Child cancer victim

A little girl says 'no' to death

By Sue Williams
AFRO Staff Writer

Phyllis Denise Griffin first noticed the lump on her infant daughter's back about one year ago.

She was bathing Samantha, a frisky, perky two-year old, after the child had spent a long day at her grandmother's East Baltimore home.

The lump, which was small and hard, had not been there that morning, as far as Denise could remember, so she surmised that perhaps "Sam," as everyone called her, had fallen or been hit by one of her playmates. It didn't seem to hurt or bother Sam in any way, so Denise finished the bath and put her daughter to bed.

But several days later the lump had not disappeared, and even though Sam did not complain or act any differently, Denise's mothering instincts told her that something might be wrong. She took Sam to Johns Hopkins Hospital, where she had taken the child ever since her birth for routine checkups and treatment. There, doctors looked at the lump, took a few tests and told Denise to bring her daughter back the next day.

The following day, Sam was admitted with a diagnosis of cancer — neuroblastoma— a fairly common type of cancer in children.

The day is one Denise will never forget. Sam was immediately subjected to an onslaught of drugs and radiotherapy. It is customary for tumors of the type Sam had to be reduced before surgery is performed.

The treatment was grueling, long; tortuous. Sam cried out for her mother as she lay, alone, in the stark beds at the hospital, her tiny arms and legs inundated with wires, tubes, and needles. For a while, she could not eat, and began to lose weight on top of everything else she was going through.

Before it was over, Sam would lose her right kidney, which had been severely invaded by the disease, as well as two ribs. A bone marrow transplant was eventually performed in order to halt the spread of the cancer. And the muscle in Sam's right leg deteriorated from months of inactivity, caused by Sam's confinement to the lonely bed at Hopkins.

"I wondered why it happened to my child," said Denise, as Sam chased a small pig in the pediatric oncology unit at Johns Hopkins Hos

Dr. Leventhal's efforts have been taken up by the Variety Club of Baltimore, which is sponsoring a telethon on Channel 2 on Sunday, May 31, to raise the money. The new unit will be a reality, she said.

Answering some very real questions important to the black community, Dr. Leventhal said that the current unit sees hundreds of black children such as Sam every year. The unit is not an elitist one; Medicaid is accepted with the same readiness as is the next medical plan. The aim is to cure.

"Cancer does not discriminate," she said softly. "It can get you, no matter who you are."

Stressing that there have been huge strides in research and treatment for cancer over the years, Dr. Leventhal said there is a need for more, much more.

"Sam is well, we think," she said, "but you have to keep working. You can't let up."

Harbold, the clinic nurse, agreed, and said that although the new unit will allow the kids with cancer to be together and to get through their ordeal by helping each other, people on the outside should not look at the unit or the disease as a sign of hopelessness.

"We don't stress the negative, and neither will we do that in the unit.

"Kids with cancer do survive, and we remind them and their parents of that all the time."

That optimism will be a big part of the Telethon on Channel 2 on May 31. Sam will be there, along with other young people who have had cancer and survived.

The unit, hopefully, will help doctors and researchers understand how to get other children off the lonely beds and onto floors chasing pigs . . . forever.

(Photo by Mark Gall)
Samantha Keekina Margaia Watts

"The doctors and nurses here advised me to quit work so I could be with her," said Denise softly, lowering her eyes, and so I did.

"I was here, every day, from about 10:00 a.m. until midnight for months And I kept wondering why it happened to my child instead of someone else's."

Remembering back, Denise played with her fingers as she related how at times Sam would not talk to her because she hurt so bad and wondered by her mother would not make it all stop. She would walk home at night, way after midnight, just to sort out the pain that was invading her life But no matter how hard she tried, nothing made sense. All she knew was that she wanted Sam to desperately.

Sam is one of thousands of children affected each year with cancer, which is the leading cause of death in children ages 1-15. Strides have been great; doctors say that Sam, like hundreds like her, has been cured of the disease.

sure. She brought this reporter's attention to a knot developing on Sam's head. "You can never really trust this disease," she said.

If all goes well, the pediatric oncology unit at Hopkins will be expanded and improved upon in the very near future, so that children such as Sam will have the greatest chances of cure possible.

Over $1 million must be raised in order to convert the current 14-bed unit in the hospital into 6 new single and 4 double rooms, The most modern computer technology will be available, said, Susan Harbold, a nurse in the cancer clinic at Hopkins.

and each patient will be hooked up to the nurses station.

But perhaps the single most important feature of the new unit will be the availability of psychological support to both patients and their parents through a community of "sameness." the unit will provide the same doctors, the same nurses, people who know cancer and who understand it, has to treat the children and their families.

"People need to talk about cancer," said Harbold, "and this unit will give everybody, including the doctors and nurses, that opportunity."

The unit was proposed and is being pushed by Dr. Brigid Leventhal, the director of pediatric oncology at Hopkins.

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Baltimore man indicted on arson charges

Russell T. Baker, United States Attorney for the district of Maryland, this week announced the return of a four-count indictment charging David Lee, of Cockeysville, and Benjamin Lee, of New York City, with violations of federal law for the arson of the World bookstore, 214 W. Franklin St., on May 25, 1980.

Lee sold textbooks and other books at discount rates at the store, which had been previously located in Columbia, Maryland.

The indictment charges David Lee with mail fraud, aiding and abetting interstate travel in furtherance of an unlawful activity, and aiding and abetting the malicious destruction of a building.

Benjamin Lee is charged with interstate travel to further an unlawful activity, malicious destruction of a building, and malicious destruction of a building resulting in personal injury.

The mail fraud count carries a maximum penalty of five years imprisonment and a $1,000 fine.

The interstate travel count carries a maximum penalty of five years imprisonment and a $10,000 fine.

The malicious destruction of a building count carries a maximum penalty of ten years imprisonment and a $10,000 fine, while malicious destruction resulting in personal injury has a maximum fine of twenty years imprisonment and a $20,000 fine.

According to Baker, the indictment charges that David Lee, who was the operator of the retail bookstore, devised a scheme to defraud the insurance companies that had issued fire insurance coverage for the business.

The indictment charges that Lee (David) falsely represented to the insurance carriers that the fire at the store was not caused by any act, design, or procurement on his part; when, Baker stated, David Lee arranged for his brother to start the fire.

The indictment also charges that Benjamin Lee used an explosive device to destroy the building occupied by the bookstore.

Winston Hill has been sentenced on Maryland state charges for his role in the fire.

Baker stated that the indictment resulted from the cooperative efforts of the Baltimore City Arson Task Force and the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI).

The indictment was presented to the Grand Jury by Assistant United States Attorneys Stephen J. Immelt and Ty Cobb.

New accounting chief at Balto. Co. Hospital

Richard Wiley has joined the staff of Baltimore County General Hospital as patient accounts manager.

A native of Pittsburgh, Pa., Wiley has a B.A. degree in political science from Morgan State University. He is currently in the process of completing a master's degree in public administration at the University of Baltimore.

Wiley is a member of the American Management Association, American Guild for Patient Account Managers, Health Care Financial Administration, National Eagle Scouts Association and the Alpha Phi Alpha fraternity.

He is also assistant scoutmaster for Troop 138 in Baltimore city.

PERISCOPE ON POLITICS

By James M. Abraham
AFRO Staff Writer

Last week, the Baltimore branch of the NAACP held a forum on the past legislative session and its impact on the black community.

Half of the fourteen-member Baltimore black delegation showed up, probably ready to defend themselves against an onslaught of angry constituents.

But the legislators came well-prepared, and found that the audience, instead of hurling brickbats, was ready to listen and learn.

Although a team of crusty panelists managed to barrage the delegates and one senator present with 'tough, insightful' questions, the legislators proved more thanequal to the task of handlin the proved more than equal to the task of handling the queries

Fortunately, with the exception of Del. Troy Brailey, D-40, who was ill most of the session, those

(Continued on Page 30)

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