

## SISTERS CATCHING UP ON LOST TIME



### Tina DiRienzo, 37 'This is our song'

The garden at Christina DiRienzo's house in Plymouth, Mass., is filled with red: she loved the hummingbirds that crimson-hued flowers would draw.

In addition to the red garden, Tina kept a vegetable garden, where she grew tomatoes and peppers that she canned.

Tina, 37, shared the house and acre of grounds with her companion, Russell Tripp, whom she had known since high school in Wareham. The two kept a menagerie — three goats, cats, and a host of other animals.

When not gardening or taking care of her animals, Tina loved to go country-and-western dancing, and to groove to the "oldies but goodies." Tina and Russell would go to dances at Redman's Hall in Wareham, often joining her mother, Patricia Pina, and her mother's husband, John.

Patricia says she would often dance with her daughter: "She'd say, 'Come on, Mom, this is our song.'" Their songs included classics like Roy Orbison's "Pretty Woman" and "Woolly Bully" by Sam the Sham and the Pharaohs.

"Sometimes we'd even have a house party here, and she and I would get up and dance," Patricia said. The two also enjoyed quiet Thursday nights at the Pinas' house, playing kitty whist with Tina's sister Terry Rakoski and Patricia's sister-in-law.

Patricia was glad to have Tina as a companion, and had missed her during the eight years Tina spent in Kentucky with her then-husband,

Peter, and two sons, Peter and Beau. "We did get a chance to go down and visit them, a couple of years before they came back, but it was way too short," Patricia said. "I wanted her to come back with me."

Four years ago, Tina and her family returned. "We still just didn't have enough time together to make up for lost time," Patricia said.

Tina was also trying to catch up with her sister, Terry. The two went to The Station together — Patricia said heavy metal was Terry's interest, not Tina's. The night was a regular get-together with the girls, Patricia said. The two were supposed to go with three other friends, but only one joined them, Kristine Carbone, Terry's neighbor in Taunton. All three women died in the fire.

— Jessica Resnick-Ault



### Terry Rakoski, 30 'Daredevil' with a soft side

Terry Rakoski, 30, had just gotten her first passport. She and her husband, Richard, were planning a long-awaited honeymoon just as soon as he returned from military duty in Afghanistan.

Theresa L. Serpa married Richard H. Rakoski Jr. on June 29, one week before he was sent to Afghanistan with the 772nd Military Police Company. The couple had planned the wedding for this year, but when he was called for active duty, they pushed up the date, according to Terry's friend and coworker Alan Medeiros.

"After the wedding, she went running around showing everybody the photos," recalled another coworker

from Copley Controls in Canton, Mass. They tried to reassure her that he would be safe overseas. "I remember when he first left, I just kept telling her, he'll be fine, he'll come home to you," one friend said.

Terry's friends say she managed to keep up a positive attitude. She organized a company program that sent shaving cream, batteries, and other supplies to the soldiers in Afghanistan, one friend said.

Terry was a meticulous worker in her detail-oriented job as a quality assurance inspector, Medeiros said.

She was also an expert pool player, who played once a week through the American Pool Association League, and "a real rocker," he said.

But she also had a softer side, studying the Bible over lunch, playing cribbage, and sharing stories about her cats with coworkers.

Thursday nights, Terry and her sister Christina DiRienzo would get together with their mother, Patricia Pina, for dinner and games of kitty whist.

"Both of my girls loved to play cards," Patricia said. "I'm going to miss those card nights, believe me."

Christina also died in the fire. Recalling Terry's "daredevil" streak, Patricia tells how Terry went sky-diving with a group from work, and took her on a hot-air balloon ride for her birthday.

"She always tried to outdo herself," Patricia said.

Terry also had exciting adventures planned: this summer, she planned to go white-water rafting.

The Taunton apartment that Terry and Richard shared was very tidy, according to her mother. "Terry was a neatnick: a place for everything, and everything in its place," she said.

Terry kept in touch with Richard overseas through the Internet and by cell phone. The couple were planning their honeymoon, a trip to Niagara Falls, Canada, for this spring.

Richard came back to the United States early, to make arrangements for Terry's funeral.

— Jessica Resnick-Ault

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Images of guitars are even part of the carpet design.

Albert was a guitarist with 18 Stars, a band that played at The Call and other Providence clubs. Lately, a band called Shryne was asking him to riff with them, says his brother, John "Patrick" Ring, 35, of Plymouth, Mass.

But Albert dreamed of more. His was the rock 'n' roll fantasy: move to California and play gigs in Los Angeles clubs where the great ones paid their dues.

"To be a rock star — that's what he wanted to do," says his brother. "For as long as I can remember — as soon as he picked up a guitar."

He liked classic rock and the harder-edged music that followed. He would lay down a speed-is-king solo in the style of Eddie Van Halen. He would dig down deep and play the blues of Jonny Lang. And he appreciated the swing of Brian Setzer.

Albert attended Dighton-Rehoboth schools and planned to study computer graphic design at a college in California. Already he had used his computer-graphics skills to design the cover for his band's CD.

His brother recalled Albert's love for baseball as he drove a visitor down the wooded back roads of Albert's adolescence. "He was left-handed, so he was an unstoppable pitcher," John Ring said.

He brought the car to a stop. Ahead was the ballfield where his brother, tall for an 11-year-old, sent a homer sailing impossibly far over the outfield. "He just crushed that ball," John said. "I just see him standing at the plate."

John shared something he has written about his brother since the fire: "I can only have faith that Albert is now in a better place, playing the music he loved for the heavens to hear."

— Michael P. McKinney



### Kevin Dunn, 37 Contentment was hard-won

It had taken him years, but Kevin J. Dunn finally had everything he wanted. He had a wife he loved, the child he'd always dreamed of, a full-time job he enjoyed, and most importantly, he was sober.

"He had just turned his life around," said his mother, Teresa Dunn, of Quincy, Mass. "He hadn't had a drink since May 12, 1995 . . . when he'd have a problem, he'd call up, and say he just wanted to hear my

voice, and then things would be all better. He was very happy."

Kevin, 37, of Attleboro, had bounced around from job to job and from place to place after graduating from Quincy High School. He struggled with alcohol for much of that time, and spent many months in homeless shelters across the state, his mother said.

Then, eight years ago, with the help of friends and family, he found Alcoholics Anonymous. He confronted his own problem and then he became a beacon for others, a helping hand who would use his own experiences as proof that the addiction could be beaten.

Dozens of the people he'd helped came to his funeral to pay their respects.

"As far as the outpouring of people who came to the wake and the funeral, it was heart-wrenching," his mother said. "People from the [AA] meetings would turn to me and say he helped them."

Her son loved roller-coasters, the music of Aerosmith, and all sports — he was particularly looking forward to seeing the Red Sox on the Patriots Day holiday in April.

For the last three years, he had been a sheet metal worker with Environmental Systems Inc., in Attleboro.

Kevin married Eileen McCarthy in September 2001, and the two had a daughter, Joanna, in February 2002. The entire family came together early last month to celebrate Joanna's first birthday, and his mother said Kevin seemed genuinely happy. He'd told her for years that all he really wanted was a loving wife and child, and a stable, steady life. She believes he'd found it.

— Daniel Barbarisi



### Lori Durante, 40 'Did so much for so many'

Lori K. Durante was a petite person — but when she cheered for her sons' sports teams, her voice could be heard above everybody else's.

Lori, 40, was a medical technician who worked second and third shifts at West Warwick's West View Nursing Home. She would sometimes go without sleep so she could attend the basketball and baseball games of her sons, 15-year-old Anthony, who attends West Warwick High School, and 13-year-old Matthew, a student at St. Joseph's School.

Friend Susan Verrier, whose son goes to school with Matthew, said she

will miss seeing — and hearing — Lori at basketball games.

"She did everything for her boys," says Lori's sister, Tonda Daniels, of Wakefield.

When she wasn't caring for her children and the residents of West View, Lori was volunteering her time at St. Joseph's.

"She was a constant presence at the school," Susan said. "She loved her boys, her patients at work, her friends — and everybody loved her. She did so much for so many people — nothing was a chore for her."

All who knew her will remember Lori's sparkling blue eyes, bright smile and distinctive laugh, Susan said.

Lori moved to West Warwick 15 years ago after having also lived in Warwick and North Kingstown. She maintained a close relationship with her parents, Paul and Betty Roe, and her brother, Jeffrey Roe, all of North Kingstown, Tonda said.

Lori shared custody of her sons with her ex-husband, Anthony Durante of West Warwick.

Her companion of two years, Tom Medeiros, 40, also died in the nightclub fire. Lori met Tom while caring for his mother, who lives at West View.

Friend Deborah Parente, of Warwick, remembered Lori as an all-around good person.

"She never had a bad thing to say about anybody," Deborah said.

Tonda says she will especially miss Lori during the holiday season, when the entire family would always gather. But she said her sister's spirit will live on in her sons, whose eyes resemble their mother's.

"When we look into their eyes we'll always know she was there."

— Erin Emlock



### Ed Ervanian, 29 'Truly loved everyone'

Edward E. Ervanian found joy in every aspect of his life.

He loved his family and fiancée, he loved his job as a department manager at Stop & Shop, he loved working with youths at St. Joseph Church in West Warwick, he loved all New England sports teams, and he loved almost every kind of music — from religious hymns to Eminem's rap.

All of this shone through in his 1,000-watt smile, and his family likes to recall that one friend said that "once you meet Eddy and your life was touched by him, you never forgot him."

Ed, 29, was a gentle bear of a young man who would scoop his mother up in hugs and always looked forward to nights with his dad when they would go out for dinner and a movie.

"Our son was a rare breed," said Edward C. Ervanian, as he sat with his wife, Polly, in their Warwick living room. "He truly loved everyone."

He also had a great sense of humor, whether it was his love for puns (the cornier the better) or his ability to happily and loudly belt out a hymn in church even though his family kept telling him he had the voice of "a bullfrog."

He had so much he was looking forward to.

Just two months ago, he became engaged to his longtime girlfriend, Stephanie Bowering of Warwick. Ed showed his mother the ring he had picked out to get her opinion, and then, on Christmas Eve, took Stephanie for a ride along the beach and proposed to her in the car. The couple were planning to wed May 22, 2004.

"Eddy was already part of their family," his mother said of the Bowerings.

He was very much his own person, his parents say. They always took him to church when he was young, but he developed his own, stronger tie to the church — serving as Eucharistic minister at St. Joseph and also being active in the Pawtuxet Valley CYO and Rejoice & Hope CYO in Cranston. He was also a member of the LaSalette Youth Group.

Although he didn't play on any sports teams, his mother said he was a walking statistician for every professional sport, particularly the Red Sox, the New England Patriots and the Providence Bruins.

"My son lived by two books," his father said. "The Holy Bible and the sports section of the newspaper."

Although his dad is a retired deputy fire chief from the Cranston Fire Department, Ed chose to find his own career path — working at several Stop & Shop supermarkets before being appointed manager of the seafood department at the chain's Richmond store.

At his funeral, his dad arranged for six Cranston firefighters to serve as pallbearers.

— Barbara Polichetti



### Thomas J. Fleming, 30 An instinct for helping

Thomas J. Fleming was quiet at first, but once he knew you, he was a friend for life.

Friends were so important to Tom that he would call just to talk about the happenings in another friend's life. He was the one who kept people in touch, and he was always there to offer help.

His mother and others who knew him say that's probably why Tom wanted to work with teenagers, as a physical-education teacher and coach.

A 1990 graduate of Auburn (Mass.) High School, Tom, 30, had been substitute-teaching for about two years at his alma mater, waiting for a position to open as he gained experience. He had also applied for a softball coaching position.

"He was one of those guys who loved to be around the kids," said Bill Garneau, Auburn High's athletic director. "We'd sit down after class and talk. He was always asking questions."

Garneau had also known Tom as a student. In those days, Tom stood out, his red hair flowing down past his shoulders. It stayed that way until his mid-20s, when he cut it short.

"I made suggestions" about shorter hair, said his mother, Judith Fleming. "It wasn't until one day that he decided. . . . He pulled in the driveway one day — I didn't even recognize who it was."

Maggie Dinsdale, a friend from Auburn High, said Tom cut his hair just before her wedding. Tom was there to congratulate the newlyweds, and he was there again when Maggie and her husband had a baby daughter. The couple didn't own a nice camera, so Tom insisted they borrow his to capture their daughter's start in life.

He was there again when Maggie had a car accident in the parking lot at Sears, where they both worked for a time.

"He was the first person out in the parking lot seeing if I was OK," she said. "The guy was just yelling and screaming at me, and Tom said 'Back off — it's not her fault.'"

Maggie and another close high school friend, Todd Shaw, said they prayed after hearing of the fire at The Station, hoping Tom hadn't gone.

Tom loved '80s music. He and Todd had attended about a hundred shows together, Todd estimates. They

would check out the bands, and they would look up at the ceilings of the clubs to check out the sprinkler equipment — the kind that might have saved lives at The Station. Tom had worked for a time with Todd and his father, who own the RC Shaw Sprinkler Co., in Worcester.

At home, Tom was more quiet, his mother said. The youngest of three children, he lived in Auburn until last year, when he moved to Worcester. His parents, longtime Auburn residents, moved to Florida last summer. They had a private service the week after his death.

"It gets a little easier each day," his mother said. "And then I see a picture of him . . ."

— Randal Edgar



### Rachael Florio-DePietro, 31 Nurturing nature

Rachael Florio-DePietro arrived at family parties smiling and offering "hellos" all around. She took care to say "love you" to everyone before she left.

For family members who still talk about her in the present tense, it was Rachael's caring, kindhearted spirit that drew people in from the moment they met her.

"You couldn't meet her and not like her," said her father, George Florio. "She loved being around people. She always took an interest."

Rachael, 31, of Coventry, loved nature, too, and she dreamed of planting a big garden. She enjoyed walking in the woods with her friends and family. Most of all, she loved little animals.

In one of the oldest family photos, a very young Rachael totters through a petting-zoo pen with docile goats and geese. Rabbits almost as big as Rachael lounge nearby. The image is old and blurry, but the picture is clear: Rachael is wandering around to each creature, saying "hello."

Her Aunt Betty remembers one time Rachael saw a wounded animal hobbling across the road as she drove home. It was an opossum, maybe, or a raccoon. Whatever it was, Rachael worried it would get smashed by another car. She pulled over and stepped into the street, guarding the animal until it lurched off into the bushes.

That caring instinct matured, her father said, when Rachael gave birth to her son Adrian, now 7. Adrian lives with Rachael's ex-husband, Dean DePietro.

"She was a devoted mom," Florio said. "She'd do anything for Adrian."

Rachael shared her love of animals — and of people — with her brother, Adam Florio, 26.

The two had always been close, hanging out, teasing each other, quoting lines from favorite movies and television shows like Seinfeld, and then acting out goofy scenes together.

Adam was with her at The Station that night. When fire tore through the club, he lost sight of his sister in the smoke and press of panicked people. He managed to escape through a window; relatives saw him on TV, cooling burns on his head with handfuls of snow. Rachael never made it out.

Adam was hospitalized for a week with serious burns and seared lungs. His family postponed Rachael's funeral at his request, until he was well enough to be there.

— Neil Shea



### Mark Fontaine, 22 Hoped to be police officer

Mark Fontaine made others happy just by being around them.

His large circle of friends often gathered at his home on Country View Drive, in Johnston, where Mark, 22, went out of his way to make adults — even those a lot older than his friends — feel comfortable.

"He always had a hug for you, even when his friends were around," said his grandmother Pauline Fortier. "His friends saw it and they'd hug you too."

Even though Mark weighed only 115 pounds, he was the peacemaker when arguments broke out among friends, his mother, Chris, says. "All of his friends respected him because of the kind of person he was."

About eight of Mark's relatives and friends went to the concert at The

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