

Christmas  
**FEATURE**

# Pair combats cancer with prayer, friendship

By Mike Latona  
Staff writer

When David Desmond and Brannon Smith first crossed paths, neither could possibly have envisioned the manner in which they'd eventually reunite.

What began as a casual friendship turned into a deep bond — one that cannot easily be explained to those who have never lived through the anguish of a life-threatening disease.

The circumstances were certainly much lighter at the time Desmond and Smith met in the late 1980s, when Desmond served as minister to Smith's youth group at Irondequoit's St. Margaret Mary Church.

"Brannon always asked him to open up the gym to play basketball," Smith's mother, Kathy, recalled.

Following his family's move to Pittsford, Smith was diagnosed with cancer in July of 1992. Smith — now 18 years old and a parishioner at Church of the Good Shepherd in Henrietta — has struggled since then with Ewing's Sarcoma, a malignant tumor that began in his left leg and spread to his lungs.

Smith's plight received considerable local attention in the fall of 1993 after an effort was launched by Father Lawrence J. Searles, SJ, McQuaid Jesuit High School's chaplain. The priest enlisted the spiritual help of supporters by distributing leaflets with a handwritten plea for prayers for Smith, as well as a novena on his behalf to Native American



Wendy Longlade/Photo Intern

David Desmond (left) and Brannon Smith, a senior at McQuaid Jesuit High School, at Smith's home in Pittsford. Both men currently are in remission from cancer, giving them much to be thankful for this Christmas.

martyr Blessed Kateri Tekakwitha.

It was also in late 1993 when Desmond made the grim discovery that he, too, had cancer.

Just a short time after becoming campus minister at the State University of New York College at Geneseo, Desmond was diagnosed with non-Hodgkins lymphoma, a malignancy which has affect-

ed the lymph nodes in his chest, abdomen, spine and leg.

Upon learning of his illness, Desmond placed a call to Smith to share the bad news.

"I said, 'Now I know more about you than I'd ever hoped to.' We just sat on the phone, crying," said the 32-year-old Desmond.

Public efforts to assist Desmond were also extensive, including a dance thrown at St. Margaret Mary's in February to help defray his medical expenses.

Over the next several months, Desmond, Smith and their families frequently met during the cancer patients' various treatments at Rochester's Strong Memorial Hospital.

"Quite often my wife (Carol) would go to visit him and his parents (Kathy and Robert) would visit me," said Desmond.

In fact, on the day last February when surgeons removed six inches of bone from Smith's leg, his mother and Desmond spent much of that time alone

in the hospital chapel.

Fortunately, many subsequent developments have indicated that the prayers are being answered.

Following radiation treatments between August and October, Desmond's cancer is in remission. "I'm feeling as well as I have in two years," acknowledged the Geneseo resident.

Smith, meanwhile, underwent chest surgery in May of this year and a bone-marrow transplant the following month. When a series of scans was performed in September, no recurrence of the cancer was detected. Smith has now returned to McQuaid to complete his senior year, which had been put on hold by the illness.

Although it's too soon to determine whether both young men are through with health problems related to their cancers, Desmond and Smith are looking forward to celebrating Christmas without the overwhelming uncertainty they faced in previous years.

"My brother gave a toast at (this) Thanksgiving and said he hadn't even known (last year) if we'd be together again," said Desmond.

Smith views this particular holiday season as "a time to celebrate without a dark cloud hanging overhead."

Both said that they attribute much of their physical and spiritual health to their vast legions of well-wishers.

"I'm thankful for all the prayers and support," Smith said.

"I would tell people that this is the answer to all the prayers that were said," Desmond added.

Needless to say, the past year's experiences have brought a renewed and deepened meaning to Smith's and Desmond's own friendship.

"Previously, our relationship was just that I was his youth minister," Desmond said. "Now it's much different, having been through 'chemo' and surgeries. We were supporting each other. I still often pray for Brannon and others I met at the hospital."

"We found common ground and it sort of connected us in a special way — not only in a medical way, but also through prayer," Smith added.

## A prayer for Kali Ann Poulton

The Kali Search Center, which is coordinating efforts to find Kali Ann Poulton, has asked area newspapers to publish the prayer below. Kali was taken from her home in suburban Rochester on May 23, 1994.

As we celebrate the birth of our Savior and thank God for this wondrous favor,

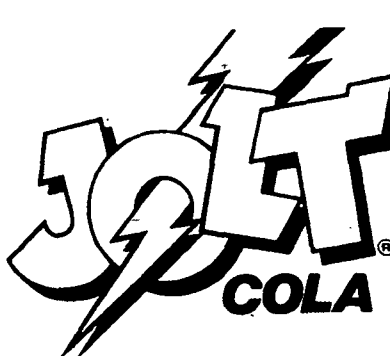


*May we reach each in our heart take time to impart, a moment of prayer for Kali dear, Bring her home soon to her mom and her dad for a child is the greatest blessing a parent ever had.*

Donations for the search effort may be sent to: Kali Search Center, P.O. Box 697, East Rochester, NY 14445. For information, call (716) 383-0774.

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