

Milford girl, only 4, dies of cancer

MILFORD (AP) — On her mother's 27th birthday, 4-year-old Amber Calistro died of cancer.

"I feel better now," said Patti Calistro. "Amber is at peace."

The memories of Amber's life are stored in the films and tapes Ms. Calistro made of their last days together. Now the memory of the child's death on Thursday also is preserved.

"I hope to catch her spirit rising," said Ms. Calistro of the photographs she shot in Amber's final hours.

"It was beautiful. Suddenly I felt this tremendous energy, as if ants were all over me. It was as if she had dispersed, and was all around us. I could only say, 'Thank you, God, thank you.'"

"You know," she added, "today is my birthday. It's more than just a coincidence. Her life and her death mean some-

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— Amber's mother

thing. Of course, I've cried. But now I feel better. She is at peace."

Amber slipped into a coma shortly after midnight and died at her home in this coastal community at about 2:30 p.m.

In the coming weeks, Ms. Calistro said, she will gather together the drawings and photographs of Amber's life, the notes on her disease, and the tapes of her voice. Then Amber can touch all those who reached out to her, Ms. Calistro said.

"They do love her," she said. "Even people she doesn't know, children, have sent letters saying, 'Amber, we love you.'"

Ms. Calistro, an artist who separated from her husband before Amber's disease was discovered in early 1979, has kept a list of people who have called her, and plans to begin a newsletter.

A few days before Amber died, Ms. Calistro said, "I know what it is like to

struggle and I want to help other people who are going through the same thing needlessly."

She insists that "something must be done" to link the families of dying children, to help parents lend emotional support to one another and to aid the flow of information about alternative cancer treatments and their legal consequences.

Amber was treated with radiation and metabolic and immunological therapy after an operation last March. Her cancer, diagnosed by doctors at Yale-New Haven Hospital as rhabdomyosarcoma, began as a lump behind her right ear. In recent weeks, it grew to the size of a saucer, disfiguring one side of her head.

Ms. Calistro plans to have Amber's body cremated Monday. Then she will sail on Long Island Sound, scattering her daughter's ashes on the water.



AP Laserphoto

Amber Calistro as she slept in her mother's arms a week ago.