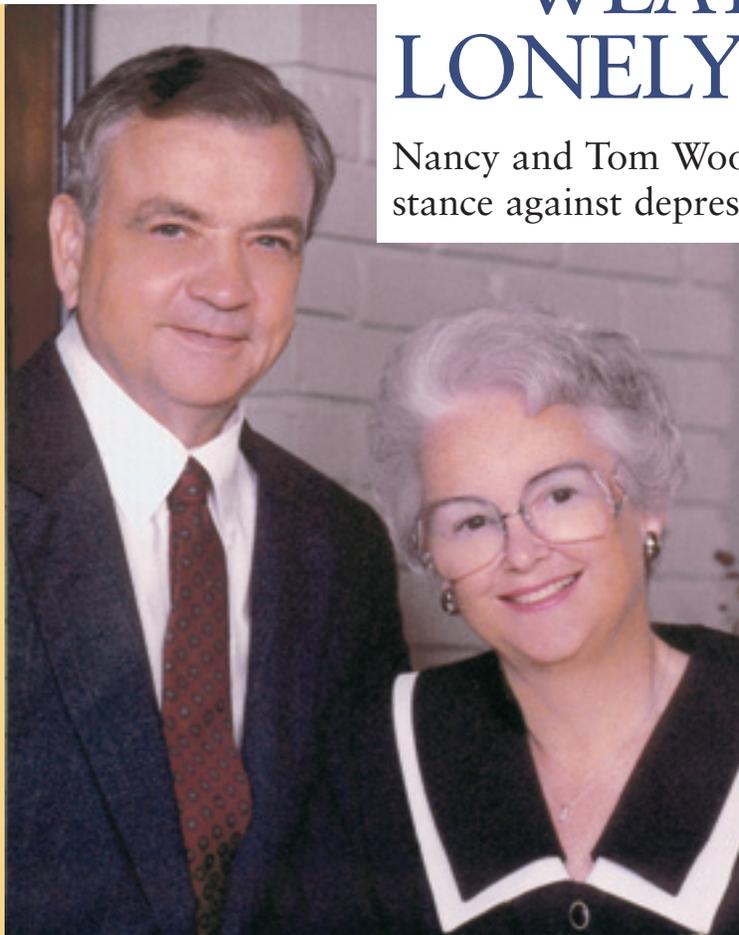


NEW HOPE IN WEATHERING A LONELY STORM

Nancy and Tom Woodworth take an aggressive stance against depression



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—Nancy Upjohn Woodworth

In 1949, a student in Nancy Upjohn’s U-M dormitory attempted suicide.

The young woman had been sad and upset for some time, and when she locked herself in her room and wouldn’t come out, Nancy ran for help.

“I remember thinking, ‘We can’t just ignore this. There’s something going on. We’ve got to get in there.’ I ran to the main desk and got help. They were able to get into the room and discovered she had slit her wrists, but was still alive. They took her to the infirmary and we never saw her again. The family came and packed up her stuff. Nobody talked to us about it. It was 50 years ago and that was just how they handled it then.

“At the time, the farthest thing from my mind was depression. What I knew of depression was people not wanting to get out of bed in the morning, that kind of thing — a person who was just sad. Now I can look back and see that she was probably depressed, though of course I can’t be sure of that.”

For years, she occasionally thought of the young woman, hoping she was fine, and couldn’t forget how her presence had been so carefully erased from the dorm and the University. But she never thought of the reasons behind it all.

Today, Nancy Upjohn Woodworth views depression in a whole new way: as a terrible and widespread disease that can be controlled by treatment — much like diabetes or heart disease. In fact, she is taking an aggressive stance

against depression the best way she knows how. A few months ago, Nancy and Tom Woodworth made a \$2 million pledge to Michigan's new Depression Center — the first multidisciplinary center of its kind in the country devoted to research and treatment of depressive illnesses.

To trace the “lineage” of this gift, one must go back several generations to the headquarters of the Upjohn Pharmaceutical Company in Kalamazoo, where Nancy Woodworth's grandfather, and then her father, served as president of the company in the 1940s and '50s.

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Growing up in the Upjohn household, there was a strong pride in and respect for the university 97 miles to the east. “My father, grandfather and both my great-grandfather and great-grandmother had all graduated from the University of Michigan Medical School,” Nancy Woodworth says, adding that her mother, too, earned undergraduate and graduate degrees from Michigan. “And I graduated from the U-M in education.”

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“I graduated from the U-M in education and taught for a few years before starting a family and raising five children. My father always had a strong belief in giving to the community and supporting his school. There was never any question about that. He made many gifts over the years, but the major philanthropy didn't actually come until my mother was diagnosed with cancer.”

Her father chose to endow the E. Gifford and Love Barnett Upjohn Professorship in Internal Medicine and Oncology in

1987 — a decision that has had an enormous impact on medicine, education and research at Michigan. Tom and Nancy Woodworth decided to continue the family's legacy of support with a gift to the Comprehensive Cancer Center.

“I felt this was something that should be done,” she says. “Michigan is a fine school. Also, even though I'm not a doctor, medicine is in my blood — there are still six doctors in my immediate family — and we felt we wanted to support the Cancer Center.”

Then something happened that changed everything for Nancy and Tom Woodworth: a relative was diagnosed with bipolar disorder. Determined to learn more about the disease, Nancy

began poring over available research and was often frustrated by the lack of information about a disease that was clearly responsible for so much misery worldwide. When the Summer 2002 issue of *Medicine at Michigan* arrived in the mail, with its cover story about the U-M's new Depression Center, including a candid interview with Executive Director John Greden, M.D., information suddenly became available.

“I picked it up and I couldn't stop reading. I mean, here was this person speaking so eloquently about the very issues that had recently become so important to me. The fact that the center would combine its medical resources to help with depression, the fact that researchers can do a brain scan and actually see the physiological effects of depression on

the brain, the possibility that some other condition in the body plays a part — I thought, isn't it wonderful that this center will enable all the branches of the Medical School to work together to find the answers!

“When I read the article,” she says, “all of a sudden I knew that this was the project in which our family should be involved. We want to see this out in the open. What I care about the most is not any recognition for ourselves, but spreading the word about the Depression Center and getting people to realize that this is a disease that needs all of the help and support it can get.”

Nancy Woodworth says she is thrilled with the initial programs the Depression Center has already undertaken: lectures that have attracted unprecedented interest from faculty and students alike. “Five hundred people came to the first program on college students and depression,” she says, “and stayed for questions after the screening of a documentary on the topic. It's not surprising; depression often seems to happen during the college years.”

Nancy Woodworth and her husband, Tom, and everyone associated with the Depression Center, have great hope that this extraordinary gift will help people — like that long-ago dorm-mate, like the members of countless families of every kind around the world — to weather a lonely storm and find their way through to hope and health. [m](#)

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