

# 'Miracle child' defies illnesses

Four years old, 27 pounds, all fight. That's Nany Graham.

By SUSANNAH BRYAN  
STAFF WRITER

POMPANO BEACH — Nanyamka "Nany" Graham smiles and sings like any 4-year-old. But there is one thing that sets her apart: a little white buggy she carts everywhere she goes.

It does not hold her favorite doll or toy, but the tools that keep her alive: an oxygen tank and feeding pump.

Nany had a 1 percent chance of being born alive. She beat those odds, and she's beating them still.

"She is what we call our miracle child," said Lisa Shafer, Nany's

preschool nurse at the Broward Children's Center.

"She has the heart and lungs of an 80-year-old smoker," said Rick Rubinstein, director of respiratory care at the center. "But

this little girl has learned to walk and talk and run around. She's just captured everyone's heart."

Nany's odyssey began even before she was born, says her mother, Pauline Foster.

Doctors advised her not to go through with the pregnancy.

"They kept telling me she wasn't



**FULL OF LIFE:** "Nany" Graham, 4, who has illnesses that require the aid of machines, doesn't let her disabilities get her down. Staff photo/Anastasia Walsh

going to live," Foster said. "They said she was going to be retarded, that she wasn't going to make it at birth."

But Foster told the doctors she was keeping her baby. "She was going to be born, and if after that she didn't make it, well then, at least she was given the chance."

Nany was not premature, but her

birth was complicated. She was born with a condition in which her abdominal organs were outside her body. That's in addition to chronic heart and lung disease.

The day after Nany was born, surgeons worked over her 5-pound

■ NANY continues on 6B



**Sun-Sentinel CHILDREN'S FUND**

Doctors advised her not to go through with the pregnancy.

"They kept telling me she wasn't

# Books, health aids top wish list

## ■ NANY

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1B

body to repair a congenital hernia. A week later she went under the knife again. She had five surgeries — all before her first birthday.

"That was very traumatic for her," her mom said. "She was just 5 pounds, 6 ounces when she was born. She was on the ventilator. She needed it to survive. The moment she'd cry, she'd turn blue."

She was heavily sedated to keep her as still as possible. Doctors feared that even small movements might put too much stress on her tiny heart and lungs.

It was 30 days before Nany's mother was able to hold her only child. "I'd go in and hold her little hand, and she knew it was me. They had her sedated, but she'd wiggle around when we went in to see her. I went in and told her mommy loved her for being strong and being a fighter."

After nine months at Plantation General Hospital, Nany was transferred to Broward Children's Center, where she received 24-hour care in the center's pediatric nursing center.

For the next 19 months, the center was Nany's home. Foster visited whenever she could, on lunch breaks, after work and on weekends.

She prayed for Nany's homecoming, but knew it would take time. "I didn't want her home one day and back in the hospital the next," Foster said.

Several times, Nany was near death.

"My God, I think this child has nine lives," Foster recalls a doctor saying after one close call.

Then, in February 1998, Nany finally went home.

The little baby who couldn't breathe on her own has come a long way, said Shafer, her preschool nurse. "When we got her, she was a critically sick baby. Now she's living a normal life."

Normal, that is, for Nany. Doctors will never be able to cure her lung disease, and do not know whether she'll ever be able to go off the oxygen, said Rubinstein, the respiratory care director.

Nany is stronger now, but still fragile. A cold can easily turn into

## ABOUT THE AGENCY

For every family or person featured in Sun-Sentinel Children's Fund stories, there are many in need. The agency spotlighted today, Broward Children's Center, wants to help more of them.

### BROWARD CHILDREN'S

**CENTER:** A nonprofit haven for children with severe physical and mental disabilities, from birth to 21 years old.

Founded in 1971 and based in Pompano Beach, it offers day care, pediatric nursing, group homes, developmental preschools, a respite program, a home health-care agency, programs for physical, occupational, recreational and speech-language therapy, education and before- and after-school care.

For information: Call 954-943-7638

Enclosed is my tax-deductible check or money order, payable to Sun-Sentinel Children's Fund in the amount of \$ \_\_\_\_\_

Mr.  Mrs.  Ms.  
 Mrs.  Other

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

City \_\_\_\_\_

State \_\_\_\_\_ ZIP \_\_\_\_\_

Check if we may print your name in a list of contributors.

Mail your contribution to:  
Sun-Sentinel Children's Fund,  
Dept. T215720  
Miami, FL 33121-5720



To charge your donation 24 hours a day, call 800-381-2112

For more information, call Sun-Sentinel Source Line: In Broward/Miami Dade: (954) 523-5463 In Palm Beach County: (561) 496-5463

The Sun-Sentinel will make every effort to acknowledge in the newspaper donations received before Dec. 31, 1999. All donations will be acknowledged by mail. Sun-Sentinel Children's Fund is a fund of the McCormick Tribune Foundation, which has its principal office at 435 N. Michigan Ave., Chicago, IL 60611. The Sun-Sentinel Children's Fund will provide support for children's charities in South Florida.

A copy of the official registration and financial information may be obtained from the Division of Consumer Services by calling toll-free 800-HELP FLA. (800-435-7252) within the state. Registration does not imply endorsement, approval or recommendation by the state.

Nany learns more than her ABC's at the center. Her therapists teach her how to maneuver down hallways and up stairs with her buggy in tow.

She also goes on field trips to the county fair, the park and the pumpkin patch. Recently, the center took eight children to Disney World. Six were on ventilators.

"We try to untether the children from the technology that keeps them alive, so they can grow socially and emotionally as well as physically," Rubinstein said.

At home, Nany's feeding pump is attached to an intravenous stand twice her size, and her oxygen tube trails all the way up the stairs to her room. Nany pulls her IV with her as she crosses the floor to retrieve her crayons. "She knows it's a part of her," her mom said.

When her feet get tangled in the tubes, her delicate fingers pull them out of the way.

But sometimes, Nany wants to play without her tubes, if only for a little while. When unhooked, she smiles and shouts "I'm free!" before running off to play.

Like other kids her age, Nany loves Barney and Mickey Mouse, and dreams of her own trip to Disney World.

Because of her fragile health, Nany has always stayed close to

home. She has yet to meet her father's parents, who live in Jamaica. Her mom and dad, Christopher Graham, are both from the island. But in Nany's world, books can take her anywhere she wants to go. "I love books!" she says. "I love books!"

"When she goes to bed, they have to go in the bed with her," her mom said, smiling.

Nany's doctors say she may be ready for public school next year, though she would need a nurse with her at all times.

Nany doesn't have a big wish list for Christmas, but her doctors say she needs a new portable oxygen tank, travel feeding pumps and a pulse oximeter to monitor her oxygen levels.

"Sometimes I still get emotional because I think of all the things she's been through," Foster said. "A couple of times we almost lost her, but she was a fighter. Long-term, we don't know what could happen. But for now, she's doing well."

Nany, meanwhile, has big plans for the future. "I'm gonna be a nurse," she says.

Susannah Bryan can be reached at sbryan@sun-sentinel.com or 954-356-4829.