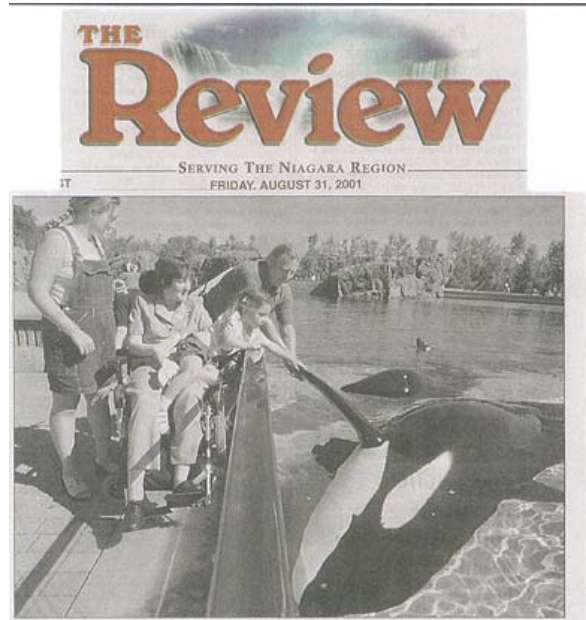


**Dying mom creates memories  
with daughters**



By JOHN LAW Review Staff Writer

Photo by Mike DiBattista/ Review

NIAGARA FALLS - After watching the dolphins and killer whales perform their tricks, Nicole Nelson leans over and explains why this isn't the usual visit to Marineland.

"They say I will die, but they don't know when." Somehow, she smiles as she says this. It's a struggle to form a complete sentence — a struggle to do anything these days — but she's simply happy to be out of the hospital for a day with her two daughters.

"I'm always sick," she says, barely whispering.

Thursday's trip to Marineland was arranged by Dreams to Memories, a Fort Erie-based group that grants wishes for the terminally ill. Nelson, also from Fort Erie, was diagnosed four years ago with severe multiple sclerosis. It was the worst form of MS - Primary/ Progressive, in which the symptoms do not remit, but gradually grow worse over months or years. Ten to 15 per cent of all MS cases are Primary/Progressive, and the onset is usually during a person's late 30s or early 40s.

Nelson was pregnant with her second daughter, Alice Anne, when she started walking awkwardly. Friends and family assumed it was because of the pregnancy, but after her daughter was born, the walking got worse and she began falling.

“People kept calling her clumsy,” recalls Nelson’s mother Murielle St. Louis.

Nelson went to the hospital, suspecting an inner ear infection. Instead, she was told she had MS.

Four years later, Nelson can barely move in her wheelchair. She does, however, manage a wave when one of the Marineland trainers glides by on the back of a killer whale. Alice Anne and her other daughter, 14-year-old Marybeth watch the show then get a head start on lunch. Nelson stays behind a few minutes to say how “very important” it was she spent the day with her girls.

Marineland spokeswoman Ann Marie Rondinelli says the park averages 10 requests a year from wish groups. Most are from children who want to see a whale up close. Dreams to Memories is different. It focuses on granting wishes for terminally ill parents with children 15 and under.

St. Louis doesn’t know how much longer her daughter has. It’s certainly not discussed in front of Nelson. These days, all energy is spent keeping her spirits up.

“You just have to accept it, it’s not easy,” she says. “It’s not easy for any mother to watch their kids be sick.”