



And I Don't Want to Live This Life: A Mother's Story of Her Daughter's Murder

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For most of us, it was just another horrible headline. But for Deborah Spungen, the mother of Nancy, who was stabbed to death at the Chelsea Hotel, it was both a relief and a tragedy. Here is the incredible story of an infant who never stopped screaming, a toddler who attacked people, a teenager addicted to drugs, violence, and easy sex, a daughter completely out of control--who almost destroyed her parents' marriage and the happiness of the rest of her family.

And I Don't Want to Live This Life: A Mother's Story of Her Daughter's Murder Details

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Ana says

John Lennon and Yoko Ono. Kurt Cobain and Courtney Love. Eric Clapton and Pattie Boyd. Jim Morrison and Pamela Courson.

Sid and Nancy. It was a crazy, passionate, tragic, Romeo and Juliet kind of love affair. Their story had a crazy beginning, but maybe the craziest thing is how normal their relationship could have been.

In all seriousness, this is a sad book. It's a sad story. Of course I'd heard of Nancy Spungen. I mean, who hasn't? During my unfortunate punk phase in high school – when I wore Doc Martens and battered and distressed clothing – I listened to Ramones, Sex Pistols and The Clash (as well as Good Charlotte, don't judge me) practically every day. I wore chains on my belt. Because nothing says punk like hip, expensive chain belts (they can also come in handy when faced with unfamiliar and dangerous situations). Thought I was so cool.

I wasn't. Anyway, like any good newbie fan, I searched the internet for information on Sid Vicious. The stories ranged from tragic to hilarious. The events of October 12, 1978 were definitely tragic. What really happened on the night Nancy was killed? Did Sid really kill her? We will probably never know the whole truth. If Sid did kill Nancy, he definitely had no recollection of it.

Nancy hasn't been painted in a good light. Most people continue to hate on her. 'She had it coming!' Yoko destroyed The Beatles. Courtney killed Kurt. Nancy had a bad reputation. She totally deserved to be stabbed. Women are the root of all evil. We must be stopped!

Nancy Spungen wasn't a bad person. She didn't deserve to die. She was a 20 year old girl. She made some bad choices. Things could have been different but they weren't. Nancy and Sid paid the ultimate price. They both ruined their lives. Such a waste.

Joi Smith says

Ever since I was a young girl I was always drawn to the story of Nancy Spungen and her "Sidney". Though my younger, very troubled self was drawn into their story of love, death, drugs, and mental illness for all of the wrong reasons.

After reading this book written by Nancy's mother for the first time, I found myself clinging to her every word... I simply couldn't put it down. On Christmas Day this year I wanted to get home just to continue reading.

The way she expressed her deepest, darkest, and most honest feelings of Nancy literally had me within tears at certain points. Nancy caused such pain for her family, that I ached for her mother, father, brother and sister so much. But most of all, I ached for Nancy...

She was a lost and sad little baby from her birth on, and there was no light at the end of her tunnel. She spent her 20 years living in misery, suffering from a severe sadness that no one could cure.

Coming from someone who suffers from mental illness (Bi Polar, Depression, OCD, Borderline Personality Disorder, Identity Disorder...) I can understand her feelings of just wanting her life to end. I was hospitalized from age 14 until I was nearly 17 years old, being treated for my severe depression, suicidal thoughts, outbursts of rage, and self mutilation. I saw a lot of myself in my younger years in Nancy while she was growing up. Her anger, and her outbursts were somewhat similar, though obviously much, much more severe.

I no longer idolize Sid and Nancy, now that I'm a stable, happy 22 year old, married woman. However, I am always interested in their story. But now, more than anything I have such sorrow for her and Sid. They were as her mother said, two lost souls... They found each other and it felt good. I do believe they both loved each other, they were just too troubled to have a healthy, long lasting relationship... and lives.

I am so happy that I have finally read this book. Nancy's story is filled with such pain being told by her mother, who wanted to badly to help her little baby... But was helpless.

In Nancy and Sid's generation, the mental health care was not as it is today. They couldn't get the help they needed. Nancy was written off as "normal" for her age group. By the time her parents were told by professionals that something was indeed not right, it was too late and Nancy was too far gone within her own mind.

Nancy self medicated with street drugs, and coming from someone who has dealt with many of her own demons (including two murders in my own family), I can completely understand. Had I not gotten the proper care, medication, and therapy, there is every chance in the world I would have turned to self medicating as Nancy did.

This poor girl, found no peace in her 20 years until her death...

Now that it's been many, many years since her passing... I pray her family has lived their lives happier, and in peace. I know her father passed away a few years ago, and her sister has a great career as a chef. I can imagine though they are always haunted by what happened to Nancy... How could they not be.

Sid and Nancy (the movie) has been a favorite of mine since I was 13 years old. My Dad was a Sex Pistols fan, and during my troubled times Sid and Nancy seemed "cool" to me. I still love that movie, and own it. But I cannot imagine how hard it was for Nancy's family to deal with the disgusting press after their daughter's death. The way they went about it was un-human like. Just disgusting. I don't know how the family felt about the movie, I can imagine they didn't like Sid and Nancy being made into punk idols and the ultimate punk couple. The movie was released after this book was written, so I'm not sure how they reacted or felt. I can imagine not so happy. I feel for them, I truly do.

This is an amazing, emotional, truthful read! I couldn't put it down...

Chuck O'Connor says

This is a book about murder, specifically, the murder of Nancy Spungen at the hands of Sid Vicious, but it is also about the small murders that Nancy encountered from her mental illness, and the insufficient medical system in place in her time to deal with her disease. It is a moving story told by Nancy's mother, and while the narrative can become mechanical sometimes, Deborah Spungen's courageous insight regarding the trauma of a parental caregiver to a mentally ill child, and a survivor of family murder (in the literal and symbolic sense) are powerful and fresh. Near the end of the book during the resolution of Deborah's journey she admits that she wasn't, "afraid to feel compassion," any more. This is a powerful moment in the book because it added counterpoint to the preceding tragedy by focusing a cause on the hurt Nancy lived found in her teachers, doctors, peers and society's lack of compassionate equipment to diagnose and treat her psychic pain. The book made me mindful of appreciating the small beautiful things in my life. My bed, food in the fridge, the love of my wife, and the joy of my son.

Lisa says

let me just say first that Nancy's mom should definatly get the award for best mother because after reading this book and all the stuff she had to go through since day one I do not see how she did it without having a freaking heart attack. This book scared the shit out of me being a mother myself, it's hard to read what another mother had to go through. I do however think this is the best book I have read in years it kept me interested and I could not put it down. I laugh because I know so many kids around here that completly worship Sid and Nancy after reading this book they should worship Deborah Spungen.

Serena says

Easily one of the most hauntingly beautiful books I've ever read. The Sex Pistols were the first band I was ever really obsessed with and like most of their fans, I hated Nancy. From everything said about her by the remaining band members to people who hung out with The Pistols, I considered her to be the punk Yoko Ono.

This book was written by her mother. It begins with Nancy's childhood and weaves a tragic tale of a misunderstood girl. It recounts her illness, her drug abuse, a family confused and frightened by her, and her relationship with Sid. Nancy was a very intelligent girl and despite reports otherwise, she loved Sid. My favorite part of the book was the poem written by Sid after her death:

You were my little baby girl,
And I shared all your fears.
Such joy to hold you in my arms
and kiss away your tears.
But now you're gone, there's only pain
and nothing I can do.
And I don't want to live this life,

If I can't live for you.
To my beautiful baby girl.
Our love will never die...

Catherine says

I found the book to be uneven and self-justifying rather than an honest and clear depiction of Nancy and her mother. I didn't like it at all because the more I read, the more it took on a very self-centered viewpoint with very little compassion or understanding of Nancy as a person. I would hope that if my daughter died, and I chose to write a book about it, I would reflect more on the loss of a very unique and special (if troubled) woman without filling the pages with self-gratifying explanations and excuses regarding her death.

Adriane Devries says

What mother doesn't want their teenage daughter to get entangled in hard core drugs and the famous punk rock scene of the late 1970s? This one: Deborah Spungen, mother of the infamous Nancy, whose only claim to fame was and still is her two-year relationship with and subsequent alleged murder by British punker Sid Vicious of the Sex Pistols. And I Don't Want to Live This Life is Deborah's account of Nancy's deeply troubled life, from a traumatic birth experience to her prophetic death before the age of twenty-one. As of its writing in 1983, the best the psychological profession could account for Nancy's outrageous personality and behavior was schizophrenia, but I imagine if she had lived today she would receive a diagnosis either in the autism spectrum, reactive attachment issues, or perhaps oppositional defiant disorder. The popular diagnoses change, but the legend of Sid and Nancy lives on...even today, thirty years after their tragic deaths, fans emulate them both and even have facebook pages in their honor. This account of a family's perspective on mental illness, fame, tragedy and reluctant healing is one of the most compelling books I've read in a long time. As an adult who once loved punk, it was a reflection on my own turbulent teenage years of angst and self-discovery. This novel reminds me of the deceptive glamour of the punk movement in its heyday, so compelling, so thrilling, yet so often destructive.

Rosemary Allix says

This is the book that inspired a lot of my own writing. I've lost my original copy and haven't read it for years, so not sure how I would respond to it now. But at the time it blew me away. It is the story of an ordinary woman - an ordinary American family - who had to deal with something extraordinary and impossibly heartbreaking in their lives. Nancy Spungen (who went on to be girlfriend of Sid Vicious and was murdered) was, her mother says, "Born angry". Nobody ever discovered why she turned out the way she did. After I read this I knew that I want to write about extraordinary things happening to ordinary people, rather than trying to create larger than life characters for my fiction.

Kristin says

Courtney Love was not the first Borderline personalitied junkie to attempt to usurp the underground! The handwringing in this book is stellar; no wonder the child was so crazy. GREAT BEACH READ and cautionary tale for those of you with teenage girls!

Terra says

This was one of the hardest books to read - as a mother and as a woman. It was heart wrenching to read the very private side of a very public story. I applaud Debbie for writing this book and sharing her story and "her Nancy" with the world. This was a book club pick that I would probably never have picked up otherwise but am sure glad I did. I made so many highlights and notes while I read in anticipation of what will certainly be a fabulous discussion at book club this coming week.

Bunnyhugger says

Nancy was most famous for her relationship with Sid Vicious (the Sex Pistols' bass player), who stabbed her to death in the Chelsea Hotel in 1978 (he died of an overdose before the case came to trial.) "And I Don't Want To Live This Life" is the story of Nancy's life as written by her mother and it is truly a harrowing one. Deprived of oxygen after a difficult birth, her life continued with non-stop screaming (as an infant) and uncontrollable episodes of rage and violence that placed an unimaginable toll on her family. It's a story of the agony of mental illness and now I can't help wondering if modern-day psychiatric medicine and knowledge would have made a difference (before the heroine addiction). By the time the end came I felt some relief for her - at least her suffering was over. Very sad and disturbing. I read this a long time ago at an impressionable age and it has haunted me since. I was living in Japan at the time and was finding English-language books hard to come by. I stumbled upon this quite randomly in a bargain bin in a Tokyo store piled high with paperbacks - exclusively with this title. I don't think it was even a book store. Surreal in a way.

Amanda says

While the first half of the book was an interesting read, overall I did not enjoy this book. The author comes off and very whiny and attention-seeking. While she talks about her daughter never taking the blame for her actions but passing it on to others, I don't think she realizes that she does the same thing throughout the book. Spungen's affair is her husband's fault, Nancy's behavior is the doctor's fault, Spungen and her husband's inability to control Nancy is the psychologist's fault, and all the problems in their house is Nancy's fault - even after Nancy's death. Spungen seems to look down on her daughter for her acting out and attention-seeking behavior, and then does things like leaving a noose hung in the garage, hoping that her husband (or one of her living children!) will see it and help her, even though she was seeing a counselor and had spoken to the counselor about her suicidal thoughts. Throughout the book, although especially in the first half, she describes allowing Nancy to set the tone of the house and do whatever she wants to do whenever she wants to do it - including the story of telling Suzy to give Nancy the pen that Suzy is currently using because Nancy wants it, then telling Suzy to not be a troublemaker - and then she blames Nancy for the fact of their household moving around her. It isn't fair to set a child up that way. She fully lost me when she was talking

about her fears that her deceased daughter was a prostitute in New York for a while. I can't image a loving mother who simply wants to show people that her daughter wasn't the druggie slut that the world thought she was (phrasing very similar to what Spungen herself uses in the book) would include that, as it was a needless addition, and hearsay at that. This book read as a long essay about how unfair and sad Spungen's life was because she was cursed with a horrible child, and as a mother I simply couldn't stomach it.

Violet says

The main thing I took away is the knowledge that although the Spungen family had a pool, they were not rich. Got that? NOT RICH! No matter what the press said! Regular old American family! Also, the fact that the author, Nancy's beleaguered mother, had "no time for the luxury of tears." I hear that!

I'm slightly bitter about this book because after I read it, my mother confiscated it, issuing the accusation that I wanted to be "just like Nancy Spungen." Oh, please! I look terrible as a blond.

Kaethe says

If you wonder what it's like to have an out-of-control child, and then what's it is like to have her become a famous murder victim, this is the book for you. I feel great pity for Ms. Spungen, but I can't help but think that the end of her daughter's life throws the rest of it into the worst possible light. Had she and Sid survived another decade, settled down, and raised some kids, that rebellious youth would feel very different.

RIP Nancy.

Stephanie says

This book was amazing, because it lets people know more about Nancy Spungen, humanizing her instead of just viewing her as a minor, murdered character in the history of punk rock. I don't usually get teary eyed over books but reading the struggles that Nancy's parents faced from the time she was a child, ending with the way the police treated them when they went to claim her body had me bawling. I also think this is a must-read for anyone who is raising a learning-disabled child, perhaps if help were available for learning & behavioral disabilities back then, Nancy's fate would have been different.

Josephine says

This book broke my heart. I read it nearly 25 years ago, yet I can recite parts of the story. It documents the incredible pain, sadness and heartbreak that the Spungen family endured throughout Nancy's turbulent and tragic life, even continuing after her death.

The public only saw the fabricated image of Nancy Spungen that was created by sleazy tabloid reporters. Yes, Nancy was a disturbed heroin addict, but she was also sensitive and could not find peace and happiness in life. She found something in her relationship with Sid Vicious who also sought something missing in his

life. He and Nancy were drawn together.

Every facet of Nancy's life from beginning to end is laid painfully bare and nothing is held back. She even revealed the contents of some of her doctors' psychiatric diagnosis', something she only learned after her death. I recommend this book very highly and praise Deborah Spungen for her remarkable strength, courage and love.

Erssie says

Enjoyed the earlier parts, did not get on so well with the ending.

For example, why dye her hair after she has died? Isn't that an insult to the choices she made? This book paints a bad picture of punks and the Sex Pistols when in fact, it was mainly Nancy's problems that influenced Sid Vicious to be the way he was. Nancy started using drugs when she was very young and in many ways her death was inevitable.

Also, I found some parts that made me question the rest of the book. For example, repeatedly referring to Johnny Lyman (I assume she meant John Lydon) and this made me wary of other parts of her research as this is a really basic bit of research with error.

Ally Stefanides says

I rated this book so high for personal reasons. Nancy sounds like me in so many ways and I believe she may have had Borderline Personality Disorder as well. Mrs. Spungen tried to be as unbiased as she could be as a mother while giving as much detail about the tragic life of her daughter and one of punk's most visible icons, however undeserved that title may be.

Zoe says

Loved this book I first read it when I was 14, being a Pistols fan, & Nancy Spungen I was fascinated with her life. Wow! Her poor suffering mother writes a really harrowing touching well written book about a child who was clearly born 'disturbed' came out of the womb screaming & biting & never stopped. Then wandered NYC stripping whoring & following cool bands in a time I wish still existed. I know many people who came in contact with nancy they all say the same thing, she was the most awful annoying bitch ever.

There is a fab video of her & sid & stiv bators & girlfriend on a cable chat show, being interviewed 3 weeks before her death. Her & sid are not high they are on Methadone & she comes across as extremely bright well spoken, & alive. People do say how intelligent she was.

I also lived in rm 100, 10 yrs after the death of nancy in the Hotel Chelsea, they had left the blood stained bed, that Nancy bled out on, I slept on it for 1 yr (clearly strung out myself cause it didn't faze me)

Anyone interested in psychology/ the Sex Pistols/ & NY punk history will enjoy this.

Jessica says

Deborah Spungen is the mother of Nancy Spungen, girlfriend of Sex Pistols' Sid Vicious. She was slain by Sid in the Chelsea Hotel in 1979. This book details Nancy's life from cradle to grave. It is a heartbreaking book by a grieving mother who loved her daughter and wanted nothing more but help her. This is the story of a little girl who screamed all day and all night when she was a baby. She chronicles the myriad of emotional problems Nancy had growing up. Nancy was a destructive force on her family and nearly tore them apart. Nancy's family tried to get her help so many times and had the doors slammed in their faces. They sent her to a slew of doctors and facilities to attempt to help their daughter. You feel the desperation of the family and their complete feelings of helplessness. As Nancy become more destructive to her family they are faced with an impossible choice, to let her continue to live at home or let her take her chances living on her own. By the time they have to make this decision, Nancy has become almost impossible to live with, she is violent, she manipulates her siblings, she was doing drugs, smoking and drinking. I often think of the Spungen family and wonder if they were ever able to heal. Don't bother reading this book if you are looking for a sensationalistic piece of tabloid tripe. This mother's story is poignant and touching.
