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SYLVIA BROWN

Sylvia has personally known the tragedy of leukemia and has been with the Southfield-based Leukemia Foundation from the days the disease was thought to afflict only children to the present, when it is a known killer of people of all ages.

## Leukemia Foundation: Year of caring

By JACKIE KLEIN

In 1952, a handful of anguished parents whose children had died of leukemia decided to fight back.

Conceived in heartbreak, born of despair and loneliness, Children's Leukemia Foundation (CLF) was formed by volunteers working from tables in kitchens, living rooms and dens. It was too late for them, but these parents were determined to minister to the needs of others and give as much as possible to research.

On a cold, snowy Sunday in February, 1976, four regular staff members and many volunteers, accompanied by truckloads of furniture, files and memorabilia, moved into new headquarters in Southfield.

They came with boxes of toys for the playroom and more solemn reminders of the year-round program of the foundation — wheelchairs, crutches and bedside tables.

When CLF celebrates its 25th anniversary in September, those who have volunteered their services over the years will be honored, said Sylvia Brown, executive director of the foundation. That will be a large order, Mrs. Brown maintains, because "volunteering is the magic word. We'd fold up without it."

MRS. BROWN and her husband, Harry, lost a little girl to leukemia 31

years ago. In her memory, the couple each year gives Sandy Ann Brown awards to persons who have contributed outstanding services to the foundation.

Mrs. Brown recalls that blustery moving day in February inside the echoing Southfield office, willing hands were putting desks and files in place, stocking the new playroom and storing sickroom equipment.

Outside the building, on Ten Mile between Evergreen and Southfield, was erected a mute but lasting tribute from the United Foundation — a brightly lit identification sign visible from freeways and highways leading into the city.

"Everybody is somebody's child," is the motto of CLF. But in 1960, for some unexplained reason, incidents of adult leukemia increased, Mrs. Brown said. The foundation has under its umbrella patients from five months to 80 years old, with all types of serious blood diseases.

Mrs. Brown and her staff keep in touch with numerous volunteer chapters spanning the entire state and with patients and their families.

A woman whose smile and manner radiates motherly warmth and the inner-serenity of one who gives of herself to others seven days a week, Mrs. Brown reminisced about when the foundation was incorporated and set

up in the Child Research Center in Detroit.

"In 1958, we decided we needed an office to pull the program together," she recalled. "We moved to Grand River, and I was retained as director at a nominal salary. We had a bank balance of \$116."

By 1961, the group had flourished and attracted other volunteers motivated not only by personal grief, but interest in the cause. We became a United Foundation service.

CLF, the only organization in the state offering free services to patients with serious blood diseases, moved to Seven Mile, increased its caseload, outgrew its office space and settled in Southfield.

"We support extensive research and implementation of the Leukopheresis program, which involves removal of white cells from donors needed to fight dangerous infections in patients," Mrs. Brown explained.

Medical science has come up with a means of giving leukemia patients a supply of infection-fighting white cells not present in the blood of those stricken with the disease. Without these cell transfusions, despite antibiotics and other therapies, infected patients would die, Mrs. Brown said.

Through blood donations, the foundation is able to provide blood free of charge to patients. Also provided for patients in remission are hospital beds, crutches, wheelchairs and other

equipment for home use.

"WE ALSO absorb the cost of medication with no ceiling on the amount," Mrs. Brown said. "We realize families are deprived in some way because of the high costs of prescription drugs and chemotherapy. We also bear the cost of emergency care."

"You can't tell a sick child that blood disease research and therapy may be the answer for him. We supply toys for youngsters who must undergo painful bone marrow tests and other regimens to make them a little more tolerable."

Mrs. Brown and volunteers entertain children afflicted with blood diseases at parties so they'll be less resentful. CLF provides counseling and practical advice for families of children diagnosed leukemic.

"Above and beyond all sympathy, care and service, research is our abiding concern," Mrs. Brown said. "We derive our funds in a number of ways and most of the money goes for research."

"I remember the days when we begged and borrowed money, had canister drives and waged door-to-door campaigns with about 50 volunteers."

"They dream we still live with day-to-day is to find an answer. Some of our patients have lived 10 or more years and are considered long-term survivors. We keep hoping for a lifetime cure, and then we'll be happy to go out of business."

## SRT will do 'The Tribe'

The Southfield Repertory Theatre Young People's Theatre will do "The Tribe" by Barbara Linden at 11 a.m. and 2 p.m. today as part of their Summer Mini-Season I.

Geared for audience participation and presented in the round, the production will be presented at the Southfield Civic Center, Parks and Recreation Building, 26000 Evergreen.

Appearing in the production are Joseph M. Ballor, Barbara Bean, Gail Betella, Leonard Bradley and Marlene Johnson.

Others are Henrietta Kryskalla,

Mark McKinney, Sue Rosenthal and Robert Seay. Guest direction is by Amy Joyce Smith.

General admission is \$2 with admission for schools, groups and senior citizens at \$1.75.

Under the artistic direction of Ralph Valaska, the Southfield Repertory Theatre is an adult professional company supported in part by the Southfield Arts Council, the city of Southfield and the Michigan Council for the Arts.

For further information call SRT at 559-2522 or Parks and Rec at 354-9603.

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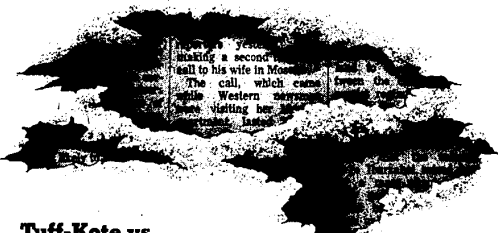


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