NANCY LOVE

Early every morning, Nancy would wake to feed the birds. She would go downstairs to her mother's candlelit kitchen to prepare the suet and the seeds. Then, quietly and matter-of-factly, she would go outside, in all kinds of weather, and call to the birds by ringing a bell on her wrist.

And the birds came—from all directions—almost as if they knew her call. She would talk to old bird friends and greet the new ones who had stopped by for a meal. The birds would sit on the fence in the backyard, singing and eating as her father's two hunting dogs pawled in frustration, not being able to get at all those birds. But the birds were safe under Nancy's watchful eyes, and somehow I think they knew it.

Even as she became more and more sick with AIDS, Nancy would feed those birds, and watch them out of her window. She was determined, no matter how sick or dispirited, to feed them. I know Nancy was nourished by them in return, as her ties with the world began to fade, and as bitterness in the face of her disease at times overshadowed her great capacity for joy.

I knew Nancy for 12 years. We met in college and became fast friends. Besides being a terrific, passionate bird watcher, she was a gifted gardener and an all-around true lover of nature. She was a keen and insightful and humorous observer of and writer about the human condition. She was inquisitive about the world around her and so open to people. She loved books by Gabriel Garcia Marquez; Lily Tomlin made her laugh a lot. She valued mystery and wonder in life. She was so many things, so many dreams and hopes and confusions and contradictions and questions. She was my friend and I love her.

The day after Nancy's funeral, I bought a bird feeder. When birds come to the feeder, I think that Nancy is visiting, too.

Once, when I was feeling very out-of-sorts, Nancy wrote "Keep your wings flapping and pretty soon you will fly again!" I think of her soaring spirit, and feel her around and inside of me when life seems bleak. And, somewhere, I know that she is flying.

Barbara Shaw
Nancy Love