

Anguish Brings Compassion For Others

For Amber, With Love

by E.N. MATHEWS

This is the story of Amber, the daughter of River Road resident Patti Stiewing, died in 1980 at four years old, the victim of a cancerous tumor. Since her daughter's death, Stiewing has been dedicating much of her life to educating the public about the dangers of cancer. Among the projects she is currently working on are a book chronicling her experiences with her daughter, an attempt to gain recognition on the Phil Donahue show, and trying to organize a world-wide conference on cancer.

The story of Amber begins in February, 1976, when she was born. The perfectly healthy child was so extraordinarily beautiful that her mother wanted her to do some modeling.

But when Amber was about three and a half years old, her mother discovered a lump in back of her daughter's right ear. "I took her to many doctors, but they wouldn't biopsy it," said Stiewing, referring to a procedure in which doctors examine a piece of tissue.

Soon the growth was expanding "to half the size of my fist," according to Stiewing. The tumor's size doubled within two weeks after Amber fell and hit her head on the fireplace.

The tumor was removed in Yale-New Haven Hospital when Amber turned four.

The Shelton resident admits she "doesn't have much faith in the medical profession." Stiewing was not convinced of the value of chemotherapy and radiology, the two conventional treatments for cancer. This led to a journey that spanned Freeport,

in the Bahamas, to Montreal, Canada, in an attempt to find help for Amber.

But after many treatments failed, Stiewing finally had to make the decision to let her daughter die. This decision, she said, wasn't a difficult one to make because of the profound influence of God on her experiences. "During the whole experience, I listened to God," she said. "He made the decisions and directed me. I just carried out his decisions—I didn't have to do anything."

Stiewing recounted her feelings when Amber died. "When Amber stopped breathing," she said, "I had a feeling of warmth and peace and love throughout my whole body, from my toes to the ends of my hair. I realized that God had come to take her back."

Since no doctor would come to their house to take Amber, Stiewing put her body into the back of a station wagon and brought it to the hospital. Before she took the body out of the car, Stiewing snapped a picture of her body, which is the final photo in a portfolio Stiewing has compiled.

Amber was cremated, and her ashes were scattered over Long Island Sound.

After Amber's death, Stiewing plunged herself completely into her work. On June 26, she completed a book about Amber's life, which intertwines Stiewing's personal recollections, conversations she had with her daughter, recordings that were made during Amber's life, and a journal Stiewing kept.

The book's subject matter is currently being perused by 18 dif-

ferent publishers.

Stiewing also became involved with Compassionate Friends in Hamden, a support group made up of married and single parents who have lost children. She began Patient Companion Group in the Bahamas, which, through a newsletter, informed people of the various facilities available in the Bahamas.

The Shelton resident has also queried Phil Donahue about the possibility of appearing on his television program to discuss her experiences.

But the highest goal she has set for herself is the organization of a world-wide cancer conference, which would convene experts in the field of cancer research for the purpose of exchanging information on cancer and informing the public. "The answer may be a combination of therapies, not just one," Stiewing said.

She is not convinced that doctors are doing all they can to cure cancer. "It's my belief that they're not in too big of a hurry to cure it (cancer)," Stiewing said. "There's a lot of money to be made out of it. If another cure was found, what would happen to all the chemotherapists and radiologists? What would they do with all that radiology equipment?"

To bring cancer research to the forefront of world concern, Stiewing is considering taking some extraordinary steps. "I've thought of camping out on the White House steps," she said. Another possible avenue she has considered pursuing is taking one of the pictures of her daughter when the tumor is at its height, and blowing it up into a poster to



Patti Stiewing of 740 River Road relaxes with her second child Toby at her home Tuesday. Suburban News photo by Bill Treloar

send to "some key people," she said.

She does not believe that this is exploitation of her daughter. "Amber knew what her purpose in life was. Her spirit is pure and good and untouched. Her body was just a container," Stiewing said.

Stiewing thinks that the public is ready for her controversial book. "People have to face reality," she said. "They have to be shocked and grossed out. Cancer is a living, eating, breathing monster that literally eats you

alive."

Amber still plays a major influence on her mother's life. "When she died, I felt that she was dispersed into everyone in the world," Stiewing said. "Sometimes I hear her talking to me. It's not me talking to myself, but Amber talking to me. She's here with me," Stiewing said.

She recalled an incident when Amber said to her, "You know Mom, love is wiping someone's tears away." Patti Stiewing is trying to spread some of that love.