

Living with Dignity

Sacred Heart House - a Photo Essay

all pictures by Graeme Williams

The Sacred Heart House hospice was opened in December 1990 in order to provide a sanctuary for people who suffer from AIDS-related illnesses and are unable to look after themselves. The hospice is situated in Kensington, in Johannesburg, and relies on donations from businesses and individuals. It can accommodate up to 14 patients and provides 24-hour nursing care and counselling.

Sister Cecelia, a Catholic nun from the nearby Assumption Convent heads a team of care workers who look after the patients.

Most of the pictures selected here depict HIV positive men at Sacred Heart sharing each other's time and taking care of each other. It shows HIV positive people as active agents of care and prevention, and no mere victims of a horrific disease. It is a reminder of an important remark made by Shaun Mellors, of Friends for Life, that HIV positive people should be encouraged to become involved in all structures and committees working in the field of AIDS care and prevention. As the tone of the pictures is of compassion between HIV positive people, it is fitting perhaps to introduce this photo essay with a poem by Shaun.

AIDS is so limited

It cannot kill friendship, nor cripple love,
as we befriend and love in return.
It cannot corrode faith, if we believe,
nor destroy confidence,
hope or silence our courage. We,
who are brave and proud.
It cannot kill peace, if we're committed
nor still the memory of lovers and friends
who passed before us.
It cannot invade the soul or reduce eternal life.
It cannot quench the spirit
or stunt the plant of hope.



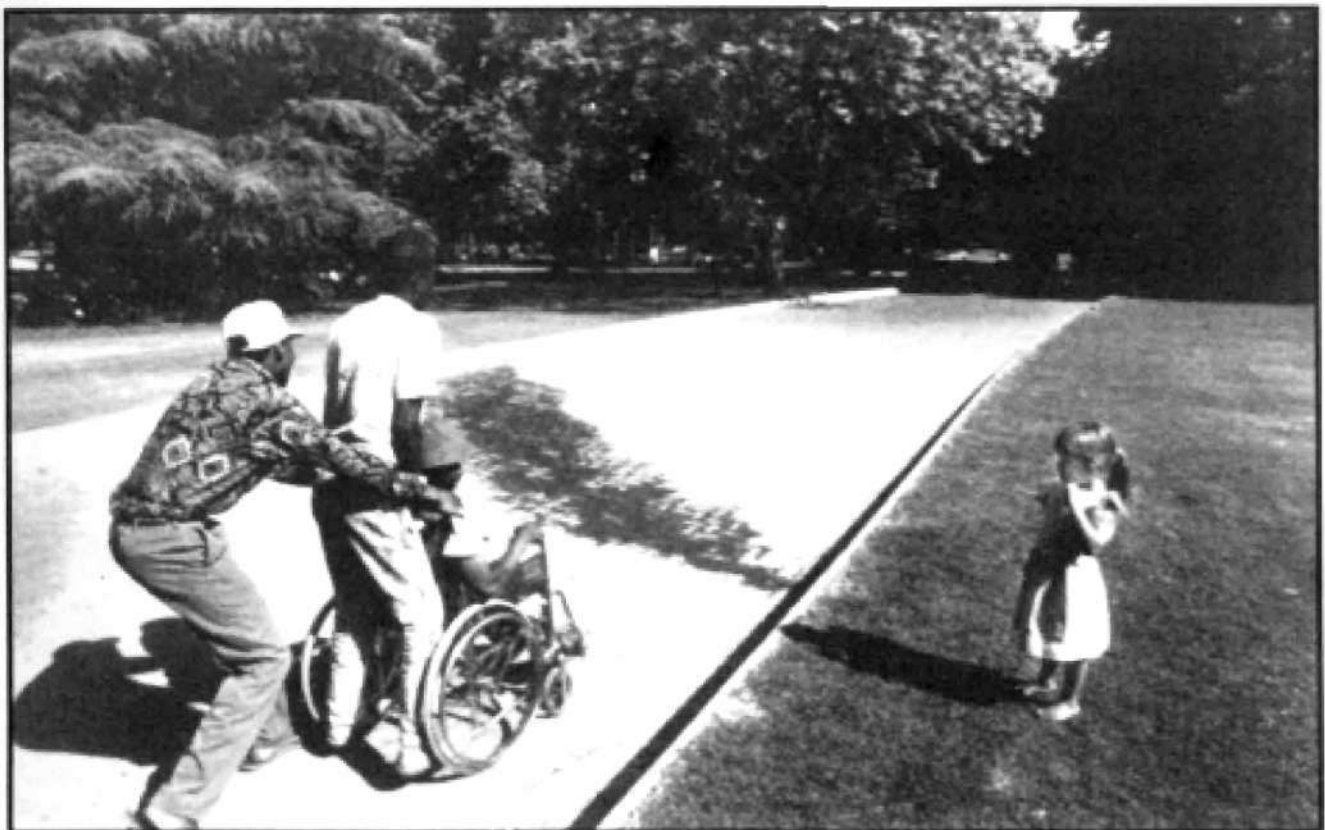
Sister Cecilia washes Shadrack upon his arrival



Pietro spends night with Shadrack



Pietro and Roger buy snacks at the local cafe



Volunteer Martin pushed Shadrack at the Johannesburg zoo



Pietro comforts Roger.



Pietro wipes a tear from Roger's face.



Roger and Phineas catch last sunlight before going in.



Andre struggles to breath while sister Val looks on.



Sister Cecilia with Andre a few hours before he died

Graeme Williams is a freelance photographer. These pictures are part of an exhibition held at the Market Theatre in Johannesburg late in 1992