

# Fr. Solanus - One Person's Testimony

Sixteen month old Elizabeth Fanning lay critically ill. She suffered from leukemia which back then in 1940 was fatal. Her swollen belly and emaciated limbs give her the appearance of a starvation victim, but the truth was that she had lost all appetite for food.

The doctors had recommended liver soup. Her mother found it almost impossible to get her to swallow even a spoonful of it.

Causing her parents even greater upset was the fact that her leukemia may have been triggered by medical treatment they had consented to for her.

When she was born in August 1938, she appeared fully normal except for a red birthmark on her neck. But then a growth appeared on her cheek. To stop the growth and to stop the spread of the birthmark, a series of radium treatments were given.

The growth disappeared, and the birthmark didn't spread further, but sadly Elizabeth also stopped growing, and became listless. Even her hair stopped growing.

A specialist diagnosed leukemia and recommended that her spleen be removed. The parents brought her to the renowned Mayo Clinic in Minnesota for a second opinion. The leukemia diagnosis was confirmed, but the Mayo Clinic specialists declared she was too weak to have her spleen removed.

The only treatment recommended was liver soup. She was too far gone for anything else.

**No hope whatsoever was held out for her recovery.**

Her mother was told to prepare herself for finding her dead at any time. Because her illness was clearly terminal, her doctors told the mother that they would waive all further fees.

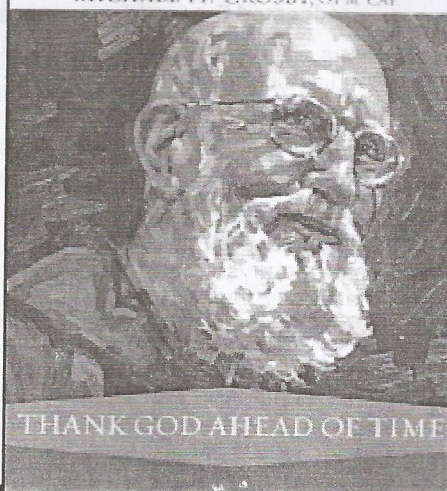
Mrs Fanning's aunt however was not without hope. She was aware of claims of amazing miracles by people who had turned to Fr. Solanus Casey.

"He's a saint, and he heals people all the time," she told her niece.

Fr. Solanus, then aged seventy, was based in St. Bonaventure's in Detroit. With the specialists having all agreed that little Elizabeth was terminally ill and without hope of recovery, the Fanning family set out on the long journey to Detroit. When they arrived, they carried their child, who was unable to stand, into St. Bonaventure's, where they got a warm welcome from Fr. Solanus..

They found themselves remarking on the shining face of Fr. Solanus (despite his untrimmed beard), as he listened with sympathy to their sad story. There was a queue of people behind them

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Cover of Fr. Michael Cosby's book on Fr. Solanus in God's Cottage €19.90 or €22.25 by post from the Diary office (Ireland) (GB £22).

waiting to see Fr. Solanus, some of them clearly suffering, yet they felt that they had his complete attention.

He spoke to them of learning to pray with faith and trust in God's goodness, warning them of how fear and doubt undermines our openness to God's power at work in us.

He urged them to practise trusting God, and to practise surrendering themselves and Elizabeth into His hands with trust in His goodness. Make concrete acts that will foster their confidence in God's goodness, he told them. Bring your sadness and anxiety to God and surrender it as this "trusts God's merciful designs."

"Thank God now for what He will do in the future, whatever that may be."

This kind of confidence in God "puts Him on the spot," he told them with a grin. He also told them of other healings he had seen including cases as "hopeless" as their daughter's.

At his encouragement, the Fannings enrolled Betsy in the Capuchin Order's Seraphic Mass Association to benefit from hundreds of Mass prayers with a donation to the missions.

Then, Fr. Solanus, in his unusually high-pitched yet whisper-soft voice (the left-over, it is believed, of childhood diphtheria, which killed two of his sisters), started speaking to little Elizabeth. Ignoring her extremely emaciated condition and her obvious listlessness, he said to her "You're

going to be all right, Elizabeth."

Then he handed a piece of candy to her as if she was a well child with a normal appetite.

On the long drive home to Dearborn, the parents saw a real change in Elizabeth. She sat up instead of just lying listlessly the way she had on the journey to the monastery. She smiled - that was a big change too. And for the first time in her young life, she was watching everything with interest.

Patricia Treece in her book "Nothing Short of a Miracle" says, "Her parents are startled, almost shocked, but are so happy at the sudden, inexplicable change that they stop at a restaurant "to celebrate." Mrs. Fanning says: "The place was crowded — and Betsy — who only an hour before had been lying in my arms as limp as a rag doll — immediately became the "life of the party." She waved to the people about us, jumping up and down. She was full of life."

Her recovery continued. The little girl that had never walked was soon walking. In the late 1960's, when Mrs Fanning was interviewed for an article on Fr. Solanus, she testified, "When I brought her back to the doctors, they were incredulous. She looked so different — healthy, lively, and her once wispy, lifeless hair was now curly."

**"That's not Betsy!" they exclaimed.**

"But it was. While childhood leukemia remained a fatal disease for many years after 1940, little Betsy Fanning simply didn't have it anymore after visiting Fr. Solanus Casey.

"You'll be all right," the Capuchin priest had said simply. "Betsy was no isolated instance of his prophecy proving correct. .... Cures include everything from cancer to heart disease, from deafness to diabetes, from polio to bone disease, from broken backs to infertility."

"If people were cured before him, his very eyes would fill with tears, and he would seem utterly amazed at the power of the Mass ... [in his mind] their cure had no connection with him. ..."

"Few dreamed that the thousands of physical cures, changes of heart, and other graces God gave through Fr. Solanus Casey, like a great tree from a tiny seed, had all grown from one act of blind trust in God made by the young Casey as a seminarian.

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