future was far from guaranteed.

"I have often referred to LaTrice as my angel when I was at IU getting treated," Armstrong said in an e-mail response from his team. "The nurses are the ones on the front line dealing with everything day-to-day. LaTrice got me through some tough days and was always so encouraging when she knew I was having a rough time. Looking back, I cannot imagine going through those treatments without her."

Vaughn -- known as LaTrice Haney at the time -- met Armstrong in October

1996. He had arrived in Indianapolis for a second opinion. He visited Indiana University Hospital doctors to learn about treatment options.

Soon, Armstrong began receiving chemotherapy at the hospital each day for five days. He repeated the process every three weeks.

At first, to Vaughn, he appeared reserved. One day, she asked Armstrong about cycling. She wanted to make a connection.

She made a friend.

"Tell me about your bike," Vaughn remembers saying. "How did you get to start racing?"

Armstrong beamed.

"I think that's what sparked the bond," Vaughn said. "He was so intense about what he did, and I could tell that he loved the sport. I think it got him away

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from thinking about his cancer. We started talking back and forth about his bike and the things he did, how he got into it, his family life. He learned my family life and things that were going on. It became a nice **relationship**."

Vaughn's interest in nursing began at age 17. She was admitted into Methodist Hospital in Gary because of a mysterious fever of 103 degrees.

Her nurse, J.P., worked evening shifts. Vaughn remembers J.P. as a gentle, confident woman. She clasped Vaughn's thin fingers and comforted the frightened girl when ice packs were placed atop her aching **body**.

"That just changed my life," Vaughn said. "I thought, 'I want to do that. I want to help people.' "

Armstrong's relationship with Vaughn has matured since his early, timid hours at Indiana University Hospital. In 2003, he invited Vaughn to Europe to watch him win his fifth consecutive **Tour de France**.

"She was really the one who saw him when he was at his lowest points, when he was really struggling mentally and physically and not sure what the future was going to hold," said Doug Ulman, p resident and CEO of the Lance Armstrong Foundation. "She was one of those lights in his life that provided a lot of information and hope and inspiration."

Vaughn, who now works in the breast

care and research center at IU Simon Cancer Center, said she was "shocked" she was one of eight people honored by Armstrong during the Tour. The list includes mostly cancer survivors.

"I've seen some miracles," Vaughn said. "I've seen it. You can't tell me they're not out there because I know that they are."

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