

And I Don't Want to Live This Life Study Guide

And I Don't Want to Live This Life by Deborah Spungen

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Plot Summary

And I Don't Want to Live This Life is a biography of the life of Nancy Spungen written by her mother, Deborah Spungen. Nancy Spungen was famous for being the girlfriend of Sid Vicious, bass player for the punk band The Sex Pistols. Before Nancy was famous, however, she was a troubled young girl whose parents fought to find her the help she needed. In this biography, Deborah Spungen tells the truth about her daughter's difficult childhood, her struggle with drugs, and her attempts to find the happiness that seemed to elude her at every corner. *And I Don't Want to Live This Life* is a tragic, honest book about a child who was loved as much as she hurt.

Deborah Spungen became pregnant with her first child, Nancy, at a time when a pregnancy was the last thing on her mind. Deborah was finishing her final year of college and her new husband was in the military, stationed clear across the country from their home in Pennsylvania. Deborah found herself struggling with a pregnancy she did not understand, unable to turn to her disappointed mother or her overworked obstetrician. Deborah's husband returned just in time for Deborah to go into labor five weeks early with Nancy. Deborah was anesthetized and had no idea what had taken place during this dramatic delivery until hours later when the doctor informed her that her daughter was born cyanotic, lacking oxygen, and that she was extremely jaundiced. The first time Deborah saw her daughter was through the nursery glass, moments before the infant was to be taken to the operating room for a blood transfusion.

Little Nancy survived her early ordeal and was allowed to go home. However, Deborah soon discovered that Nancy was a difficult infant. Nancy cried twenty-four hours a day, only calming in her sleep, sleep that would rarely last for more than an hour or so at a time. Deborah and her husband Frank found themselves walking around on egg shells when Nancy was resting, afraid that even the flip of a light switch might wake her. When Deborah turned to her pediatrician for help, he accused her of being inexperienced and then prescribed Phenobarbital to calm the baby long enough to allow her parents to sleep. Despite Nancy's constant crying, she grew and developed at an amazing rate. Nancy crawled early and would constantly be on the move. Nancy learned to talk early as well, often having verbal tantrums, threatening to destroy her mother's belongings at the young age of two.

Deborah and Frank moved into a new house when Nancy was still a toddler, a move that deeply traumatized Nancy. Soon after, their second child, Susan, was born. Nancy resented Susan and would often go out of her way to torture the little girl. Within a few years, Deborah and Frank welcomed a son into their home as well. This time Nancy took to the new infant with excitement, more than happy to help out with his care. However, when Nancy began school, her difficult behavior returned. Nancy would have trouble making friends and would sometimes come home from school convinced that everyone at the school was out to get her.

Deborah and Frank decided to take Nancy to a psychiatrist and have her evaluated. After months of testing, the clinic they turned to decided that nothing was wrong with



Nancy that a few behavior modifications could not fix. However, despite their attempts to do as the doctors asked, Nancy's behaviors grew worse. Another psychiatric clinic evaluated Nancy and placed the blame for her behaviors on the parents. Nancy began therapy with a doctor, but whenever Deborah would reach out to this doctor for help with Nancy's behavior, it would be assumed that Deborah was overreacting or exaggerating Nancy's behaviors. Even a bad reaction to a sedative did nothing to convince the doctor. Finally, however, when Nancy attacked the doctor and destroyed her office the doctor began to believe Deborah's claims. Unfortunately, despite having come to the conclusion that Nancy was schizophrenic, the director of the hospital told Deborah and Frank they were no longer equipped to deal with Nancy. This director failed to tell the Spungens about his belief that Nancy was schizophrenic or to recommend further testing.

At this point Nancy had been thrown out of public school and Deborah was left to find a private situation for her. After months of searching, Deborah found Darlington, a private school system designed to help children with emotional and behavioral problems. Nancy was interviewed by the school and they agreed to accept her into their program in Connecticut. Deborah and Frank took their daughter to the school and left her in the care of the directors there, hoping that this one last chance would be the one to save their daughter. Nancy was only eleven.

Nancy did well at the school. However, when she returned the following year and a new director was in charge, Nancy's behavior once again escalated. Soon the school decided they could no longer handle Nancy and they transferred her to another of the Darlington schools in Pennsylvania. It was at this second school, the Avon Unit, that Nancy was introduced to illegal drugs. Nancy would come home on school breaks and smoke cigarettes in the kitchen and marijuana in the bedroom. Despite discussions with their parents against illegal drugs, Deborah and Frank soon discovered that their other two children were also smoking marijuana. This caused Deborah and Frank to be placed in a difficult position when the Darlington system decided the best way to get rid of Nancy was to graduate her at sixteen. Unable to have Nancy around their younger children, Deborah and Frank agreed to allow Nancy to go to college in Colorado where she had already been accepted at the University of Colorado.

After only a few months, Frank received a call from the Denver police alerting him that Nancy had been arrested in a case involving stolen skis. The only way Nancy could avoid being charged with theft was to agree to leave Colorado immediately. Nancy returned to Pennsylvania and her parents' home. Nancy was to get a job and work toward independence, but like school, Nancy had trouble getting along with others, causing her to lose the one job she managed to get. Nancy began sleeping all day and partying all night. In time the Spungens knew they had to move Nancy out of their home. Deborah arranged for Nancy to take an apartment in New York City, not far from the Chelsea Hotel.

Nancy did well in New York at first. However, Nancy's growing dependency on illegal drugs soon took over and she found herself unable to care for herself or to make the money she needed to survive. Nancy eventually got into a methadone program and



kicked the heroin addiction. Soon after that, Nancy moved to London to be a part of the music scene that was growing there. It was in London that Nancy met Sid Vicious, bass player for the Sex Pistols. When the Sex Pistols broke up, Nancy and Sid moved back to New York to attempt to launch Sid's solo career. Nancy had begun using heroin again in London and Deborah was in the middle of attempting to get her and Sid into a methadone program when she got the word that Nancy had been murdered.

The Spungens suddenly became front page news, with reporters camping on their front lawn. Frank and Deborah could not leave their cars to enter their home without being hounded by dozens of reporters, both from the United States and London. To make matters worse, the Spungens were treated with a great deal of disrespect when they dealt with the coroner and the district attorney dealing with their daughter's murder. It soon got to the point that Deborah was afraid to go home alone. After Sid Vicious' death a few months later, Deborah decided to sell the house and make a new start of it. This caused some turmoil for the rest of the family who felt that Deborah was attempted to pretend Nancy never existed. The family would have to enter counseling in order to see the impact Nancy had on their lives and was still having. It took time, but eventually the Spungens were able to put their lives back together and move on.



The Aftermath and Chapters 1-2

The Aftermath and Chapters 1-2 Summary and Analysis

Deborah Spungen is the mother of Nancy Spungen. Nancy was famous for being the girlfriend of Sex Pistols' bass player, Sid Vicious. The Spungen family was overwhelmed by the negative press surrounded her daughter and her murder. Therefore, Deborah Spungen felt compelled to write this book in order to set the record straight about her daughter and to maybe help another family going through what they have gone through.

In *The Aftermath*, Deborah Spungen, overwhelmed by the death of her daughter and the press surrounding the overdose death of her murderer, thinks about suicide. In chapter 1, Deborah Spungen went into labor five weeks early with her first child and was frightened, but her doctor brushed off her concerns. Nancy was born cyanotic and she developed a severe case of jaundice. Deborah saw her baby for the first time through the glass wall of the nursery in the minutes before she was taken to the operating room for a transfusion that could have killed her. The blood transfusion worked and Nancy was allowed to go home a short time later after the doctors declared her perfectly normal.

In chapter 2, The first time Deborah was left alone with the baby, the baby cried for hours for no apparent reason. Deborah blamed herself. The baby would continue to cry for hours. After they moved into their own apartment, Deborah took Nancy to a new pediatrician and insisted something was wrong with her. The doctor said Deborah was being too indulgent. Finally, faced with Deborah's multiple complaints, the doctor prescribed phenobarbital for Nancy. The medicine helped, but was not a cure.

In these first few chapters of the book, Deborah introduces the reader to her relationship with Nancy by describing her despair when her grief for her daughter was tainted by the overwhelming rudeness and intrusion of the press. Deborah wants to commit suicide in the prologue to her book, admitting to the reader that the combination of the press and the reality of her daughter's murder were just too overwhelming for her to deal with. Deborah could not even cry for her child. However, Deborah made a promise to give her daughter a good life, and this promise has been fulfilled in the writing of the book. Through this admission, the reader not only gets to see Deborah's overwhelming grief and hurt, but to understand her perspective in writing this book before it has even begun to tell Nancy's story. From this prologue, the reader recognizes that this book is not only a biography, but it is a grieving mother's way of dealing with the troubled life and tragic death of her oldest daughter.

In the first two chapters, Deborah takes the reader through the pregnancy, birth, and first year of Nancy's life. Nancy had a difficult life from the very beginning, being born early and with problems. This was a terrible time for Deborah, a first time mother who is faced with the possibility that her first born might die before she can even take her



home. This created a bond between mother and child that left Deborah feeling maybe a little more responsible for this life than perhaps a typical new mother might feel. This loyalty is tested from the beginning, however, when Nancy begins life with tears twenty-four hours a day. Anyone who has been around an infant knows how difficult this can be, especially when a parent cannot find a cause other than their own inexperience. This belief that she was at fault for Nancy's pain begins a cycle that will continue throughout Nancy's life of Deborah blaming herself for her daughter's unexplained pain. At this same time, Deborah turns to the medical community for help and is given drugs to mask Nancy's problems. This two will begin a cycle that the Spungens will find themselves on, them begging for help and getting excuses and drugs rather than honesty. It could also be the beginning of a drug addiction that will be the theme of Nancy's final years, leading to her death.



Chapters 3-4

Chapters 3-4 Summary and Analysis

In chapter 3, Frank and Deborah had a second child, Susan. Shortly after Susan's birth, the Spungens bought their first house. After the move, Nancy began having temper tantrums. Nancy's tantrums would be extreme, involving hyperventilation and violence. These tantrums would happen everyday and sometimes for something as simple as accidentally coloring outside the lines. As Nancy's verbal skills grew, she would begin having verbal tantrums in which she would threaten to damage people's belongings. Nancy also had horrible nightmares that would wake her causing Deborah to sit up nights attempting to calm her. When Deborah spoke to the doctor about these things, he brushed them off as normal two year old behaviors. Even Frank brushed them off when Deborah insisted something was wrong. Deborah gave birth to her third child when Nancy was three. Deborah had to be hospitalized shortly after for kidney surgery and then David suffered an abdominal obstruction. During that time Nancy was an angel, making Deborah question her belief that something was fundamentally wrong with her eldest daughter. However, the odd behaviors soon returned. Frank agreed to take Nancy to a psychiatrist where she was tested over a period of months. The clinic's advice was to take Nancy home and love her.

In chapter 4, Nancy began school. In less than six weeks, Nancy was moved up to first grade. In second grade, Nancy was doing fourth and fifth grade level work. However, Nancy had trouble making and keeping friends. About this time, Frank began making overnight trips to New York for business. Deborah began feeling alone in the struggle to care for Nancy. This eventually led to an affair. The affair lasted about a year. Sometime later, Frank asked for a divorce. In course of discussing the possibility, it came out that he too had had an affair. Frank and Deborah decided to make their marriage work.

In these chapters, Deborah discusses Nancy's early childhood and the impact having two more children had on Nancy's behaviors. From the beginning it seems clear that Nancy was not happy to share her home and her parents with Susan. Nancy ignored the baby, then began to torture Susan as they grew older. Nancy would steal away Susan's friends and belongings, doing all she could to annoy her younger sister. At the same time, David's birth and that health crisis that took place afterward brought out a gentleness in Nancy that had not been obvious before. Nancy was an angry child who became frustrated easily and would have temper tantrums when she was frustrated. Nancy would scream and yell for hours on end for simple things, like her own mistake in coloring. This seems unusual to the reader, like a sign that something is not right with this child. However, Deborah and Frank did what any other parent would do and took their daughter to a psychiatric clinic. The overall consensus was that Nancy was simply too intelligent and she needed a structured environment where she would be challenged. Deborah and Frank embraced this conclusion because they needed to believe there was nothing wrong with their daughter. However, the reader finds this



confusing based on Nancy's easy frustration. The reader has to wonder if maybe there might be another reason for Nancy's fits other than boredom.

Deborah relates to the reader in these chapters an affair she had. Deborah openly blames the stress that Nancy caused the family for the affair she had and for her husband's decisions to avoid the home as often as possible. This shows the reader how much stress Nancy's frequent tantrums put on her parents, perhaps showing better than anything else could how difficult Nancy was to get along with. Nancy was so difficult that two people who truly loved each other were willing to throw their life together away in order to deal better with Nancy's difficult behavior.



Chapters 5-6

Chapters 5-6 Summary and Analysis

In chapter 5, the Spungens bought a new house. During that time, Deborah and Frank saw the musical Hair and bought the soundtrack. From the first time nine year old Nancy heard the album she was fascinated, often playing it over and over again. This began a fascination in rock and roll for Nancy. Nancy's odd behavior expanded during this time. Deborah once caught Nancy standing at the top of the stairs with the family cat in a bag, ready to throw it down to see if it would land on its feet. Suddenly Nancy seemed to come out of a spell and was shocked to discover what she had almost done. Deborah took Nancy to another psychiatric clinic and she was once again tested. This time the clinic recommended therapy for both Nancy and her parents, in essence blaming Deborah and Frank for Nancy's uncontrollable behavior.

In chapter 6, the Spungens religiously followed the instructions of the clinic, going to their group and individual therapy sessions despite the fact that they disliked them. During this time, Nancy suffered from a throat infection and was given a prescription for Atarax to help her sleep. Minutes after the first dose, Nancy had a horrible reaction that caused her to hallucinate and act out violently. The only advice the psychiatrist gave Deborah was to never give the drug to Nancy again. A few weeks later, the Spungens were in New York when Nancy learned Hair was going to be performed in Central Park for free. Nancy wanted to stay, but her parents refused. Before they could leave, Nancy disappeared. Nancy was finally found by a local cop at the end of the concert. The Spungens did not punish Nancy for her actions because she had what they called the look and they knew it would make no impact. The psychiatrist criticized them for this.

A few days later, Nancy hyperventilated while making a bracelet with some neighborhood girls and she dropped her beads. Deborah took her to the emergency room where she promptly revealed her stress was an act and she locked herself in the examining room. Again the Spungens were criticized by the psychiatrist for their actions. A few days later, Nancy attacked her sister. This led to a meltdown at the dinner table and Nancy leaving the house. Frank followed and accidentally caused Nancy to pull her arm out of the socket in an attempt to force her to return home. Sometime later, Deborah and Frank went on a trip together, leaving the children with a sitter and Deborah's mother. During their absence, Nancy attempted to stab the babysitter with a knife, stopped only by her grandmother's successful attempt at taking the knife away. Nancy also began refusing to go to school. This behavior caused the school to ask the Spungens not to bring their daughter back. At her next visit to the psychiatrist, Nancy became angry when the doctor would not tell her where she was from and destroyed her office. The doctor decided she could no longer handle Nancy. The director of the clinic visited with Nancy and told her parents they could no longer handle her case. After Nancy's death, Deborah would learn that the director had believed that Nancy might be schizophrenic, but he neither told her parents this nor recommended further treatment.



In these chapters, the Spungens reached out to the medical community again in hopes of finding an answer to their daughter's odd behaviors. They did not find one. Nancy's behavior only continued to become more odd, including moment in which she appeared to be going into some sort of trance that left her unable to recognize the right or wrong in her choices. Nancy would get a look that her parents called The Look, a look that included a frown and glazed over eyes. This look would warn the Spungens that Nancy was not herself, that her actions might become strange, and that she could become violent. The Spungens tried to relate this information to the medical community to whom they turned to for help, but in this instance, it is clear that the medical community let them down. Even as Nancy is taking a knife to the babysitter and pulling her own hair out by the roots, the psychiatric community ignores her pleas for help and instead blames her parents for these outrageous behaviors. It has gotten to the point where even Deborah Spungen blames herself because she cannot argue with the wisdom of the educated people who are supposed to recognize mental illness when they see it. However, it turns out the clinic did eventually realize Nancy was ill, they simply could not believe how ill because of her young age. As a result, they tossed her away and refused to offer her the drugs and therapies that would have changed the direction of her life. It is at this point that the tone of the novel becomes not only frustrated, but angry as well.



Chapters 7-9

Chapters 7-9 Summary and Analysis

In chapter 7, Deborah got Nancy a new psychiatrist through her pediatrician. This psychiatrist recommended Nancy be placed in a residential treatment center/school facility. Deborah began searching for a school that would take Nancy, but cost proved to be an impediment. During this time, Nancy attacked her mother with a hammer because she refused to take her to a museum. A call to the psychiatrist after this attack led to him prescribing thorazine for Nancy. A short time later, the psychiatrist had Nancy admitted to a psychiatric hospital. When Frank and Deborah went to visit and learned that Nancy was in the women's ward, they demanded that Nancy be released immediately. Deborah finally found Nancy a school. Nancy would go to the Barton Unit of the Darlington school system in Connecticut.

In chapter 8, the Spungens delivered Nancy to school. It was difficult for the Spungens to leave Nancy, but she seemed to be adjusting well. At the end of the semester, the Spungens were overjoyed to learn Nancy was doing well and she was expected to be allowed to return to public school in time to begin high school. However, when Nancy returned to Barton the following year, the kindly Bebees were gone, replaced by an overwhelmed young man. Nancy had trouble adjusting that year and did not progress as well as she had before. During the Christmas break, Nancy's behavior became odd once more. Nancy became paranoid, convinced her mother was making phone calls about her. Nancy also told a cousin she was doing drugs at Barton. At the end of the following semester, the people at Barton decided they could no longer handle Nancy and had her transferred to the Avon unit of Darlington in Pennsylvania.

In chapter 9, Nancy began school at Lakeside Campus, the Avon unit of Darlington. The school had more girls and less supervision. Nancy complained constantly about the school and when she returned for the holiday break, she was smoking. This caused more tension in the household. When Susan told Deborah that Nancy was using illegal drugs, immediately contacted the school. The director denied that anyone at the school used drugs, except for maybe some marijuana. About this same time, Deborah began noticing pieces of her jewelry missing from her room. At about this same time, Nancy was given neurological testing as a part of a request by the Spungens to get state funding for her school expenses. Nancy was found no conclusive evidence that Nancy suffered a tumor or brain damage from her troubled birth.

In these chapters, Nancy is once again medicated for her behaviors. This is part of a pattern that began when Nancy was only an infant and has thus far done very little to address Nancy's overall behavioral problems. The Spungens have Nancy hospitalized, but immediately have her released when they learn their eleven year old daughter has been placed with the older women because the juvenile department cannot handle her intensive problems. This tells the reader two things, first, that Nancy's problems are far deeper than simple parental neglect or overindulgence, and second, that Nancy's



parents are far more interested in protecting their daughter than placing her in a dangerous situation that could lead to only more disappointment.

Nancy begins school in the Darlington system and does well when she has the undivided attention of a caring, elderly couple. However, when this system changes and Nancy finds herself just one among many, she again begins to deteriorate. The reader must wonder if perhaps Nancy might have done well with her parents had they not decided to have more children. However, the reader must also realize that no parent can give a child the attention Nancy needed and that this is just another symptom of her overwhelming problems. It is also discovered that whatever is causing Nancy's trouble is not a direct result of any physical problems or her traumatic birth, leaving the reader convinced that perhaps Nancy is schizophrenic like a previous doctor thought, but did not tell. This makes the reader wonder once again how her life might have differed if the medical community had not failed her. Finally, when Nancy is moved to Lakeside Campus she begins using drugs, a theme of the book. This is the final step in a pattern that began in her childhood and appears to be Nancy's way of self medicating. The reader knows where this will take Nancy and wonders how the pattern could have been broken.



Chapters 10-12

Chapters 10-12 Summary and Analysis

In chapter 10, Nancy introduced her parents to her first boyfriend. Jeff was a member of a band that formed at Lakeside Campus. Shortly after that time, Nancy became convinced that she was pregnant and she perforated her uterus in an attempted abortion. However, Nancy had never been pregnant. At Christmas Deborah caught Susan with a joint and learned that Nancy had given it to her. It was after this that Deborah learned about Dr. Cott, a doctor in New York who treated schizophrenics with homeopathy. When Deborah and Frank described Nancy's behavior to him, Dr. Cott agreed that Nancy was schizophrenic and agreed to treat her. In chapter 11, Deborah contacted Darlington and told them she would be taking Nancy out of school for a month to be treated by Dr. Cott. Darlington told Deborah if she did that, Nancy would lose her spot at the school. Dr. Cott told Deborah that it would be better to leave Nancy where she was, taking away their one chance to have Nancy treated. A short time later, the director of Avon told the Spungens that they wanted to graduate Nancy at fifteen. When Deborah objected, they agreed to keep her another year. When Nancy learned of her mother's reaction, she attempted suicide. A week later she tried again and almost succeeded.

In chapter 12, Nancy settled down in her final year at Avon and even went to the prom. Nancy bought a slinky, inappropriate dress for the prom, but was so excited about it that her parents allowed her to wear it. Nancy would later be buried in that dress. Nancy graduated from Avon and was accepted to the University of Colorado on the condition that she take summer school classes before the fall. Deborah and Frank flew with Nancy to Boulder at the beginning of summer school and Nancy was calm, happy when they left. However, it did not last. When Nancy returned home after summer school, she returned to her difficult behavior. It was almost a relief when Nancy returned to school that fall. Over Thanksgiving, Frank got a call that Nancy had been arrested. Frank flew to Boulder and discovered that Nancy was arrested in connection to some stolen skis, but that her arrest could compromise an ongoing federal drug investigation. Frank was told that the police would drop the charges if Nancy would leave school and return to Philadelphia. Nancy was not happy to leave school and fell into a brief depression. Deborah convinced Nancy to look for a job and to help, loaned Nancy her car. A few days later, Nancy was arrested for reckless driving after she wrecked the car. As a result, the Spungens chose to commit her in order to get her out of jail.

In these chapters, the Spungens had another chance to have Nancy treated for her illness, but were once again forced to give it up. The school system would not allow Nancy to leave for a month, but a month was required by the doctor willing to help. This left the Spungens in a quandary and they chose to leave Nancy in the school where she was exposed to illegal drugs and was not getting the help she needed. Then the school immediately turned around and announced they wanted to allow Nancy to graduate at fifteen because they could no longer handle her behaviors. Once again, the system let



Nancy down and left the Spungens scrambling for a way to help their daughter and protect their other children.

The tensions at home are also becoming noticeable in this section of the book, touching on the theme of the difficult child and the family. The reader can see how dealing with Nancy has caused hurt feelings and rift between each member of the family. It is difficult living with a child with problems and Nancy's problems seem extreme to the reader. Not only is Nancy difficult at home and in the school setting, but she also becomes something of a problem to the public, getting arrested twice in a very short time. The reader begins to wonder what will happen to Nancy if her parents are not able to find her help one more time.



Chapters 13-15

Chapters 13-15 Summary and Analysis

In chapter 13, the Spungens took Nancy to two hospitals in an attempt to commit her. The first hospital decided there was no reason to admit Nancy while the second agreed she needed their help. Nancy had a screaming fit when they took her inside. The doctor told them a few days later he had decided to release Nancy because there was nothing they could do for her. Nancy was placed in the out-patient care of another psychiatrist. Nancy stole the family car, so Frank began taking the distributor cap off of it every night. Nancy reacted by putting her arms through the window. When the psychiatrist learned this, he dropped her as a patient, claiming she was too disturbed for his practice. A few weeks later at Nancy's hearing for the reckless driving charge, the judge publicly blamed Deborah for her daughter's actions.

In chapter 14, Deborah insisted that Nancy get a job, but she was fired from the first one she attempted and gave up. Nancy began sleeping all day and going out all night with a group of friends. Nancy would often bring people home with her, exposing her younger brother and sister to the dangers of drugged out or drunk teenagers. Nancy was actively taking drugs during that time, getting the money from things she would steal from the house. The only benefit of Nancy's behavior was that Susan and David stopped emulating her. About that same time, Nancy became a rock groupie, hanging out with up and coming bands, often bringing some of them home. Deborah became afraid during this point that Nancy would become pregnant, therefore she was relieved when a doctor told her that Nancy had an underdeveloped uterus and would most likely never be able to have children. Frank and Deborah attempted to lecture Nancy into better behavior, but she only threatened to burn the house down, leaving them desperate for change.

In chapter 15, Deborah and Frank decided to help Nancy get an apartment in New York. Nancy was happy for the first time in a long while. After she had moved into the apartment, Deborah went to visit Nancy and was pleased to see how much pride she took in her apartment. However, by Christmas time Nancy was back on the drugs. Nancy began calling, begging for money. After a while, Nancy got into the music scene in New York, meeting people who would eventually be well known in the music industry. When Nancy came home to celebrate her eighteenth birthday, she was dark and angry.

In these chapters, Nancy begins to make a life for herself outside of the bonds of childhood even though she is only seventeen. Nancy has given up on school after being kicked out of Colorado and gives up on work after losing a single job. Again Nancy reveals her strange quirks and her inability to overcome obstacles. Nancy struggles to make a life for herself despite her mental illness and does well after being removed from the safety of her family's home and moving into a place of her own. Unfortunately, stress causes Nancy to turn once more to illegal drugs, setting into motion once more the



pattern of drug abuse, a theme of the book, that has failed her in the past and is likely to fail her in the future.

The Spungens are also once more let down by the medical community. Nancy is successfully committed for a second time. However, this commitment ends when the hospital sees how sick Nancy is, repeating what has become a pattern of disappointment for the Spungen family. A psychiatrist who believes he can fix Nancy with positive reinforcement also gives up on the family when he realizes how sick Nancy is. It seems that everyone in the medical community was unable to deal with the stress of Nancy in a way that her family has done since her birth. This shows the reader how strong the family unit had to be to help Nancy, illustrating the theme of the disturbed child and the family, as well as how useless the medical community can sometimes be for families such as this.



Chapters 16-18

Chapters 16-18 Summary and Analysis

In chapter 16, Nancy got a job as an exotic dancer. Several months later, Nancy announced that she was going to Jamaica to get over her drug addiction. This plan quickly ended, however, and instead Nancy asked to come home while she detoxed. The first night home, Nancy came into Deborah and Frank's bedroom begging for Valium. When they refused, Nancy became belligerent. A couple of days later, Nancy returned to New York and got involved in a methadone program. The methadone seemed like a miracle for Nancy, helping her kick the drug habit and somehow making her calmer too. Unfortunately, things were not as calm at home. David and Susan had a party while Deborah and Frank were out of town, allowing a boy to drive their car. The car was once again wrecked.

In chapter 17, Nancy was soon back on drugs. Nancy tried methadone a second time. That fall, when Nancy's lease came up on her apartment, she announced that she wanted to go to London where the music scene was. Nancy saved for months, but was unable to save enough money. Finally Deborah paid for the plane ticket. Nancy left for what Deborah and Frank thought would be a two week trip to make a fresh start for herself in London.

In chapter 18, Nancy would call often from London, begging for money. One day Deborah came home from work with the news that Nancy was in the hospital to have surgery on her spine. Nancy had developed a cyst on the base of her spine. It was during this time that Deborah became aware of the important role Sid Vicious played in Nancy's life. Deborah researched the Sex Pistols and watched them on television, finding their type of music, or anti-music, horrifying. Nancy was proud, however.

In these chapters, Nancy continues to struggle with her drug addiction, a theme of the novel, making several attempts to kick the habit with the use of methadone. Deborah talks about the controversy that has always surrounded methadone use, but claims it was a miracle for her daughter. Once again, things were beginning to look up in Nancy's life, but it would not last for long.

Nancy went to London shortly after her nineteenth birthday and met Sid Vicious. Deborah and her family had no clue what was about to happen to their family. It was bad enough that Nancy brought instability and chaos to their lives, but the introduction of fame to their lives was about to turn everything upside down. Sid Vicious was the bass player for the band, Sex Pistols. This band was formed not because of their musical ability, but for their ability to be wildly outrageous, something that appealed to the angry working-class teenagers in London at the time. The Sex Pistols were widely known, creating a great deal of fame around its members, a fame that rubbed off on Nancy Spungen. It was a turn that Nancy took great pride in, but promised great difficulty for the Spungen family.



Chapters 19-20

Chapters 19-20 Summary and Analysis

In chapter 19, Nancy called to tell Deborah that she and Sid got married. Deborah thought it was a scam to get money. Sometime after that, Sid and Nancy moved into a hotel and were kicked out after the manager called the police because of screams from their room and the police found pills in the room. After that, Sid and Nancy rented a house of their own. The Sex Pistols went on tour in the United States soon after that, but Nancy was not invited to go along. The tour was quickly canceled, however, when people began walking out of the concerts when they did not live up to their hype. However, the tour brought local press into the punk scene and the Spungens began getting calls from reporters looking for information on Nancy. As Sid's career with the Sex Pistols ended, Nancy decided to become his manager and to launch his solo career in New York. Nancy and Sid arranged to fly home, stopping in Pennsylvania for a weekend to visit the family.

In chapter 20, the visit from Sid and Nancy was disturbing to Deborah who found them both odd and unresponsive. Sid would rarely talk and ate only with Nancy's urging. At their hotel they would lay in bed for hours and watch cartoons. A friend of David's was impressed to meet Sid Vicious, but to Deborah and Frank, he was just a drugged out kid who found fame too early and too easy. During the visit, Nancy came to Deborah and asked her to take her to the hospital to remove some stitches. Nancy showed Deborah where her ear had to be sewn back on after a beating, again she claimed by the Teddy's or punk haters. Deborah removed the stitches herself. On the way to the train station at the end of the visit, Nancy announced to her family that she believed she would die before her twenty-first birthday.

In these chapters, the reader begins to see the changes the relationship with Sid has brought to Nancy. Nancy is happy for the first time, even though there is still drug use and it appears that Sid might be beating her. Deborah does not say for sure at this point in the novel that Sid is the cause of the multiple beatings Nancy has suffered, but the suggestion is there. The Spungen family finds themselves the center of press attention after the Sex Pistols come to the United States, hinting at what it will be like for them later when Nancy is murdered. Nancy is a celebrity now whether she likes it or not and this is rubbing off on her family, making them collateral damage once again in Nancy's destructive wake. When the family meets Sid Vicious, they are less that impressed by him, a dull kind of person who appears to be drugged and unaware of his surroundings most of the time. Deborah tells an anecdote about Sid attempting to play the guitar that is ironic, especially since Sid was the bass player for the Sex Pistols. This only seems to underscore how ridiculous his fame was and how harmful it turned out to be.



Chapters 21-22

Chapters 21-22 Summary and Analysis

In chapter 21, Sid and Nancy settled in at the Chelsea Hotel. Nancy would call often and talk to her mother. In early October, Deborah cleaned out Nancy's closet, giving away most of her old things, including most of her clothes. The only thing Deborah left behind was the prom dress. The last time Nancy called was a Sunday. Nancy hinted that Sid had been beating her and that she was thinking of leaving him. Nancy did not call again.

In chapter 22, Deborah spoke to the detective in charge of the case in New York and learned that Nancy had been murdered and Sid arrested. Deborah tried to reach Frank, but he was on the road and unavailable. Deborah then drove home in a state of shock. Deborah's close friends rallied around her and she eventually was able to reach Frank. Before everyone could return home, the press converged on the front lawn, begging for comment from the family. Deborah and Frank went to the funeral home to make arrangements that night, making every effort to keep the funeral private. It was on the news that Deborah learned that Nancy had been stabbed.

In chapter 23, Deborah and Frank went to New York to meet with the detectives on the case who took them to the morgue to identify the body where the coroner on the case was more interested in her missing keys and the fact that she would have type the report herself than the Spungens. Later the Spungens were taken to the district attorney's office where they were interviewed by the prosecutor on the case. When Deborah and Frank returned home, they realized they could no longer ignore the press, so they decided to give an exclusive interview to one reporter. The funeral was that Sunday and no members of the press were in attendance.

In these chapters of the book, Deborah Spungen shares the horrific details of her daughter's final days and her death. The death of a child is horrific enough, but Deborah shares with the reader the overwhelming intrusion of the press on the family from the moment of Sid Vicious' arrest in New York. Illustrating the theme of privacy versus fame, the Spungen family was inundated with the press in such a way that they found their lives disrupted far longer and far more tragically than the death of their daughter should have caused. In the end, the Spungen family gave an interview to the press in the hopes that it would cool the fires, but it only seemed to ignite them.

Nancy's death was also tragic because of the inhumanity it exposed in the legal system. The Spungen's were treated as though they were no better than trash when they went to identify their daughter's remains. Despite having lived a law abiding life and doing all they were supposed to do by societies demands, Deborah and Frank were forced to listen to a coroner complain about her own petty problems and call their daughter a disgusting name to their faces. They were also forced to endure the indignity of learning the details of their daughter's death on the local news. This would become motivation

for Deborah Spungen to change the system and to help others like herself, giving the reader another peek at the perspective through which Deborah wrote this book.



Chapters 24-26

Chapters 24-26 Summary and Analysis

In chapter 24, Sid's mother called to express her sympathies and to plead Sid's case. A reporter then attempted to force his way into the house, convincing the Spungens to tell Nancy's story so that lies would not be printed in his paper. Sid later called and expressed his grief over Nancy's death and his regret that he could not attend her funeral. Three days after the funeral, a group of English reporters forced their way through the front door and left a newspaper on the floor. The reporters then called the police and accused Deborah of stealing their property. Deborah became so overwhelmed that she went to see a therapist friend of hers. The friend listened to Deborah pour out her pain and frustration, convincing her to continue with therapy. The therapist also suggested Deborah and her family get away for a weekend. Deborah, Frank, and David went to the Catskills, but David found himself watching a sketch making fun of his sister and Sid on Saturday Night Live. Deborah wrote a letter to the producers and got a kind response.

Sid wrote a letter to Deborah again expressing his pain over losing Nancy and suggesting he would rather die than live without her. Included with the letter was a poem that expressed Deborah's own feelings regarding Nancy and a line that would become the title of this book. Sid attempted suicide less than two weeks after Nancy's death. From the hospital Sid called Deborah again. Another letter from Sid came and gave Deborah a clue as to what happened the night her daughter died. Deborah came to believe through the letter that Nancy bought the knife with the intention of asking Sid to kill her.

In chapter 25, a new prosecutor took over Sid's case. The new prosecutor asked Deborah and Frank to his office and proceeded to treat them like criminals. Deborah returned to work only to learn that reporters were calling her employers, past and current, to get information on her. Deborah begged her therapist for pills, but was refused. It was then that Deborah began thinking about suicide. Sid's death in early February of 1979 brought the press back. It was then that Deborah had the epiphany that she needed to fulfill her promise to Nancy by sharing her story with others. Deborah found herself able to cry for the first time that day.

In chapter 26, Deborah knew she needed to move to get on with her life. The house sold quickly and Deborah found a new house in the city. Frank, who was originally behind the idea of moving, became disillusioned when it actually took place. David and Susan were also unhappy with the move, convinced Deborah was running away from everything that was Nancy. The family began therapy together and discovered that they had never learned to communicate properly with one another because of Nancy and had to learn again how to interact with one another. About this same time, Deborah saw an episode of the talk show, Donahue, on which there were families who were part of an organization called Parents of Murdered Children. Deborah reached out to the founding



couple and eventually became strong enough to start a chapter of the organization in her home town. Deborah also wrote a guide for parents on how to deal with the legal aftermath in the case of a murdered child.

In these chapters, the theme of privacy versus fame continues as the family continues to fight the growing craziness of the press's hunt for new information about Nancy and the family's reaction to her death. Also during these chapters, Deborah is forced to confront her daughter's murderer. Deborah comes to believe that Sid killed her daughter, but it was a kind of assisted suicide rather than murder. Deborah always knew her daughter was unhappy and wanted to kill herself. Deborah never imagined it would come the way it did, however, and she was still confused and angry with the man who murdered her child. At the same time, Sid Vicious clung to Deborah because she was his last connection to Nancy. It was a strange relationship that brought more pain than relief to Deborah.

These final chapters of the book are more about Deborah and her reality after Nancy's death than the story of Nancy Spungen. What Deborah and her family were forced to go through in those months after Nancy's death was a continuation of the pain Nancy brought into their lives from the moment she was born. However, it was also insult added to injury as uncaring people made jokes out of the tragic death of a young woman. Deborah nearly fell apart in the face of this pain, but was strong enough to find a way to fight back. Deborah took her personal tragedy and turned it into something positive, a way to help others like herself. Deborah proved herself to be everything she promised Nancy she would be.



Characters

Deborah Spungen

Deborah Spungen is Nancy Spungen's mother. Deborah is the author of this book. Deborah tells the reader at the beginning of the book that she wrote this book about her daughter's life and death because she wants to offer hope to other families struggling with the same type of difficulties she and her family suffered with Nancy. Deborah began her story with the traumatic birth of Nancy. Deborah was a young, innocent college student who was not prepared for pregnancy and motherhood. The traumatic birth of her daughter followed by a difficult infancy left Deborah frustrated with the medical community and unable to convince anyone that there was something really wrong with her daughter, not just her own inexperience.

Deborah attempted to get Nancy help many times during her childhood, but she was often told that all Nancy needed was better parents. This left Deborah frustrated because she knew that there was something more going on with Nancy beyond her husband and her own indulgences of some of her behaviors. Deborah's fight grew more complicated as Nancy was thrown out of the public school system and accepted to the only private school system that seemed willing to take her, then introduced to drugs in that same school. Nancy's behavior continued on a downhill slide until Deborah and her family felt their only alternative was to set her up in an apartment of her own. Nancy took to her freedom well, although it allowed her to become involved in illegal drugs and make the move to London that would notoriously lead her into the relationship that would end her life. Deborah loved her child and found grieving her death complicated by the press that followed the arrest of her famous boyfriend, Sid Vicious.

After Nancy's death, Deborah discovered that Nancy had become her sole focus in life and now she must redirect her attentions. Deborah fought to salvage what was left of her family, to help repair the difficulties in communication that living with Nancy left her family. Deborah also had to fight the fears that Nancy's death and the ensuing press coverage left her with. Deborah would struggle to move on, embracing a new organization designed to support parents of murdered children. Deborah would go on to begin a chapter of this organization in her hometown and write a guide to help parents of murdered children deal with the legal aftermath of such a death.

Nancy Spungen

Nancy Spungen was the child of Deborah and Frank Spungen. Nancy was born prematurely and suffered from both a lack of oxygen and jaundice after her birth. Nancy was kept away from her parents the first few days of her life while her condition was treated with a blood transfusion. When Nancy went home with Deborah and Frank, she would cry almost constantly. The nurse that Deborah's mother paid for called Nancy a difficult baby. However, this behavior continued to such a point that Deborah and Frank



could not get any sleep. Deborah turned to her pediatrician for help, but he thought the problem lay with Deborah's inexperience. However, he prescribed Phenobarbital to help anyway. This began a pattern of medicating Nancy's behaviors that would eventually lead to her illegal drug habit.

Nancy grew up with increasing behavior problems. Nancy would have terrible temper tantrums, often threatening to destroy her mother's property. Later, Nancy would torture her little sister. Nancy had trouble making and keeping friends in school. As Nancy grew older, her parents attempted to help her through psychiatric clinics in the area, but they were often blamed for being over indulgent or for neglecting Nancy's emotional needs. When Nancy was thrown out of public school, Deborah was forced to find a private school who could help Nancy with her behavior problems. This situation led to a school that would introduce Nancy to illegal drugs. Nancy's behavior became so intolerable in the private school that they graduated her early. Nancy then went to college for a semester, but was thrown out when she was arrested as part of scheme to steal skis.

Nancy eventually moved to New York on her own. Nancy worked as an exotic dancer during this time. Nancy also overcame her heroin addiction by using methadone. Then Nancy got it into her head to move to London where the new music scene was taking place. Nancy met Sid Vicious of the Sex Pistols while in London and they became a romantic couple. When the Sex Pistols broke up, Sid and Nancy moved to New York to revitalize Sid's career. A few months later, Nancy was found murdered in her Chelsea Hotel room and Sid was arrested for the murder.

Frank Spungen

Frank Spungen is Nancy Spungen's father. Frank Spungen married Deborah Spungen when they were both young. They had not planned to become parents so quickly in their marriage, hoping to give marriage five years before adding children to the mix. They wanted to move to New York and live young, carefree life. However, Deborah became pregnant with Nancy before she could graduate from college. Frank was in the military for the bulk of Deborah's pregnancy with Nancy, leaving Deborah to deal with her fears and the pregnancy alone. When Frank returned, he was able to share the birth with Deborah, as the two of them faced the uncertainty of Nancy's health and the fear that they might lose their first child before they could take her home.

Throughout Nancy's early childhood, Frank worked a job that often took him out of town. Frank would also spend a great deal of time with his friends during the week, avoiding the stress of home life. Frank would often become overwhelmed with Nancy's disruptive behavior and even thought of leaving his family on many occasions. Eventually Frank realized what his behavior was doing to his marriage and he chose to stay with his wife and make their marriage work. Frank did the best he could in dealing with Nancy, standing by his family and fighting to get Nancy the help he knew she needed.



Susan Spungen and David Spungen

Susan Spungen was born a year after Nancy. Susan and Nancy were not close as children. Nancy often resented Susan, annoyed at Susan for dividing their parents' attention. Over the years Nancy would seek out Susan in order to torture her, often destroying Susan's side of their shared bedroom and excluding Susan from play. As a teenager, Susan began smoking marijuana because Nancy introduced it to her. When Nancy died, Susan took the death hard, pushing away everyone she cared about because she did not want to lose someone else she loved. Susan found it difficult to deal with her family in the aftermath of Nancy's death, angry with her mother for selling the family house as if in an attempt to ignore the fact that Nancy ever lived.

David Spungen was the youngest of the Spungen children. David was Nancy's favorite and she would often treat David with special attention. When David was a teenager, Nancy introduced David to marijuana just as she did Susan. Upon Nancy's death, David was only seventeen. David found the press difficult to deal with. David also found it difficult to deal with his sister's death, knowing he both hated and loved her. In the end, David learned it was okay to grieve his sister.

Sid Vicious and Anne Beverley

Sid Vicious was the bass player for the punk band the Sex Pistols. Sid was a confused young man who was thrust in the limelight at an early time for simply being outrageous. Sid could not play the bass, despite his role with the Sex Pistols, and found it difficult to make a career of music after the Sex Pistols broke up. Sid and Nancy met during the decline of the Sex Pistols. Sid and Nancy would often do drugs together. Sometimes Sid would become violent, often beating Nancy. When the Sex Pistols broke up, Nancy moved Sid to New York, appointing herself his manager and she spent the final months of her life attempting to revitalize Sid's career. After Nancy was found dead in their hotel room, Sid was arrested for her murder. Before he could stand trial, Sid would die of a drug overdose.

Anne Beverley was Sid Vicious' mother. Anne Beverley contacted Deborah Spungen several times after the death of Nancy. Anne wanted to express her sympathy for Nancy's death the first time she called and to express the fact that she did not believe her son capable of killing someone he loved so deeply. Anne Beverley would later call Deborah upon the death of her own son. Anne would request that she be allowed to bury her son beside Nancy, but Deborah refused. Sid would eventually be cremated.

Dr. Blake and The Director

Dr. Blake was a psychiatrist Nancy saw at a psychiatric clinic when she was a young teen. Dr. Blake believed Nancy's behavior problems were based in her parents' neglect of her emotional needs. Dr. Blake saw Nancy once a week and forced her parents to meet with a counselor once a week to discuss Nancy's behaviors and their affect on the



family. Deborah Spungen often told Dr. Blake of Nancy's impossible behaviors, but Dr. Blake did not believe her until the day Nancy had a meltdown in her office. At that point, Dr. Blake refused to see Nancy again. The Director of this same clinic evaluated Nancy after her meltdown in Dr. Blake's office and wrote a report in which he suggested that Nancy was schizophrenic. However, the Director never shared this opinion with Nancy's patients nor did he recommend further treatment.

Bob and Charlotte Hullinger

Bob and Charlotte Hullinger had a daughter who was murdered by a boyfriend while she was an exchange student in Germany. The Hullingers would form a group called Parents of Murdered Children to help other parents like themselves who had suffered from such a tragedy. Deborah Spungen on television and was inspired to contact the couple in dealing with Nancy's death. This friendship would lead Deborah to begin a chapter of POMC in her hometown and to write a guideline for parents dealing with the legal system in the aftermath of a child's murder.

The Pediatrician

Deborah Spungen took Nancy to a young pediatrician when she was an infant. Deborah often turned to this pediatrician in Nancy's infancy to seek help for Nancy's long crying spells and temper tantrums. This pediatrician never took Deborah's concerns seriously, putting them down to inexperience. However, this pediatrician prescribed Nancy Phenobarbital, a narcotic used to treat seizures, that he hoped would calm Nancy's behaviors. This medication allowed Nancy to sleep for an hour at a time. Deborah believed this was the beginning of a pattern of self medication Nancy would use to treat her unbearable symptoms.

The Reporters

Upon Nancy's death, the Spungen family were inundated with reporters interested in Nancy's death because of her connection to Sid Vicious of the Sex Pistols and his arrest in her murder. The reporters were often rude, forcing their way into the home or calling the police on false charges of theft. The Spungen's attempted to ignore the press despite their overwhelming intrusion on their privacy, but eventually decided to give their story to one writer of their choosing in the hopes of reducing the interest in their story. The press would return upon the death of Sid Vicious, leading Deborah to become afraid to be in the house alone and deciding to sell Nancy's childhood home.

The Millionaire

When Nancy was a small child, the Spungens had a rare night out in which they met a local millionaire. This man became interested in Deborah and began calling her for lunch dates. Deborah relented and commenced an affair with this man. Deborah

blamed her decision to have this affair on the stress Nancy's behaviors placed on herself and her marriage to her husband Frank. The affair would last almost a year and Deborah would eventually end it, deciding to attempt to make her marriage work.



Objects/Places

Hammer

One Sunday afternoon, Nancy became angry with her mother when she would not take her out to the place of her choice and attacked her with a hammer.

Knife

Nancy would be killed with a knife she bought herself as a gift for Sid Vicious. The knife was a hunting knife similar to one Sid saw a friend give to an acquaintance and admired.

Hair Musical Soundtrack

After seeing Hair on Broadway, Deborah and Frank Spungen bought the soundtrack. Nancy, even though she was only nine, was fascinated by the album and would often play it over and over again. Deborah saw this as Nancy's introduction to the music that would become a driving force in her life.

Phenobarbital

The pediatrician put Nancy on Phenobarbital as an infant to calm the crying spells that Nancy would have at all hours of the day and night. Deborah describes this as the first of many incidences of over-medication that led to Nancy's drug addiction.

Atarax

Nancy was given Atarax to help her sleep while she was suffering from a bad throat infection. This drug caused Nancy to have a severe allergic reaction in which she suffered hallucinations.

Thorazine

As a teenager, Nancy was put on thorazine to control her behavior. However, this medication left Nancy sleepy and dulled her personality. Nancy would be taken off the drug when she moved to the Darlington facility, Barton.



Heroin

Nancy would be introduced to many drugs while at Lakeside Campus, leading her to an addiction to heroin.

Sex Pistols

The Sex Pistols was a punk rock band created by Malcolm McLaren to cater to the angry working-class teens who frequented his popular clothing store. The Sex Pistols could neither sing nor play instruments, but their outrageous behavior during concerts made them wildly popular in England. Sid Vicious was the bass player for the Sex Pistols when Nancy met him.

Psychiatric Clinic

Frank and Deborah twice took Nancy to a psychiatric clinic during her troubled childhood. The first time, Nancy was declared healthy and only needed to be loved. The second time, the parents were blamed for Nancy's behaviors. After Nancy's death, Deborah would learn that this second clinic believed Nancy was schizophrenic, but they failed to relate this information to Nancy's parents.

Darlington

When Nancy was expelled permanently from public school, her mother was forced to find a private alternative. Finding a school for an intelligent, but behaviorally troubled young woman proved difficult. Eventually, however, Deborah found Darlington, a private school system for emotionally and behaviorally troubled students.

Darlington's Barton Facility

Nancy's first placement in Darlington was at the Barton facility in Connecticut. The first year there, Nancy got along well with the elderly couple who ran the place and everything seemed to be looking up. However, the following year a new director took over and Nancy began to have trouble adjusting, eventually leading to her move to another facility.

Darlington's Avon Unit, Lakeside Campus

When Nancy began to have difficulties at Barton, she was transferred to the Avon Unit, called Lakeside Campus. It is at Lakeside that Deborah believes Nancy was introduced to illegal drugs.



Chelsea Hotel

Nancy was stabbed in the abdomen in a room at the Chelsea Hotel on October 12, 1978.

London, England

Nancy moved to London, England in shortly after her nineteenth birthday. Nancy believed London was where the music scene was and she wanted to be a part of it.

Themes

The Difficult Child and the Family

Deborah Spungen was not prepared to have a difficult child. From the moment Nancy was born she would scream for hours on end, she did not like to be held or cuddled, and she would have temper tantrums that were exaggerated and uncontrollable. As Nancy grew, so did her difficult behavior. Nancy would threaten to destroy things or hurt people if she did not get her way. Nancy gave her brother a black eye, would torture her sister, and would often ignore her parents' attempts at discipline. It became so bad that Nancy was eventually thrown out of the public school system and forced to find a private school that could educate this highly intelligent child while dealing with her difficult behavior.

When Nancy was small, Deborah was home alone with her for days on end. Deborah's husband would often go out of town on business and when he was home, he would often go out with his friends in the evening to avoid the difficulties of dealing with Nancy. This caused a great amount of tension in Frank and Deborah's marriage, leading them both to have relationships outside of the marriage. Frank thought about leaving the family, abandoning his responsibilities and leaving Deborah to deal with the difficulties surrounding Nancy on her own. However, their love for one another and their commitment to their marriage finally overcame the difficulties of dealing with Nancy's behavior.

Nancy's behavior did not only cause tension for Deborah and Frank in their marriage, but it led to problems with their other two children. Nancy would often take out her frustrations on her brother and sister, picking fights with them and occasionally attacking them physically. When Nancy began doing illegal drugs, she brought them home. Nancy introduced first her sister Susan to marijuana, then later her brother David. Not only this, but the younger children witnessed their sister's behavior and would at times emulate it. Deborah became frightened that all three of her children would end up on the same path as Nancy. Finally, when Nancy left the home, Deborah became aware of how their behaviors were designed around how Nancy would react, causing them to not communicate with one another properly. It would take family therapy to help repair the walls Nancy's behavior put up in the family, walls that still existed even after Nancy's death.

Drug Addiction

Nancy was a difficult child from the time she was born. As an infant, Nancy would cry constantly, leaving Deborah and Frank exhausted. After multiple complaints, the pediatrician finally prescribed Phenobarbital for Nancy to help her sleep. The medication would help Nancy sleep about an hour at a time. When Nancy was a teenager, the doctor put her on thiorazine to stop her outrageous behavior at home. This drug left



Nancy sedated, changing her personality to the point where her parents almost missed her outrageous behaviors. These medications were the beginning of a pattern of medicating that would lead Nancy into drug addiction.

When Nancy went to Lakeside Campus in the Darlington school system, she was introduced to illegal drugs. At first it was cigarettes, marijuana, and PCP. As Nancy continued to indulge in these drugs, her choices expanded to heroin. Alcohol also became a problem. When Nancy was thrown out of college, she came home and would spend her days sleeping and her nights indulging in these drugs, often bringing strangers into her parents' home and putting her younger siblings in danger. Nancy also introduced drugs to her siblings, but she would only let them use marijuana, warning them that the use of harder drugs would not be something she would allow.

When Nancy moved to New York City her drug use continued. Nancy became an exotic dancer, attempting to make enough money to not only pay for her drug habit, but to provide for herself so that she would not need to depend on her parents. This never happened. Nancy eventually realized her drug habit was getting out of control and enrolled herself in a methadone program. The methadone helped and for a while Nancy was free of her drug addiction. However, when Nancy moved to London and fell on hard times, she once again turned to drugs. Nancy's life with Sid Vicious would be punctuated with drug use mixed with attempts to use methadone to kick the habit. Drugs would be rumored to be a part of Nancy's death as well.

Privacy versus Fame

When Nancy became involved with Sid Vicious in London, she would become a part of the fame that surrounded him and his punk band, the Sex Pistols. Nancy's name would appear in the London papers and she would often be photographed with Sid. Nancy was often villainized in the papers. When Nancy died and Sid was arrested for her murder, this villainy increased. Suddenly, the Spungen family who had lived a quiet life found themselves the center of the international press.

Deborah was grieving her oldest child and would find herself forced to deal with reporters knocking on the door at all hours, forcing their way into the house and harassing all members of the family. Deborah even learned that some of these reporters would lie and call her former employers, looking for information on Deborah they could use in their stories. As the press coverage appeared to be dying down, the death of Sid Vicious only reignited it. Deborah once again found herself afraid to go home alone in fear that a member of the press would be in the house. Soon Deborah realized she must move out of the home her family had lived in for more than ten years in order to feel safe. The outrageous behavior of the press is what makes privacy versus fame a theme of the novel.



Style

Perspective

The author of this book, Deborah Spungen, is the mother of Nancy Spungen. The book is about Nancy's life, the nineteen years of her life before she met Sid Vicious and the short time after their acquaintance up to the day she was brutally murdered in a Chelsea Hotel room. Deborah wanted the world to know the child who was her eldest daughter. Deborah wrote of the difficulties her daughter presented for herself and her family, describing behaviors that began when Nancy was only an infant and expanding throughout her childhood. Deborah described in the book the attempts her family made to get Nancy help and to discover the origin of her problems.

The perspective of this novel is subjective. Deborah Spungen was Nancy's mother, therefore her story is from the point of view of someone who deeply loved Nancy and wanted only what was best for her. Deborah and her family came under close scrutiny when Nancy was murdered, with the press hounding them day and night, making assumptions about their lives and their role in Nancy's life. Deborah wanted to set the record straight, to show how hard she and her family fought for Nancy, and to perhaps give help to other families dealing with a difficult child or those whose children had been murdered as Nancy had. Therefore the perspective of this novel is highly personal, giving insight to a story that no one else could possibly give.

Tone

The tone of this novel is dark. The novel is written by the mother of a young woman who had deep psychological problems from the moment of her birth and who developed behavioral problems that would eventually lead to a drug addiction. The family would then be plunged into a nightmare of press coverage when this same child became involved with a famous punk band member and was murdered by this same famous young man. The tone changes from time to time, but the overriding tone is one of darkness, of confusion and frustration, which stems from both the attempts the family made to get their child help and the interactions with this child that always seemed to lead to conflict.

The tone of this novel reflects the difficult subject it covers. The author attempts to describe a time in her life that was filled with conflict and difficulties, of a struggle between loving a child she bore and was raising and the hatred of a person whose sole purpose in life appeared to be to bring as much pain and conflict to the family as possible. The tone is overwhelmed with frustration and pain as the reader goes along on the ride with the Spungen family as they attempt to understand and love their deeply troubled child.



Structure

The book is divided into twenty-six chapters with a prologue. The book is told in a linear time line, beginning with the birth of the author's daughter, Nancy Spungen, continuing through Nancy's troubled childhood and ending with the aftermath of Nancy's murder. The author and her family were plunged into a media nightmare upon Nancy's death due to Nancy's romance with punk rocker, Sid Vicious. Sid was arrested and charged with Nancy's death, spurring on this media coverage. As a result, Deborah Spungen felt it was her responsibility to tell Nancy's true story, to share with other families the struggle they went through with Nancy in the hopes of helping through their experience.

The structure of this book is fairly straightforward. The book is written in almost a novel format, telling a story from beginning to end without flashbacks or backstory that confuses the plot. The book focuses only on Nancy's impact on the family, leaving other aspects of the family's life in the dark to preserve a figment of their privacy. The book is told in both exposition and dialogue, telling the family's story not only in internal monologue like other biographies, but by telling story much like one might find in a novel. The book is well written and tells a powerful story in a clear and concise way, expressing Nancy's story from a unique perspective.

Quotes

"How could she ask me to let her bury her son—my baby's accused murderer—next to her?" The Aftermath, pg. 6

"Years later, when Nancy had become a heroin addict and I saw her for the first time with needle marks all over her arms, hands, ankles, and the backs of her knees, I remembered the first time I had seen her in the nursery with the gauze patches on her heels." Chapter 1, pg. 21

"Then Nancy came along, and the life we wanted had to be put on the back burner." Chapter 3, pg. 35

"Unable to keep friends, Nancy began to take out her social frustration on Suzy and David." Chapter 4, pg. 52

"When I put on Hair, something magical happened. Nancy sat right next to the phonograph, totally absorbed by it." Chapter 5, pg. 69

"My instincts told me he was wrong, that something was seriously wrong with Nancy—regardless of her environment. But I couldn't bring myself to doubt the director or disagree with him." Chapter 5, pg. 77

"She was possessed, demonic. She was hallucinating and she had no idea I was there." Chapter 6, pg. 79

"I had to do everything in my power to keep my promise to my child. I took several deep breaths. I did not cry. I would not cry." Chapter 6, pg. 102

"It was at Avon that Nancy became involved with drugs. This time it was no figment of her imagination." Chapter 8, pg. 132

"At last, after fifteen years of searching, someone had told us what was wrong with our child." Chapter 10, pg. 159

"As I sat down at my desk I glanced at the calendar page for that day, October 12, 1978. On it I'd scrawled 'Call Whit Deer Run re: admission Nancy, Sid.' Had to remember to take care of that, I told myself. And call Nancy that night if I hadn't heard from her." Chapter 21, pg. 306

"I disclose them now because both Nancy and Sid are gone. They can no longer speak for themselves." Chapter 24, pg. 355



Topics for Discussion

Discuss family. How did Nancy's behaviors throughout her childhood affect the family dynamic? How did Nancy treat her sister? Her brother? Why was there a difference in the way Nancy would treat her sister over her brother? How did Nancy's behavior affect her parents' marriage? Why? What could the parents have done differently to help their family? Did the parents do all they could for Nancy?

Discuss mental illness. What is schizophrenia? Why did the Spungen family have so much trouble finding help for their daughter? Was Nancy schizophrenic? Why was she never treated for this illness? How did this illness manifest itself in Nancy? Could there be other explanations for Nancy's difficult behavior? What were some of the explanations given to Nancy's family in her childhood? Could Nancy's behaviors be explained by her parents' treatment of her, as suggested by one psychiatrist?

Discuss perspective. Who wrote this book? Why did the author feel it was important to write this book? How is this person's perspective different from anyone else who might have written a book about Nancy Spungen? Why is there such interest in Nancy Spungen? Did Nancy Spungen want the attention given to her in the final year of her life? Explain.

Discuss punk music. What is punk music? Where did it begin? Why did it began? Was it popular in the United States? How did the Sex Pistols affect Sid Vicious' life? How did it affect Nancy Spungen's life? Why did the press follow the relationship between Sid and Nancy? How did this affect Nancy's difficult behaviors? How did this affect Nancy's family after her death? Why?

Discuss Sid and Nancy's relationship. How did they meet? What was their relationship like? How did Nancy feel about Sid? Why did Nancy hook up with Sid? Why did Nancy stay with Sid after his career ended? Why did Nancy appoint herself Sid's manager? What were Nancy's hopes for Sid's future? What did the press say about Sid and Nancy's relationship? Why does Deborah say in the book that this perception was wrong?

Discuss drug use. Why does Deborah seem to think the use of Phenobarbital when her daughter was an infant was the beginning of a habit that would ultimately lead to her daughter's death? Why was Nancy put on Phenobarbital? What was the doctor hoping to treat with this drug? What other drugs did Nancy use in her childhood? Why? What was Nancy's unusual reaction to Atarax? Why was Nancy placed on Thorazine? What was Nancy's reaction to this medication? Did all these drugs lead to Nancy's addiction to heroin? Explain.

Discuss the treatment Deborah and Frank received in the aftermath of Nancy's death. Does freedom of the press allow for the invasion of privacy the Spungen family experienced in the aftermath of Nancy's death? Was it fair of the press to judge the Spungens for the way Nancy was raised, how she lived her life, and how she died?



Who else judged the Spungens? Was this fair? How did this affect the Spungens ability to grieve their daughter?