

Alma's Family Part 3

In the mid 1970's Alma got very involved with her Church, St. Cecilia's Catholic Church on East 106th Street. She was in the choir, a reader of scripture, a member of the Bible Study, and a very active participant in all parish activities. The church was her greatest source of strength. She was also an Associate of the Dominican Sister's of the Sick and Poor – an order of Catholic nuns. When everything else went wrong, her parish was still there for her.

In 1980, after many, many years on Public Assistance, Alma got a job as a Secretary at a Catholic Youth Center on West 108th Street called Grace House. Alma loved her job and worked there for the next 26 years. On occasion, Alma brought her grandchildren to Grace House and at one point or another all of her children visited her there. Going to work every day after being out of the work force for so long was as Alma said, " a blessing."

In 1985, while at work one day, a police officer arrived at the door of Alma's work to ask her Alma. When Alma saw his face, she knew something was wrong. The officer was the same officer who had come to her home to tell her that her husband Cano was dead. But this time, the officer was here to tell her that she son, Anthony had been found murdered under the Manhattan Bridge in Brooklyn. Alma was devastated, but she immediately sprung into action, thinking about how she was gonna pay for a funeral at Farrenga Funeral Home on East 116th Street. Anthony was allegedly murdered in a drug related incident. Alma called his girlfriend so that she could tell his daughters and asked her social worker to go to her daughter's home to tell them. Anthony's three children continued to live with their mother – Alma collected money to bury her son, and everyone at the funeral kept watch for rival drug gangs who were rumored to be coming to the funeral to disrupt and disrespect his memory. Alma maintained contact with Anthony's girlfriend and her grandchildren after his death.

In 1989, Dionne died from AIDS. Dionne had been having sex with I.V. drug using men, many of whom were HIV positive, in those days, no one knew this. Dionne contracted AIDS – she refused to be tested, refused to go to the doctor, but knew by this time she was HIV positive. Dionne wasted away, she was always thin, but near her death she was 80 lbs. Her oldest daughter, Anne, who was now age 10, went to live with Alma. Pam, Dionne's second daughter went to live with her aunt Judy; Matt her son also went to live with his Aunt Judy.

In 1992, Brenda also died from AIDS. Like her sister, Judy had been having sex with I.V. drug using men, many of whom were HIV positive and she contracted AIDS. She was hospitalized many times and after a long and protracted illness, she died leaving behind her five children. All five of her children ages 1 year to 10 years old, remained in Alma's home and were raised by her. For a time Alma was provided with kinship care foster care payments, but when she realized that it meant that ACS would be in her home every two week, she refused the subsidy saying, "I don't want those fucking City people in here telling me how to raise my fucking grandchildren." Alma made sure her grandchildren had Medicaid, educational services and every other benefits, which they were entitled to including survivor benefits for Brenda's children because Brenda had a work history.

Judy, Alma's middle daughter, remained in a relationship with Rafael and was now after her sister's death, a mother to eight children which she gave birth to and two of her sister's children -- ten children in all between the ages of 13 and 6 years old. Judy made sure her children had every educational and health care related benefit and ACS played no role in her caring for the children, especially after her past experience with ACS.

Dionne's children:

Anne who was raised by Alma after her mother's death, graduated from high school, got a degree from college, works full time, has been married for 17 years to the same man and has three children of her own – a son and two daughters. She and her family live in Kingston, NY

Pam who raised by her Aunt Judy after her mother's death, did not graduate from high school; had a son with her boyfriend when she was 18, and had two more sons with two other guys. She does not work, but she is a very good mother who is devoted to her sons and very committed to making sure that they graduate from high school. She lives in her own rent subsidized apt on East 108th Street.

Matt who raised by her Aunt Judy after her mother's death, did not graduate from high school, does not work, has a history of substance abuse and his currently homeless. His sister's help him when they see him, but he does not visit regularly.

Brenda's children:

Damien who was raised by Alma after his mother's death, did not graduate from high school and was involved in drug related activities, was arrested and is currently serving a ten year sentence in upstate NY.

Phil who was raised by Alma after his mother's death, did not graduate from high school and was also involved in drug related activities. He is currently addicted to crack, is homeless, and family members try to avoid him because he steals from them to buy drugs. He previously served a three year sentence in upstate NY.

Tamara who was raised by Alma after his mother's death, graduated from high school has some college credits, and lives in NJ with a family whom she considers to be her own family. Tarama has no children, and works full time at Whole Foods.

Chris who was raised by Alma after his mother's death but was reviled by his grandmother because she blamed his father for giving her daughter AIDS, and because he was the darkest skinned member of the family. Chris always had a severe learning disability and did not graduate from high school. Thus far he has not been arrested, has no children, and lives in upstate NY working in odd, off the books jobs.

Brendan who was raised by Alma after his mother's death was his grandmother's favorite – she made no secret that she loved him more than all of the others and he was the only grandchild whom she overtly had affection for. He did not graduate from high school, he has a girlfriend and a daughter and lives on East 108th Street. Recently he has been having some substance abuse problems, but is usually a loving father and a good boyfriend to his girlfriend and baby's mother.

Judy's children:

Joshua lived with his mother and accepted Rafael as his father. He did not graduate from high school, got involved in drug dealing and was arrested and currently serving 15 years in state prison.

Maria has two daughters, she is not married, works full time in a hospital as an aide, graduated from high school, and lives on East 107th Street with her daughters.

Donna has one son, she is not married, works full time as an aide in a health care setting, graduated from high school and lives on East 107th Street with her son.

Sarah is a police officer. She graduated from high school, is not married and has no children, she lives on East 108th Street.

Veronica

Maura

Elsa are all in high school, have no children and live with their mother and Rafael on East 119th Street

After a long battle with cancer, Alma died in 2006. Until her death she continued to work as a Secretary at Grace House on West 108th Street and was a devoted member of the St Cecilia's parish and the Dominican Sisters of the Sick and Poor. Alma left behind one daughter, 16 grandchildren and at the time of her death two great grandchildren.