

Tomorrow: Raising an Angel – Memoir Raises Funds for Tsunami Relief

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They have shared the ultimate desolation – the death of their daughter. Yet Claudia Vellozzi Averhoff and Francisco Averhoff are shouldering their sorrow to build a better tomorrow for countless other children.

Just after Monica died, they discovered a notebook of her poems. Now these poems have been collected into a book, and the proceeds are being donated to the Monica Anne Averhoff fund for the education of orphans and homeless children in Indonesia through the friends of Jakarta International School Foundation.

Vellozzi and Averhoff are both MD's and both work at CDC. After years of healing others, they now have the hard task of healing themselves, from a pain that will never end but will hopefully blur a bit as time goes by.

Vellozzi has been at CDC for about a year and half, working at NIP, in the Epidemiology and Surveillance Division where she is clinical team leader for smallpox vaccine adverse events and works with vaccine safety as well. Averhoff, who is also in NIP and ESD, works in the Viral Vaccine and Preventable Diseases Branch. He has been with CDC for 13 years, and was in the EIS class of 1992.

Monica was born September 2, 1990, in Geneva, Switzerland, where they were both working for the World Health Organization (WHO). The couple also has a second daughter, Cristina, born 19 months after Monica. (Cristina will be going into 8th grade next year).

In 2001 the family was living in Indonesia, where Averhoff was assigned by NIP to work with WHO as a medical officer for immunizations. They, along with other American personnel in Indonesia, were asked to evacuate following 9/11 and then again a year later when Bali was bombed.



Francisco Averhoff and Claudia Vellozzi spend a day at the beach with their daughters Cristina (left) and Monica and the family dogs. Monica died later that day.



The couple, who are both MD's and both work in NIP, are sharing Monica's poems, which have been collected into a book. The proceeds are being donated to the Monica Anne Averhoff fund for the education of orphans and homeless children in Indonesia through the friends of Jakarta International School Foundation. *Photo by Kathy Nellis*



Monica began writing poems in a spiral notebook at age 10. They were discovered after she died.

During the second evacuation in October 2002, they were living in temporary housing in Duluth, just outside Atlanta.

"We decided to spend the holiday weekend (Thanksgiving) at the beach in Florida, just the four of us and our dogs," says Vellozzi. "Still exhausted from our hectic travels, we simply needed a break."

"Thanksgiving Day was one of the best I can remember," she recalls. "We were in a rental beach house, each participating in creating our Thanksgiving meal."

The next day the family headed to the beach for horseback riding. It was then that Monica, aged 12, had a fatal accident, falling from her horse. Her foot got stuck in the stirrup and she was dragged down the beach.

"The day after she died, my sister found a beat up spiral notebook of poetry of Monica's," says her mother. "Apparently she had been writing poems for two years and we had never known it."

"A lot of the poems are pretty spiritual," says her father. "It's almost like she knew she was going to die."

This one, written March 6, 2002, is short, simple, and inspirational.

Untitled

*Don't go back in time,
Don't live your life in the future.
Concentrate on the present,
So it is fit to give someone as a gift.*

Now Monica's poems are a gift, not only to her friends and family, but to the orphans and homeless children of Indonesia. Her parents chose poems to go into a book, *Tomorrow: Raising an Angel*, with narrative by her mother woven throughout. There are dedications and remembrances from those close to Monica. But the poems tell their own story, of a young girl, brimming with life, love and happiness.

These are Monica's "Rules of Life," written at age 11, six months before she died.

Rules of Life

*Love life, you only get to live it once.
Live life to the fullest.*

Live life for others.

It is better to be happy and have fun for five minutes, than to be always sad and bored.

*Don't test people for friendship; trust that they will be good friends.
Feel lucky even if you have only one friend, it is better than none.*

Trust yourself.

Do what you think is best.

Give everything you can.

Always be optimistic.

"We thought the poems were fantastic," says Vellozzi. "A friend of ours, Paula Yoon, who also works at CDC, transcribed them on her computer and we made them into a pamphlet to share with friends. For us, it's like sharing Monica."



Another family beach vacation. "Thousand Islands are off the coast of Java outside of Jakarta. You can drive there and then take a boat to one of many small islands. We spent a long weekend there just to get away with some friends," recalls Vellozzi.



The family vacationing in Lombok, east of Bali, a beautiful place with "unbelievable white sand and deserted beaches," says Vellozzi. "It's gorgeous. We went there for one of the school breaks. We snorkled here and we got stung by Portuguese Man of war jelly fish-very painful and scary."

They contacted a publisher and the book idea was already in the works when the tsunami hit Indonesia. "We decided to donate the proceeds there," says Vellozzi. "It just made sense and it's something that would please Monica. She was always such a sharing, giving child. She had signed up to work in a local orphanage there before we were evacuated. After she died, we found out that she had been visiting one of the kids in Jakarta in the hospital. The child had a blood disorder and Monica used to call her and take her books. We never knew that."

The family, through their contacts at the International School in Jakarta, has identified a girl, age 12, who lost her family and a limb during the tsunami. They have decided to support her surgery for a prosthesis and schooling until she graduates. They are also hoping to raise enough money to support the building of a library of a school that was destroyed in Sumatra by the tsunami. "Monica loved to read, we think this would be a fitting tribute to her, especially in Indonesia, where she blossomed," says her father.

"She filled us with pride, the way she approached life," says Averhoff. "She was always so optimistic. We were a very close family, always. I have always made family a priority and I am so thankful for that."

Living overseas drew them even closer, says Vellozzi. "In Indonesia we had so



The book *Tomorrow: Raising an Angel* is published by Little Treasure Books and may be purchased at www.littletreasurebooks.com. All proceeds go to the Monica Averhoff Fund. Photo by Kathy Nellis

much time together as a family, we really bonded, it was lovely.”

At the time of Monica’s death, Vellozzi was not yet working with CDC. She had been in private practice as a family physician and worked as a physician at the American Embassy in Indonesia. She did not come to CDC until 11 months after her daughter died. Averhoff, however, reflects about the support from his CDC family. “I felt like CDC and in particular my supervisors at the Global Immunizations Division at NIP really were there for me – Bob Keegan, Denise Johnson, Hamid Jafari. Martin Landry, who has also lost a child, spoke and met with me during the months that followed, it really helped. Really, the NIP community stepped up to the plate and just helped us get through it.”

Monica died November 29, 2002. But her spirit lives on, in the hearts of her family and friends and now in this beautiful book.

“Monica’s poems make you want to be a better person,” says Dave Hennen, CNN Senior Producer.

“The creative and open spirit of this remarkable young woman can be clearly seen through her poetry,” says James Fallows, National Correspondent, *The Atlantic Monthly*.

Some of her writing seems eerily prophetic. In one poem, two young rivals run a race and one stumbles and hits her head and dies. The last two lines are:

*“I’ll be waiting in heaven for you.”
Then the light just disappeared.
The End*

Averhoff likes her “Africa Poem,” a lyrical and picturesque ode to an exotic place. “During our second evacuation, Monica suggested that we should consider our next post in Swaziland,” says her father. “She was so full of life and adventure.” The poem concludes:

*Shading your eyes from the sun’s blazing rays
You must be lucky,
Living here all your days.*

Vellozzi’s favorite is “The Flight of the Sparrow.” She says “it’s child-like and full of animals but so well-written. In the end she gets carried away on the back of a sparrow. To me, it’s like she died and went to heaven.”

*And before I knew it
I was gliding up above the clouds,
On the back of a sparrow.
All around me was blue,
A cool breeze rippled through my hair.
I was free!
I had a new freedom.*

The memoir/poetry book is a beautiful glimpse into the heart and soul of a young girl who died too soon, a curly-haired beauty who loved to laugh and dance, who was a child but yet seemed wise beyond her years; creative, curious, fun-filled. Her bright star shines on in her poetry.

Into the Mist

*Coming out with a solution,
already knowing the answer,
coming back to life,
Only to know it.*

*Grieving over loss,
Knowing they’ll come back,*

For once.

*Walking on with a head held high,
Not losing yourself,
on your journey.*

*Taking care of yourself through time,
Otherwise dying away into the dust.
Fighting harder all the time,
On the brink of giving up each day.
Finally giving up.
Only to explore better places.*

*Looking up to the stars,
always knowing they'll be there,
Wanting to believe that your heart's desire,
Will be there too.*

*Closing your eyes,
once and for all,
Disappearing with your soul,
Into the mist.*

This ***Inside Story*** by **CDC Connects** reporter Kathy Nellis. The book is published by Little Treasure Books and may be purchased at www.littletreasurebooks.com. All proceeds go to the Monica Averhoff Fund.