The Farmington Observer

Suburban Life

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'The big enemy here is ignorance'

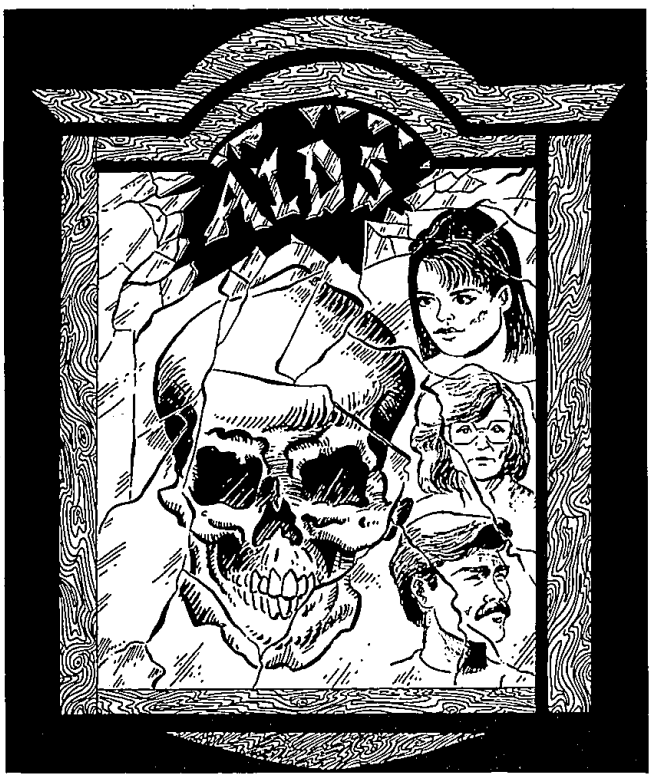

Illustration by MARVIN TEEPLES

Three people who face the presence of AIDS everyday recently told about the impact the fatal disease has had on their lives.

By Loraine McClish
staff writer

GARY IS a homosexual and a former intravenous drug user. He has been diagnosed as having AIDS Related Complex, sometimes referred to as ARC, a forerunner to what he refers to as full-blown AIDS.

Debbie has a brother who has AIDS and whose family expects him to die before the year is out.

Kim is a registered nurse who works with AIDS patients daily at Henry Ford Hospital, Detroit.

If there was one message the Farmington panel of three sent while telling their experiences with acquired immune deficiency syndrome (AIDS), it was, "Be kind."

Debbie, watching as her brother goes blind and simultaneously watching her parents' heart-rending frustrations as their son's health declines, expressed it best:

"Don't tell me it's the wrath of God. That doesn't help, and besides, I don't believe it. We're struggling to deal with the worst thing that has ever happened to us and we know about the family that has turned its back, the stigma that society has put on AIDS. The families and the patients need a little kindness.

"The big enemy here is ignorance."

Gary, Debbie and Kim were brought together by the Peace With Justice Committee of Salem United Church of Christ of Farmington to help dispel some of the ignorance. The Oct. 20 forum stemmed from a proposal for action within the United Church of Christ Synod to respond to the pandemic of AIDS in the world.

THE BAD news is that 600-700 people in Michigan now have full-blown AIDS; 60,000-70,000 people statewide have been exposed to it.

"That makes a potential for quite a problem," Gary said, adding that only 8 percent of the total are female.

The good news comes from Kim, who says, "AIDS is a very difficult disease to catch."

Kim is well aware of the AIDS stigma, the first of which came to her from her mother, outraged that her daughter would expose herself to the virus day after day, and, in turn, risk exposing members of her family.

"When we had our first AIDS patients, every employee in the hospital would put on a mask and gloves when they came anywhere near that room. The only thing we accomplished with that was to make the patient feel like a leper," she said.

"Now we know better, and I have no fear of sitting on a patient's bed because I am not at risk. That virus has got to get directly into your blood stream and you do this through a sex partner, sharing needles or through a blood transfusion.

"The most-recent study I read was one taken in the most-crowded of Hispanic families living in New York, where the people shared toothbrushes and razor blades and there was no incidence of AIDS at all. You just can't catch AIDS any other way than from one person's blood stream to another person's blood stream."

GARY'S LIFE made a turnaround when he learned he had pre-AIDS four years ago. He stopped using drugs and quit his job simultaneously. He's now volunteering himself — "acting as a guinea pig" — for an experimental drug through Ford Hospital. He is counseling and visiting AIDS patients in person or on the Wellness Networks AIDS hotline.

Gary has watched a lot of people die during those four years. Most of them are young, in the prime of their productive years. Most of them die in pain. Many die alone.

"Most newly diagnosed AIDS patients have to quit their jobs immediately and go on disability. I had no prescription coverage and those were running $200 every 10 days. That doesn't help the stress level. Every

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— Debbie
sister of AIDS patient

Tuned in

He can't let folk sound fade

By Shirlee Rose Iden
staff writer

JERRY ZOLYNSKY/staff photographer

Though he's a folk music lover and not a musician, Farmington Hills attorney Ken Knoppow has a mixing board, filers and any number of Folktown mementoes in his home.

Ken Knoppow calls himself a "no ability, no talent" lover of folk music. His wife, Laraine, calls him "obsessed."

However you measure it, Knoppow, a Farmington Hills attorney, comes out an unlikely impressario who "wants to keep the music going."

For Knoppow, "the music" means folk music, the kind he would go quite a distance to hear. To ensure enjoying his favorite genre of music, Knoppow founded the Folktown Coffeehouse in Southfield back in 1981.

"The last night The Raven was lit was Feb. 6, 1980," said Knoppow. "We opened Folktown on Feb. 6, 1981. With the Raven gone, I had to go to Ann Arbor, or Toronto, to hear folk music."

Determined to do something about the situation, Knoppow originally decided to look for a restaurant to buy or lease. "My wife discouraged me and instead I went to Southfield, which is centrally located and worked out an arrangement with the city."

FOLKTOWN OPENED with a series of eight Friday night concerts, a format that continued until the switch was made to Saturdays. "Station WDET has Saturday folk shows, so we can get our performers on radio and that helps," he said.

Not a musician, Knoppow said he "does everything" for Folktown.

"I work out the contract with the city of Southfield, I arrange for food, I ahlep equipment, I find housing for the performers, and I work with cable TV getting concerts on television."

Born and raised in Detroit, he went from kindergarten in a yeshivah in which his mother taught, to McCulloch and Bagley elementary schools, Post Intermediate, Mumford High School and Oakland University.

Along with his interest in music, he had nurtured an interest in law, and was graduated from the University of Michigan Law School. Knoppow practices general law from a Southfield office along with some immigration work and traffic related matters.

"AFTER GRADUATION, I worked for Secretary of State Austin, so I still get drunk driving defenses and cases like that," Knoppow said.

Knoppow and his wife, Laraine, live in Farmington Hills with their two daughters: Brianna, 6, and Alana, 3. "Alana was born on a concert night, unforgettable," said Knoppow, admitting that was the least convenient childbirth scenario possible.

Laraine Knoppow, an X-ray technician, also takes photos and videos at weddings and other parties.

Knoppow's interest in folk music goes back a long way, but around 1978 he heard about the Mariposa Concerts in Toronto and "was hooked, really got into the music."

"Essentially, Folktown is the only club like it in the metro area," he said. "We bring Michigan musicians, but also national and international performers. I've done immigration

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