

## Man embraces life after daughter's death

### **A Telegraph Column By Dean Shalhoup**

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A decade ago, Hollis resident John Ogrodowczyk set out on a journey. He had made no plans, had no itinerary. There was no departure time, no expected time of arrival, no destination.

As a matter of fact, not until years later did Ogrodowczyk even know he had embarked on the journey. And still today, whether it takes him north or south, east or west, up or down, he knows not his path until he's on it.

What he does know for sure, though, is that this journey rolls steadily on – and that its beauty and reward are based solely in its very absence of tangibles.

Ogrodowczyk is more than eager to talk about his journey. This week, he took a seat in the cafeteria at Milford contract manufacturing company Cirtronics, where he works teaching co-workers advanced computer skills and building databases. He pushed aside the day's newspapers and placed a couple of items on the table in front of him.

One was a Kelly green-colored compact disc. The other was a single sheet of paper bearing a photo of an attractive, smiling young woman with accompanying text announcing an April memorial service to mark the 10th anniversary of her death.

The woman pictured was his first-born child, Nancy Ogrodowczyk, whose sudden death the day before her 27th birthday in 1994 blindsided his family and knocked an ideal life from its axis.

The disc case, meanwhile, pictures Ogrodowczyk smiling, looking quite happy, the photo superimposed over a map of



Ireland. It carries a recently released disc of Ogrodowczyk singing Irish songs – the latest in what he calls a series of blessed occurrences that have by chance come his way since he bottomed out following Nancy's passing.

Shortly after she died, the Ogrodowczyks started the "Nancy O" Fund in memory of their daughter, who taught French at Souhegan High School in Amherst and dance, theater and singing to children all over the Nashua area. The fund would help needy children afford lessons and find opportunities in the performing arts.

For Ogrodowczyk, however, the shock of Nancy's passing only deepened further the sense of despair that had begun with his layoff from a major tech firm two years earlier. Usually an upbeat guy who loved to sing in church and other choirs, Ogrodowczyk fell silent.

"I was becoming more and more depressed," he said, "but I didn't really know it. . . . I mean, my daughter had just died, how could I go any lower?"

Just before Nancy's death from complications stemming from her longtime asthma condition, Ogrodowczyk had taken a

10-hour-a-week job at Cirtronics. That was the result of a lucky happenstance – he overheard a conversation about the company looking for someone with his knowledge. Ogradowczyk muses it was probably his first post-tragedy “blessed occurrence.”

His start date delayed by Nancy’s death, Ogradowczyk was welcomed a couple of weeks later by co-workers whom he says have been wonderful ever since.

“This job saved my life,” he said. “What I needed then was a lot of support, and I got that here . . . there’s a lot of heart at this place.”

His wife, Diane, pushed him to get out and sing again. The long, slow rebound had begun.

A lifelong lover of song (at 5, he started yodeling and singing cowboy songs on stage with his uncle), Ogradowczyk listened to opera by the hour, paying special attention to the tenor arias. Four years ago, he saw a notice for a New Hampshire concert by the renowned Irish tenor Frank Patterson. He went.

“That’s when my love of Irish ballads started,” Ogradowczyk said. He met Patterson, and in 1999 joined the local Rosita Lee music school on a concert tour of Ireland. When Patterson died a year later, Ogradowczyk and his wife returned to

Ireland to meet Patterson’s family and pay their respects.

A surprise awaited.

“I was asked to sing at his memorial banquet,” Ogradowczyk said.

“It was an incredible honor . . . a wonderful, inspiring moment for me.”

After befriending a Missouri musician and producer named Jerry Ganiel while visiting a Christian monk friary in Weston, Vt., Ogradowczyk said he acted upon his earlier inspiration and took his next step – singing his beloved Irish ballads in a studio and making his first CD.

“My love of singing Irish songs and honoring the memory of Nancy are now combined,” Ogradowczyk said, adding that part of his CD sales go to his daughter’s fund, now a part of the larger New Hampshire Charitable Foundation.

The circle had come full. But still, his journey continues.

“I believe that if we continue to dream and stay true to what we are called to be, life will allow the (right) people and opportunities to cross our paths,” Ogradowczyk said.

“All we have to do is allow ourselves to flow with them.”

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## The Nancy O Fund

Irish balladeer John Ogradowczyk of Hollis has released a CD of his songs, “Ireland in My Heart,” a tribute to his late daughter, Nancy. It is available at Darrell’s Music Hall, Main Street, Nashua; The Toadstool Bookshops, Lorden Plaza, Milford; and Hollis Pharmacy, Ash Street, Hollis. Part of the proceeds benefit the Nancy O Fund for needy children with aspirations in the performing arts.

Donations to the fund may be sent to: The Nancy O Fund, New Hampshire Charitable Foundation, 37 Pleasant St., Concord, NH, 03301.