

HAVE AIDS  
ease hug me



File photo

that hangs in the office of Sister Joyce, director of the Farano Children, says much about the ones entrusted to the center.

s; or telling their abusive boy- here is not room for you here any

women have touched me with their dication to their families, keeping them for as long as possible. Given between putting food on the table ling money to take a bus to the doc- ill opt for the former. Their lives are ut they rarely complain.

gin my third year as the program's am glad that I live in Rochester. The y is fortunate. Rochester has many r people and families impacted by majority of us work together to pro- most appropriate services to meet idual's needs.

does "turf" become and issue. We able to develop cooperative efforts e one that began in September with nal and Child AIDS Intervention providing case-management ser- ayBreak Alcoholism Treatment Faci- positive clients.

nning to provide services when a n inpatient, we are able to build a ith the client. When a client is dis- rom DayBreak, he or she already e case manager. In addition, case- ent services have begun to be put in

te beginning, the program has also sed with many volunteers, and port from the community. Chur- al ministry committees, grants and ns, service organizations and indi- ave donated money for the pro- eration and the clients' needs.

such support and the program's am constantly asked, "Don't you get sed working with AIDS patients?" wner is "no," because we focus on l that it has to offer. I am sad, and, ssed, when we lose someone, but I to look at all that person has, gone nd am glad that that person is no fering.

ok at the fact that I have been a part eople's lives and hope that their e been a little bit better because of nce.

llinen is project director of the Rochester Maternal and Child AIDS Intervention

E Leo McMannus  
Guest contributor

Nancy S. was only 31-years-old when they buried her in September, 1991, at Incarnation Catholic Church in Sarasota, Fla.

She had survived her young daughter by little more than a year.

Nancy's older brother Peter — a Redemptorist priest — came down from his assignment in North Carolina to help provide care in her final, painful days.

He was there to celebrate her Mass of Christian Burial in the steamy heat of a Florida evening, and to utter that previously unutterable word: AIDS.

Nancy was the youngest in a family of two boys and two girls. After her family moved to affluent Longboat Key in Sarasota, Fla., she became — like some of her friends — almost addicted to surfing.

Surfing was popular nearby at Brandon Beach. But there was better surfing on the east coast of Florida — namely Sebastian Inlet — and Nancy and her friends often went there. Even better surfing could be found much farther up the Atlantic coast at Cape Hatteras, N.C., so they went there as well.

"As a child of the 60s," Father Peter said in his funeral sermon, "she was a free spirit in search of dreams that were never fulfilled. She loved the water and she loved surfing. This dream to be a surfer took her to Rincon, Puerto Rico; Huntington Beach, Calif.; and the north shore of Oahu in Hawaii. She had great courage going off on her own, but her dreams never became a reality, and reality was always a dream to her."

Nancy came to see Hawaii as a paradise. In the fond hope of living there, she enlisted in the United States Coast Guard. It was November when she enlisted, and the Coast Guard sent her for training to balmy Cape May, N.J. Later, she was sent to Boston in the winter.

Distraught that she was so distant from Hawaii, she managed to secure an honorable discharge. Her father, an army careerist who had retired in 1970, was unhappy with her decision.

Nancy moved back home to Sarasota, but Hawaii continued to beckon alluringly. Because of her dream, she would leave her family and go among strangers. As her mother, Alice, recalls, her eyes filling with tears, "I didn't think she had courage to go thousands of miles and not know a soul."

She did, however, choose to live inexpensively with fellow surfers in primitive quarters, wait on table for survival and live only for surfing.

On one of her trips back home to Florida, Nancy had the misfortune to meet a man who had AIDS. Unfortunately, she did not find out until it was too late.

"He was quite wealthy," she later told a television interviewer in Honolulu, Hawaii. "He was drug trafficker and a fisherman who wanted the fast life. He contracted AIDS through sexual contact, and, in turn, gave it to me."

As a result of that meeting, Nancy also found herself pregnant. Despite pleas from her family to remain with them in Florida, she returned alone to Hawaii. In January, 1988, she tested HIV-positive, the early stages of AIDS. Her pregnancy served only to accelerate the advance of the dreaded disease in her.

Uncertain about her own future — and about her baby, which she knew might be similarly infected — Nancy decided to give her baby up for adoption. A private adoption counselor in Hawaii recommended the little-known Starcross Community in Anna-

*'God has been trying to get my attention for a long time. He finally did.'*

Nancy S.



File photo

Eight-month-old Tony, suffering from AIDS, gets loving attention at the Farano Center for Children in Albany.

the birth, the child was taken home to Starcross.

While in the community's loving care, the baby — baptized Christina Elisabeth De Rossi — tested positive for HIV, a retrovirus that leads to AIDS. She did eventually develop AIDS. On April 9, 1991, just before her third birthday, Tina died peacefully in Sister De Rossi's arms.

Even during the few years of her life, Tina became something of a celebrity, making several appearances on the ABC program, *Prime Time Live*. At her death, she was the subject of an editorial in the *Santa Rosa Press Democrat*.

After the baby's birth, Nancy returned to her family on the mainland. She moved to be near her mother in Sarasota.

Her mother is one of those unusual people who somehow give the lie to the despair and discouragement that afflict most of us in similar circumstances. Bright, cheerful, with a radiant smile and strong Catholic faith, she had already faced two serious bouts with cancer — in 1979 and again in 1985 — and the pain of a broken marriage in 1981.

Because of her brief stint with the Coast Guard, Nancy, without a job and without insurance, almost providentially merited care in the Veterans Administration medical center an hour away in St. Petersburg.

Sick as she was, Nancy was able for some weekends to come to her mother's apartment. In June, 1990, anxious to see Tina again, she and her mother flew out to San Francisco, where Father Peter joined them. In a rented car, they drove up to Starcross for one last visit. The pain of the visit and the departure was excruciating.

After Tina's death, Nancy's condition seemed to deteriorate. In August, 1991, she came home to her mother's small apartment for the last month of her life.

She told her mother, "God has been trying to get my attention for a long time. He finally did."

Although she was in constant agony in her final passion, able to stand up for but a brief time and troubled by terrible running sores, she spoke, not about dying, but about shopping, going to a mall, and even seeing a movie.

And so her family took her to a movie, and they wheeled her in a wheel chair to a mall, where she bought gifts for everyone.

She had one other request — to go to the beach. They wheeled her there for a picnic and one last look at the surf.

In his funeral sermon, Father Peter made the point that AIDS is "not a disease that is affecting only one segment of society ... her death is a reminder that we need to do what we can ... to stop the spread of this disease and to reach out in love and compassion to those ... who are emotionally and physically affected by this AIDS."

He concluded "by saying for Nancy and for my father, for Barbara, and for Tom and myself, a word of thanks for Mom. She was the strong and courageous one, always there for Nancy these past three years. Thank you for the love and compassion you showed her. Thank you for showing us what unconditional love is all about."

The extent of that love is almost unlimited.

A former Rochester resident, E. Leo McMannus currently lives in Venice, Fla. He learned about Nancy when he was given a copy of Father Peter's homily. After reading the homily, he contacted the family. He has since become friends with Nancy's mother, who told him about Nancy's story.

## Mother and child touched others during short lives

polis, Calif.

Since 1986, this small community of lay Catholics has responded to the need for homes for children with AIDS.

The staff — which included Brother Tolbert (Toby) McCarroll, a former lawyer; Sister Marti Aggle, a former flight attendant; and Sister Julie De Rossi, a former graduate student — all met in the 1960s. They were at the time "all devout members of America's largest denomination: former Catholics," as Brother Toby described them.

They eventually returned to Catholicism and in the 1970s formed the Starcross Community, dedicating themselves to caring for abused and neglected children.

Thus it was that Sister De Rossi came to Hawaii and was present when the baby, a girl, was born in early May, 1988. Two days after

# Insight