

# Killer of The Innocent

## By Michael W. Curtis

My kid sister, Kimberly **Aylene** Curtis, was a normal thirteen-year old girl. She was a soft spoken, quiet and reserved girl who loved little children. She was small built and had worn glasses since she was a toddler. She had lots of hobbies like tap dancing, ballet, reading, writing poetry and riding horses. The kinds of things any thirteen year old girl would do. She also had her share of problems much the same as any other thirteen-year old girl: what to wear, boys, acne, dieting etc.

The end of her normalcy didn't come in with a bang. It slipped into our lives so quietly that no one even realized its significance. In September of 1978, she noticed a dime-sized lump on her left collar-bone, midway between her neck and shoulder. No one in our family had any idea where the knot came from nor did we pay much attention to it. When we thought about it at all, we thought it was a "goose egg" from an injury she didn't remember receiving. Then we thought it was a cyst or a boil. We passed it off and figured it would go away in time. Yet it slowly grew **day-by-day**.

By December, the knot had grown to the size of a golf ball and was painful to the touch. We were forced into the realization that something was very wrong. Our mother took her to an orthopedic surgeon.

The orthopedic surgeon examined her and diagnosed the knot as a calcium deposit from a bone fracture that Kim hadn't realized she had incurred. By the end of February, the lump had grown well beyond the time it should have stopped growing and begun to shrink. The orthopedic surgeon then **rediaagnosed** the lump as a **hematoma**: large sack-like pocket of blood. By then, the lump had grown to the size of a tennis ball. The doctor was preparing to aspirate the **hematoma** (drain the blood) when another orthopedic surgeon became involved in the case and suggested another -very different- theory.

In April of 1979, Kim was referred to a prominent physician, at **Shands** Teaching Hospital, at the University of Florida, in Gainesville. The physician, Dr. **Enneking**, examined the lump on Kim's collar bone and instantly knew what it was. Kimberly Curtis, age thirteen, had cancer!

Dr. **Enneking** diagnosed the tumor as a Ewing's Sarcoma: a rare type of bone cancer that normally affects adolescents and teenagers. The prognosis was uncertain because the fatality rate for a Ewing's Sarcoma victim was very high. Nonetheless, our family was optimistic.

Kim was admitted into **Shands** Hospital and placed into their large pediatric and adolescent ward. That entire area of the hospital was filled with children and teenagers with various forms of cancer, leukemia, cystic fibrosis and other life threatening diseases.

Kim underwent surgery to remove her left collar bone and subsequently the tumor. The surgery was followed up with six weeks of daily radiation treatments. Before the end of the radiation treatment, the radiation burned Kim's esophagus and made eating and swallowing very painful. Before the radiation treatments were over, she began a six month regiment of chemotherapy. For one week out of each month, Kim received a chemotherapy treatment mixed in with radiation treatments. For that week and most of the following week, Kim was very sick and all her hair fell out. It was a tough time for her with so much life and death going on around her.

Kim's emotional trauma was multiplied because she was in the midst of puberty when the treatments began. Once the treatment had started, she stopped growing at all and her passage into womanhood stopped cold. This left Kim in a physical and emotional limbo.

Kim made some friends at **Shands** hospital. One of her closest friends was a girl, a year older than Kim, named Kathy **Enfinger**. Like Kim, Kathy also had Ewing's Sarcoma. She was going

through chemotherapy at the same time as Kim, so the two had much in common. They compared notes throughout their treatment and kept each other company through the long hours in the hospital.

### **REMINISCENCES OF SANDRA CURTIS**

Kathy and Kim were soul mates. They were going through the same treatments at about the same time. They were best friends. They passed many long boring hours together.

Kim was very bitter, emotionally, during this period. The pain and sickness of the chemotherapy combined with the long periods in the hospital, far from home, made her life miserable. The presence of death all around her, and the **all-too-real** possibility of her own death, created pressures in her life that few teenagers ever have to face. She was frequently moody and often fought with her mother and her family. It was a difficult time for her and our family. Kim remained in Gainesville for two months. A pathologist, named Dr. Ervin# Shaw, friend and neighbor of the family, arranged for a Dr. Charles Davis to take over her treatments at Richland Memorial Hospital, back home in Columbia, South Carolina. This meant that Mom and Kim didn't have to be hundreds of miles away. That was a great relief to Kim, our Mom and the rest of the family. At Richland Memorial Hospital, Kim met Frances Friedman, the Play Therapist at the Children's Hospital, and they became friends. During her stay at Richland Memorial, Kim often helped Frances with the younger children and became something of a counselor herself. Later, during her remission, she would serve as a counselor at Camp **Kemo**, a summer camp for children with cancer.

Once the treatments ended, Kim started the business of getting on with her life. It was a trying time for her; **reintegrating** herself into school as a "normal" teenager. She had experienced life and death in a way that her peers had not experienced and could not understand. One person who helped Kim a lot was Mrs. Betsy **Dyches**. Betsy **Dyches** was a tenth grade English teacher at Irmo High School. Kim was a student in her class, but they somehow became friends as well.

### **REMINISCENCES OF BETSY DYCHES**

When I first met Kim Curtis in the fall of 1980, she was a student in my advanced tenth grade English class. To be honest, in the craziness of the beginning of school -learning ISO new names, faces, personalities, strengths and weaknesses- I hadn't really noticed Kim all that much. But all that changed when she wrote her first essay - an essay about what it was like to have cancer.

One of the major causes of her volatile emotions was the lack of her menstrual cycle. The chemotherapy had completely stopped her becoming a woman at the normally very trying age of 14. After nearly a year without a menstrual cycle, Kim was scheduled to undergo a treatment designed to bring on menstruation when she began to menstruate spontaneously. Her finally passing into womanhood was the final step on the painful journey to a normal life for herself.

Another major problem for Kim was having to attend school while wearing a wig. It was a source of embarrassment for her and she was very sensitive about it. She didn't want to be seen, even by her family, with just her bald head.

As time went on, her hair grew back, painful memories pushed farther into the back of her mind and she became a normal teenaged girl. Her attitude toward herself and toward life improved. She truly was a normal teenager experiencing normal problems like what to wear and how to get the attention of a cute boy. She took up writing poetry and often expressed her feelings in verse.

In June of 1981, just when Kim had finally put the cancer behind her, a suspicious spot showed up on a routine CAT scan. She returned to Gainesville and had a surgical biopsy on it. Kim and our family was ecstatic to learn that the tumor was benign! Kim breathed a sigh of relief and went

on to enjoy a fine summer. Then in September of 1981, three years after the discovery of the first tumor, another tumor was discovered on her pelvis. Again Kim and our mom packed up and went to Gainesville.

At the urging of Betsy **Dyches**, Kim decided to start a journal to record her feelings and to serve as a basis for a book she wanted to write. She wanted to write a book about her experiences with cancer in hopes of helping other teenage cancer patients. She also wrote letters to Betsy **Dyches**. At **Shands**, the new tumor was **biopsied** and found to be a Ewing's Sarcoma. Because this was a reoccurrence, her chances for survival were greatly reduced. The tumor couldn't be removed because of where it was located. Her **oncologist**, Dr. Graham-Pole, decided to do a high dosage chemotherapy to try to shrink the tumor.

### **EXCERPTS FROM KIM'S JOURNAL**

**Wednesday, October 10, 1981.** (**Shands** Teaching Hospital)

Today was a super **yucko** day. A ton of doctors came by and they all had bad things to say. My chemotherapy might be given in one of two huge doses. I'd be in isolation for 4 to 6 weeks. Even then, we have no promises. If it's **osteogenic** sarcoma, I'll most likely have my leg amputated. I've thought about it and that's okay with me. I was upset and I cried when everyone left. I snuck down to the **WATS** line and called Mrs. **Dyches**. I feel like I'm okay now. I just want to get this over with. I want to get the biopsy over with so we will know what exactly is going to happen. I'm gonna try real hard to get up and going after the surgery so I can get out of here.

**Thursday, October 15, 1981**

I had the biopsy today. I threw up and felt crummy afterwards. Frances and Mrs. **Dyches** both called and I cried both times. I felt so afraid that I was going to die from this cancer.

**Wednesday, October 16, 1981**

Dr. Graham-Pole came in this evening and told me he wants to do the 4-6 week chemotherapy. He said my chances on the 6 month or 1 year chemotherapy aren't good at all. Also, he wants to start right away so I can't go home. I was very upset and I cried but I perked right up. I'll make it through. I'll be in a room by myself. I'm just going to be brave and not feel sorry for myself. Life is too precious to waste... I can't spell the drug I'll be taking but it's called **melaphalan**.

**PERSONAL NOTE:** After her diagnosis, Kim was given a weekend off to relax before she was put through the intensive chemotherapy. The chemotherapy treatment her doctor wanted to use was different in that it was a super heavy duty dosage. The idea was to overwhelm the cancer in her body with what was intended to be a near fatally high dosage of the drug. Chemotherapy drugs are poisons that are intended to kill all fast growing cells in the body: such as malignant cells. Fingernails and hair are among the other cells that are affected by chemotherapy drugs.

### **EXCERPTS FROM KIMS JOURNAL**

**Saturday, October 17, 1981**

I got out of **Shands** today. Thank Goodness! I get a two day vacation before I have to go back for the long stay. Mom and Dad got me a motel room by myself which is great. I'm glad they understand my need to be alone for a bit. I've been so tired and sore today. This cancer business is sapping my strength. I cried tonight.

### **EXCERPT FROM A LETTER**

**Sunday, October 17, 1981**

Mrs. Dyches,

... I'm in Lake City (Florida) in a Holiday Inn. Today is Sunday and I got out of **Shands** Yesterday. My parents got me my own room for last night. They understand my need to be alone sometimes and you can't have that in a hospital. There's two double beds for just me. I told them I had enough room for an orgy. I'm sure they slept well after that. Anyway, it was just what I needed. One thing was nice. I got to strip down in a wide open room without pulling any curtains around my bed and I got to use the toilet without fear of someone walking in on me. Real luxuries.

I really like my new roommate and her family. They are such nice people. They prayed for me. The girl's name is **Shandra** (Bailey) and she's 13 but she's a dwarf. She had one hip operation and she's having another next week. After that, she'll have on plaster pants for two months. While she was in surgery, her mother gave me a tape of her's and said that **Shandra** liked it a lot so she wanted me to have it. It is religious music by Amy Grant. I was so touched, there aren't words to describe how I felt. Oh, by the way, did I mention (?) she has a very nice sixteen year old brother. He is really nice. The kind of boy I've been waiting for. We talked a lot the night **Shandra** was in surgery.

My mother and I are becoming close again. I guess that's why our bad times hurt so much, because we've been so tight in the past. It's easy to take your frustrations out on the ones you love because the love never ends. I still must protect her and Dad though because as the parents of me, they are especially delicate...

PERSONAL NOTE: Kim checked back into **Shands** that Monday morning. The next day, she went into surgery. The purpose of the surgery was twofold. The first reason was to place a special "Central Line" I.V. catheter in her pulmonary vein: called a Hickman Catheter. The Hickman catheter was to prevent her from having to have new I.V.s started every few days. During the course of chemotherapy, a patient must receive near *constant IN.* plus various injections of drugs. A vein will only last so long before it wears out and a new IN. must be started. By using the large pulmonary vein, with its relatively stronger walls, a single IN. can last for months. The Hickman catheter was inserted in the right pulmonary vein that runs from the right lung to the heart. Then the catheter leads through the chest up to loop over the collar bone and then emerges from the chest about midway between collarbone and nipple.

The second reason for the surgery was to harvest bone marrow for later use. The chemotherapy drug they planned to use would destroy the bone marrow in her body. In order for her to survive, this bone marrow would have to be replaced with the harvested bone marrow. Bone marrow can't be donated as easily as blood. It must be type matched like any other organ. By using Kim's own bone marrow, they guaranteed Kim's body wouldn't reject the marrow.

## **EXCERPTS FROM KIM'S JOURNAL**

### **Tuesday, October 20, 1981**

I had my surgery today. They put in a Hickman Catheter. I call it a "**hickey.**" It hurts now but they say it will get better and I won't even know it's there. I'm sure glad I won't get stuck so much. I also got 1 1/2 pints of bone marrow taken from the back of my right hip. That is quite sore...

PERSONAL NOTE: Two days after her surgery, Kim started receiving radiation therapy: twice a day for three weeks. The radiation resident, Chuck, was the one who did her radiation treatments the first time she was at **Shands** Hospital. Kim was delighted to have a familiar person doing her treatment. Chuck was wonderful with the kids and gave them a lot of support through the ordeal.

### **Thursday, October 22, 1981**

I got x-rayed and painted for radiation. Chuck is going to do it. He came off a research project to do this for me. I'll be radiated two times a day for about three weeks Kathy **Enfinger** is in for chemotherapy. It's good to see her. Her hair is gone and she has a Hickman catheter too.

### **EXCERPTS FROM A LETTER**

### **Friday, October 23, 1981**

Dear Mrs. **Dyches**,

I didn't write yesterday because I was sick to my stomach all day. I am again today but I'm tired of just lying there feeling like s---. Maybe I'll feel better if I do things.

I started getting radiation treatments today. I go twice a day. I lie on my stomach and get my rear end radiated. One of those times they do my spine because a suspicious area showed up on the bone scan and x-rays. So as Chuck said, "we're gonna 'blast' it." Chuck is the very good looking radiation resident. He is also my "friend"...

I took the bandage off yesterday from where they did my bone marrow harvest. You wouldn't believe the holes they poked in me. There must be twenty-five of them. Chuck went in to watch them during the operation and he got so grossed out, he had to leave.

I finished the book called Too Old To Cry, Too Young To Die. In the first part, nine teenagers tell their story. Some of these people are from **Shands**. Then in the rest of the book, they have sections on stuff like going bald, relapse, medical expenses, handling parents, etc ... There was a case history written by one girl that I can really relate to except for one thing. She died in the end.

PERSONAL NOTE: Kim read many books written by cancer patients. They helped her to get in touch with her own feelings on the most horrible parts of having cancer. Her plans for her life included writing her own book on the subject:

### **EXCERPT FROM A LETTER**

### **Saturday, October 24, 1981**

By the way "Mrs. **Dyches**," if you happen to notice my grammar and punctuation mistakes, DON'T! That's not my bag at all. When we write the book, **that'll** be your department. Okay? The chapter I'm gonna start with is called "The Hospital Scene: Take a Walk in the Zoo." The first topic is "On the Inside: Night **Stalkers**, Nurses and other Goofs."

PERSONAL NOTE: Once the initial shock was over, Kim seemed to accept what was happening and face things as they were. Much of that was due to several phone conversations with close friends and the visit of Kim's closest friend from home. Another major factor for her was meeting an eighteen year old girl, named Rennie. Rennie was in remission from **neuroblastoma**, a childhood cancer of the nervous system. Her leg had been amputated and she had been through the full regiment of radiation and Chemotherapy. At the time Kim met her, she had been without cancer for five years. In this acceptance, she gained unbelievable wisdom for one so young. However, this was also a time of turmoil. Even though there were times she was so positive, there were also times of fear for her life. She shook them off quickly and tried hard not to let others know these low points existed.

## EXCERPTS FROM KIM'S JOURNAL

Sunday, October 25, 1981

I am reading Sunshine (By Norma Klein) right now. I read it after I had cancer before and I thought Kate was selfish to die and leave her baby behind just because she didn't want her leg amputated. Now I see that she had good reasons for her decision and it doesn't matter what I think. I have no right to judge her and I hope people don't judge me too much. The time that my cancer hurts the worst is when I think about how much others are hurting because of it. My parents and others that love me are hurt by it. I can make my hurt stop but I can't make their's stop.

Life is so beautiful. There is so much to experience, so much love, laughter, tears, and sunshine to experience. I am truly going to try to improve myself so I can experience more of the qualities life has to offer ...

## EXCERPTS FROM A LETTER

Tuesday, October 27, 1981

Dear Mrs. Dyches,

I've picked up little tid-bits about life since I got cancer but I've finally put it all together somewhat. I know what living life to its fullest is all about now. It is using your talents to be the best person you can be. It is being open minded to new things, experiences and possibilities. It is always striving to learn new things so that you can better yourself and in turn, benefit others. There is no ultimate goal in life. If you ever stop growing, changing and learning, you have stopped living. No one is better than the other guy. We always have things to offer and things we can benefit by from others.

To know how precious life is, you must first face death or experience the death of someone close to you. I am sorry I spent time being depressed but I think it made happiness so much sweeter. There is good in everything. Sometimes it isn't so easy to see it but it's always there.

PERSONAL NOTE: Once this change came over Kim, she often found herself helping others to overcome their own trials. Her acceptance of her fate allowed others to accept theirs. But helping others wasn't always easy for her. While she could accept her own pain, she hated to see others in pain.

## EXCERPTS FROM KIM'S JOURNAL

Wednesday, October 28, 1981

A nurse came into my room and told me she wanted me to go talk to a sixteen year old girl (Dondra Lovvorn) that just came in. She has osteogenic sarcoma in her knee and she's only known since Friday. I think she just found out today that they are thinking of amputating her leg. Anyway, I talked to her and her parents for a while, then they left the room and she started crying about her leg. Sometimes I think this is a bunch of shit. I mean, I think she'll adjust to it and all but why should she have to. I know her and her family are in shock now and going through a very traumatic time. It's just a bunch of crap. But then again, what was I saying about there being good in everything? Well, that's true enough for me but maybe not for her. I don't exactly feel anymore that I've gotten a crappy deal. Although sometimes, times are very hard. I'm not saying I enjoy this. I'm saying a lot of good has come from it and if I could go back to April, 1979 and change my future, I wouldn't. I feel special I guess. Like God chose me because he knew I could do it and he chose me for all the good things that have come from it. Without suffering and crap, there would be nothing special about this

PERSONAL NOTE: The incident with **Dondra** seemed to perpetuate Kim on her roller coaster period of emotional ups and downs. She was outwardly so positive about life, but alone in bed at night she often cried herself to sleep. She acknowledged these periods without even seeing a contradiction.

## EXCERPTS FROM KIM'S JOURNAL

### Thursday, October 29, 1981

**Dondra** met Rennie and decided to get her leg amputated. I'm so relieved to hear that. **Dondra** is so nice. Today, Sandy Callahan (a friend from treatments three years before) came up. I didn't even recognize her at first, her hair is so long. She said she had a lump in her stomach and was fixing to have a CAT scan. She's been off **Chemo** for three years ... She kept saying, "Why do we have to go through this again?" "Why us?" I felt funny because I accept mine. I don't think, "Why me?" I think it's okay. I trust God for his decision.

I cried and cried tonight.

I didn't even read the bible or pray before I went to sleep. **Dondra** feels a lot better now. She's accepted the fact they are going to amputate her leg. She says, "take her leg off," not "amputate." She's so sweet, I know she will be a fighter.

### Friday, October 30, 1981

**Dondra** had her leg amputated today. I pray to God she comes through it okay emotionally... Someone up here died today. The emergency alarm went off and everyone went running down there. Even though I didn't know him, it still disturbs me.

## EXCERPTS FROM A LETTER

### Monday, **November 2, 1981,**

Dear Mrs. **Dyches,**

**Dondra** moved in with me today. I don't mind having her as a roommate at all. Her family is nice. **Dondra** said her stump looks like an overgrown **boob**. I'm glad she has a sense of humor and a good attitude. She told the doctor to go find her leg and scratch it.

PERSONAL NOTE: Kim spent most of the time on an emotional roller coaster. She was always careful to be pleasant to others but inside she had many rough times. On Monday, November 9, Kim received the first of the high intensity **chemo** treatments she was to receive. For the next three weeks Kim would be very sick from the drug and not write much in her journal. One major side effect of the drug she received was that her immune system would be useless for a long time. The drug kills off all the white blood cells in the body and also kills the bone marrow that produces new white blood cells. She would be given back some of the harvested bone marrow. She also would receive some white cells via **I.V.** just to keep her bodies natural bacteria from killing her and she would be very susceptible to any infection. For this reason, she would be in isolation and not be able to socialize much with people. She stayed at an emotional low at this point. For Thanksgiving, Our brother David and I traveled to Gainesville to share thanksgiving dinner with our family. Our Mom and Dad were there and so we went too.

Kim was still on the tail end of her isolation period so she was permitted to have company but only on a limited basis and with no physical contact. Thanksgiving dinner was boxed turkey dinner provided by a local church. The food was okay but our family was thrilled to be together. I was amazed at the world that Kim was a part of. The entire part of the hospital Kim was in was

filled with children, many with life threatening diseases. Yet the place was about as far from being gloomy as could be. All the children there laughed and joked with one another. There was a feeling of caring and mutual support between them that transcended race, age, sex or any other normal **delimiter**. There was something else there that brought tears to my eyes. The kids there could talk about serious illness and death so intimately. To hear some of them talk you would think they all had medical degrees. I guess in a way they did; from the University of Hard Knocks! Sickness and death was all around them and a part of them. Like the children in a war torn country, these kids had known death. Even the littlest ones could name a half dozen kids who had fought and lost hard battles within those walls. Seeing my kid sister as part of that world really brought home to me the first time just how sick she was.

One young 14 year-old boy, named Eric Stafford, had a multitude of Ewing's sarcomas all over his body. He was at that time Kim's closest friend as he was going through the same intensive chemotherapy as she was. He and Kim weren't allowed close contact during the isolation stages of their treatment, but they could sit in the same room together and play cards as long as they wore surgeons masks.

One afternoon, Kim and Eric were allowed to leave the hospital and come to the motel where our families were staying; again wearing masks. David and I played "**Uno**" against Eric and Kim and were soundly beaten. Kim and Eric were so jovial and happy. Sometime during the afternoon, Kim and Eric decided they would take their masks off even though they were under strict orders not to. They made a big game out of it.

### **REMINISCENCES FROM DAVID CURTIS**

It was touching to see her in that position ... to see such positiveness in someone facing what she was facing. It was so remarkable to see Kim and Eric removing their masks in the motel room. It was a true act of defiance. A symbol of their freedom, if only for the afternoon. They knew what they were risking. They had weighed the risks and decided that they wanted to enjoy themselves.

**PERSONAL NOTE:** When the weekend was over. David and I drove home. It was a solemn trip for both of us. It had been the first time either of us had been to **Shands**, to see first hand what it was like. It was a memory neither of us would ever forget.

On Monday, November 30, Mom told Kim that her friend Kathy **Enfinger** was diagnosed as terminal. That meant that the doctors have determined that her cancer had advanced beyond the point where it was treatable. She would be allowed to live out her few remaining days being made as comfortable as possible.

### **EXCERPTS FROM KIM'S JOURNAL**

#### **Monday, November 30, 1981**

Mom just held my hand and told me that Kathy **Enfinger** is terminal. I can't stop crying. She is such a beautiful person. I guess that's why God wants her with him.

**PERSONAL NOTE:** Around the first of December, Kim would be released from **Shands** and allowed to return home for Christmas vacation. She had a few tests to have run and she had to get her blood counts to nominal levels. Finally, on Saturday, December 5, 1981, Kim came home. At the time, I was amazed at how happy she seemed that Christmas. My memories of that time with my sister were my most pleasant memories. She was so jovial and easygoing; a Kim Curtis I had never seen before. I know now that there was a lot going on behind that facade.

### **EXCERPTS FROM KIM'S JOURNAL**

#### **Thursday, December 10, 1981**

I talked to Arlene (Mikes wife) on the phone for a pretty good while tonight. At one point I wanted to cry. I have learned to take it easy, not to worry so much, and enjoy life. I know things now that I never knew before. I only wish others could know too. Even my own Mother hasn't caught on. It makes me kind of sad and angry way down deep. Mostly sad. I guess people just don't stop and think. I don't know if I would if it happened to someone else in the family besides me. I hope I can grow up and find me a man that thinks more like me. I really envy people like Cyndi and Tim who are so much in love.

PERSONAL NOTE: Shortly after she got home, her vacation was marred by getting a viral infection. Her temperature hit almost 103 degrees and she was pretty sick. She was immediately hospitalized at Richland Memorial Hospital. Kim got pretty angry about it. She desperately wanted to be home for Christmas.

### **EXCERPTS FROM KIM'S JOURNAL**

#### **Monday, December 14, 1981**

My fever has been gone for 34 hours now. I have a feeling my blood cultures are negative. If they aren't, I'll have to muster up ever bit of strength I have to be able to gracefully stay in this hospital. I want very badly to be out in time for the Christmas holidays. Christmas this year will be very meaningful because it'll mean being home with my family and friends and hopefully, no sickness for a while. I will truly thank God if he allows that to happen.

PERSONAL NOTE: After ten days, Kim was released from Richland Memorial Hospital. That was the good news. The bad news was that a chest x-ray turned up what appeared to be a tumor on her lung. I think that this is when a part of Kim really realized that she was going to die.

### **EXCERPT FROM KIM'S JOURNAL**

#### **Wednesday, December 16, 1981**

I have to stop thinking about dying. I thought about it long enough to decide that I can handle it if it comes. Meanwhile, I'm gonna think positive, take care of myself, make the best of my life now. I'm going to start on a new program to form the good habits I need.

#### **Friday, December 18, 1981**

Dr. Davis came by a little while ago and told me that the spot on my lung is most likely a tumor. The other night I started wondering, Frances believes that if you think positive you can get it beat. I believe that too, but sometimes I can't help but wonder if I'm gonna die. It's a very real possibility. Now, with this new tumor, if it's a tumor, it seems the Melaphalan didn't work

#### **Sunday, December 20, 1981**

I just read the part I wrote on December 16th. I said that I was going to think positive, keep hoping and fighting, yet I'll make the most of my days now. It's okay for me to think about dying because that's being realistic. It's simply a fact.

PERSONAL NOTE: In thinking back, that was truly one of the best Christmases our family has ever had. Everyone got along well. I had my wife and David had his fiancée. Kim seemed so happy and mom and dad were so proud and loving of their extended family. The time we spent together was punctuated with laughter and fun. One of the most enjoyable things about that Christmas was that Kim, David and I really started to become close. You see, as we grew up, Kim was six years younger than myself and four years younger than our brother, David. David and I were inseparable and that always left Kim as the "third man out." But it was more than that. Kim was an entirely opposite personality than myself and David. David and I were outgoing and

gregarious. Kim was always shy and sensitive. That personality difference combined with the age and sex difference kept David and I from ever being really close to Kim.

One of my most vivid memories of that Christmas was an "Uno" game we played on Christmas day. Kim had gotten tired of wearing her wig so she removed it. She was completely bald. Most of the time, Bald chemo patients will wear a hat or kerchief or something to cover up their bald head. This time, Kim just played cards totally bald. We made a number of bald jokes and I ended up offering to, "shine your head for a quarter." She accepted my offer so I shined her head with my shirt sleeve. Someone snapped a picture of it and that picture has become a symbol, to my family, of Kim's acceptance of her fate.

On Monday, January 11, 1982, Kim checked back into Shands Hospital. This visit started off on a happy note when the CAT scan revealed that Kim didn't have a tumor in her lung after all. Yet even so, Kim still had nagging fears she couldn't share with anyone.

### **EXCERPTS FROM KIM'S JOURNAL**

#### **Tuesday, January 12, 1982**

4:00 a.m. I've been up all night. I'm losing some of my positiveness about this whole deal. I hate to lie to people but I must start faking positiveness because I don't want people to think I'm a negative person.

6:35 a.m. I'm so tired, I feel like a zombie. But I want to stay up until the next shift comes on. I also want to be up for 24 hours, before I go to sleep. I can't believe I've stayed up this long without coffee or anything. For some reason, I just didn't want to go to sleep and be alone in bed. I'm weird I guess. I can't tell anybody that because I have to put up a false positive front. I hope people start coming in soon... I guess I like the company. I hate to be left alone. But now that I have to put up a false front, I won't be as eager to talk about my feelings. Why am I changing so much now? Is it because of all the strain I've been under the past few months? I don't know. I just hate for anyone to know I've been feeling so negative...

I got to see NICU (Neo-natal Intensive Care Unit) last night. It was so neat and not at all what I expected. Some of the babies are so tiny. There's one named Amanda that I'm gonna go and see today. I only wish I could pick her up. It's hard to believe that a human being could be so small. Cathy picked up Amanda and goes, "Meet Amanda, the fetus." It was funny but true.

PERSONAL NOTE: If by this time, it was obvious that Kim was truly aware of the likelihood she would die, it truly struck home when she found out Kathy Enfinger had died.

### **EXCERPTS FROM KIM'S JOURNAL**

#### **Wednesday, January 13, 1982**

I found out yesterday that Kathy Enfinger died. She died one week ago on January 6th. I was so shocked. I didn't know it would happen so soon. I don't want to talk anymore about the details of her death or how upset I was. I just want to say how I feel now. I want to live better now. I want to totally devote myself to improving myself and my life.

PERSONAL NOTE: On Wednesday, January 20, 1982, Kim started her final three day chemotherapy treatment. Like the last treatment, Kim would be very sick through the three days. On Saturday, January 23, 1982, Kim started to break out with huge red spots on her body. Immediately following the chemotherapy, Kim's white blood cells were non-existent. In that immunosuppressed condition even the simplest disease is potentially fatal since she has no way to fight off any infection that attacks her. In this case, the simple disease was chicken pox.

## EXCERPTS FROM A LETTER

Sunday, January 24, 1982

Dear Mrs. D.,

I can't believe I'm finally writing you a letter. I was thinking about calling you but I'm not allowed out of my room. I have what they think are chicken pox - they'll be sure tomorrow. And wouldn't you know my med student and senior resident are both pregnant so now they have to stay away from me. It's a shame because I really like the med student (Mary).

I'm sending Katie a birthday card. I know it's late, but I've been feeling pretty bad lately. I need a blood transfusion but they have to wait to the very last minute to give it to me because I'm developing a resistance to blood and it's hard to crossmatch me.

Later: I'm sorry I can't finish this letter. I just don't feel good at all these days ...

## EXCERPTS FROM KIM'S JOURNAL

Monday, January 25, 1982

I keep having to stop writing because I've been so sick. I'm feeling better now because I've been given some blood today. I have chicken pox! I'm on strict isolation. I bet the kids on the floor who haven't had them are on isolation. I bet the nurses love this.

Dr. Graham-Pole thinks I'm depressed but I'm not. I only appear depressed when I'm physically down. He wants to send a psychology student to see me but all I really want is some of the nurses to come in and sit down and talk to me. There is nothing psychologically wrong with me...

I just can't wait to be done with all of this. I feel that God has great plans for me.

PERSONAL NOTE: Those words were the last entry in Kim's journal. By January 29th, Kim's chicken pox had started to improve, but her strained immune system had allowed her blood to become infected by bacteria. As a result, she was placed in intensive care.

Dad was called down to Gainesville. The whole family was in fear for her life. Many times over the next few days, Kim stopped breathing and had to be verbally coaxed her into taking her next breath. Finally, on February 4th, 1982, Kim needed a rest and was placed on a respirator.

Knowing that her time was now short, David and I went down to Gainesville to be with our parents and to see Kim for what we believed would be the last time. Mom and Dad were in bad shape emotionally. The last week had been very rough on them. David and I wanted to see her one last time. We were warned that she didn't look good at all. Though her appearance had been accurately described to us, we still were not prepared for the way she looked. Kim was, of course, completely bald from the chemotherapy treatments. Because of the lack of antibodies, the chicken pox sores were as big as half-dollars on her body. Her skin was slightly blue colored and her whole body was bloated from excessive fluids. She lay on a bed with a large tube running into her mouth. The wall behind her was loaded with complex looking machines and readouts. The respirator was a huge machine that beeped and hissed with each lung full of air it pumped. She had only a hospital gown draped over her still body. Had I not been told, I would not have recognized her as my sister.

## REMINISCENCES OF DAVID CURTIS

The emotional trauma was - horrible. We had been prepared for the way she looked but that thing we saw in the bed wasn't our sister. She was bloated and blue and had those huge sores all over

her. I realized then that she was dead long before we got there. We saw her only once that trip and even then very briefly. Once was enough! The rest of the trip we spent consoling our parents. It was clear to both of us that there was little hope for Kim. That Sunday evening we left to go home. If our last trip **back** from Gainesville was solemn, this trip was morbid. I know I spent the whole trip trying to replace the horror of the way she had looked with memories of the beautiful young woman I wanted to remember. I don't think I was successful, then. There was a few times in the next few weeks when it seemed she might regain consciousness, but she never did. Finally, on February, 27, 1982 Kim's exhausted body gave up the fight and she died

PERSONAL NOTE: I still think of Kim often. We have her Journals and her poetry to remind us of her. I can't help feeling angry that she had to die. We were just starting to discover how much we had in common as people. I can't help believing she would have been one of my closest friends, as adults, though we were not really close as kids. After all, we both liked to read and to write. I often regret that she never had the opportunity to see my children. She loved kids. I imagine that if she were still alive she would have a bunch of her own, if she could. If not, she would have adopted half the kids in the neighborhood.

Irmo High School now has an award called the "Kimberly Curtis" Award. It's awarded each year to the best essays written by Irmo students. The recipient's essays go to compete in a nation wide contest. Perhaps, one day, the winner of the Kim Curtis Award will publish a book and then in some small way, Kim's dream of being a writer will be fulfilled.

Eric Stafford died a few months after Kim died. He had already had **numorous** tumors and his prognosis was never very good. **Dondra Lovvorn** is still alive and is due to be married on November 10, 1990. My mother plans to **attend** that happy occasion. Rennie married, two years ago, to a man diagnosed with Cystic Fibrosis. Both are still alive and well.

In loving memory of Kimberly A. Curtis

Michael W. Curtis