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# Bone Marrow Report

By Heather Millar

# A Second Chance for Christopher

**N**icki McCurley now thinks that the last few hours she spent with her son were a gift from God. Before 3-year-old Derek McCurley slipped into the final phase of his illness, he somehow found the strength to become the same little boy she had known before his bone marrow transplant—the kid who said he loved snow and spaghetti and *Batman* and *The Lion King*.

His eyes brightened as he sat up in his bed at Fairview University Medical Center in Minneapolis, Minnesota. With his brother, Christopher, then 5, he zapped “bad guys” with Power Ranger figures. He sang and even tried to dance.

Then the pneumonia set in. As he fought for air in the middle of the night, Derek lost consciousness in his father’s arms. By the next day, even a ventilator could not get enough oxygen to the boy’s brain.

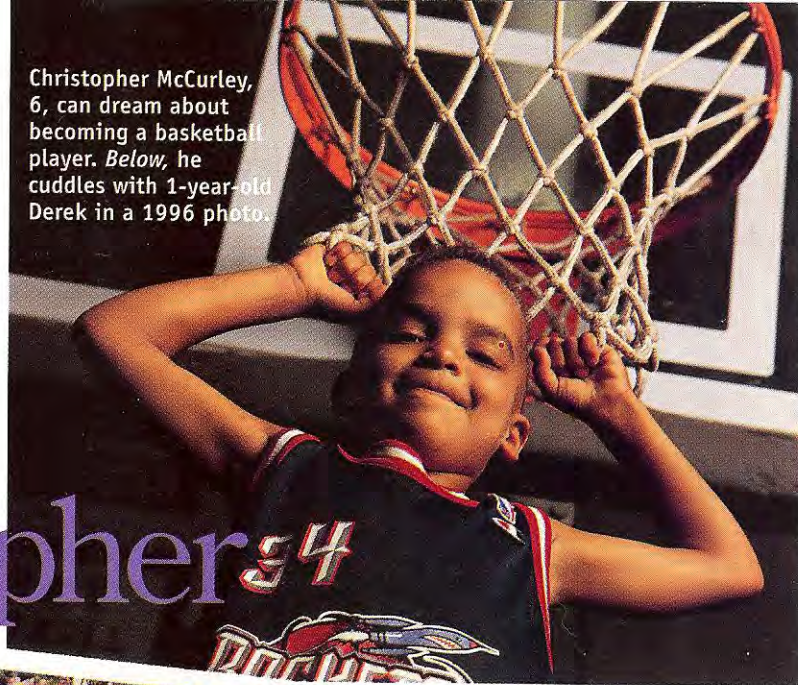
On February 21, 1998—as his mother held him and sang “Jesus Loves Me”—Derek quietly passed away.

Christopher, who had had his own bone marrow transplant 15 months earlier, missed his younger brother.

He would talk to “Big D” all the time, in the car, at the cemetery, even when he was playing basketball, his favorite sport. “Mama?” Christopher asked one day, after the family had returned home to Lubbock, Texas. “Why did Derek die and I didn’t?”



Christopher McCurley, 6, can dream about becoming a basketball player. Below, he cuddles with 1-year-old Derek in a 1996 photo.



There’s a critical need for minority volunteers.”

Christopher and Derek each had an extremely rare disorder known as Wiskott-Aldrich syndrome (WAS). It causes the blood-producing bone marrow to make platelets that are too small, resulting in blood that clots slowly or not at all. It also damages the lymphocytes, cells that fight infections.

When Christopher was diagnosed with WAS in 1992, his parents were floored. “After the doctor told us, neither of us could believe it,” Nicki says. No one in their family had had a serious illness.

Even more scary: The McCurleys had limited time. Children who receive a transplant before age 5 have an 85 percent chance of surviving. After that, as long-term problems become more serious, the survival rate falls to 20 percent.

Harry and Nicki, whom friends describe as energetic, like a “popped champagne bottle,” sponsored several blood drives to try and save their son.

But when Derek was born and also diagnosed with the same disease, they needed to step up their lifesaving campaigns.

They made more appeals on television and in newspapers, even appearing in a commercial with Houston Rockets basketball star Charles Barkley. They worked ▶▶▶▶▶▶▶▶

The short answer to that question: Not enough people from minority groups have been tissue-typed as potential marrow donors.

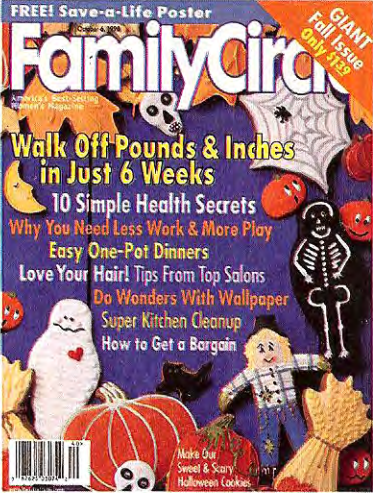
This narrowed the odds drastically for Derek and Christopher McCurley. Their mother is Caucasian. Their father, Harry McCurley, is African American. Of the more than 3.2 million people in the National Marrow Donor

Program (NMDP) registry, 255,791 are African American, 238,097 are Hispanic, and 189,216 are Asian. There are fewer donors of mixed race.

“Because the characteristics that determine a marrow match are inherited, they are most likely to be found within the same racial or

ethnic group,” explains Andrea Carter, an NMDP spokeswoman in Minneapolis. Says Carter, “Caucasians have an 85 percent chance of finding a potential match. Minorities have only a 59 to 76 percent chance.

**“If only we had found a matching donor before he got so sick, Derek might just have lived.”**



# your letters

I can see it in people's eyes after talking with them over the telephone and then meeting them in person: "She didn't seem that fat over the phone." Families need to be supportive and help build young people's self-esteem, so that they can grow to be adults who do not continue the trend of degrading anyone not quite like themselves.

*Eleanor Gray  
Phoenix, Arizona*

## Weight Prejudice

We received over 120 letters regarding Delta Burke's essay about the cruelty overweight people face. (Full Circle, October 6, 1998)

Unfortunately for today's women, especially teens, there is a lack of full-figured role models. Society needs to realize that you don't have to be a size six to be beautiful. I am a woman, a wife and a mother—and that's beautiful!

*Michelle Valles  
Corpus Christi, Texas*

The number of people who actually equate fat with dumb is unbelievable.

## Are You FAMILY CIRCLE'S Most Loyal Reader?

Ann Maren's relationship with FAMILY CIRCLE began in 1948. Her only daughter, JoAnn Papa Magiera (pictured), started "reading" the magazine in 1950, at the age of 1. Now in its 67th year, FAMILY CIRCLE has been shared by three generations of women. We'd like to know when FAMILY CIRCLE first became a member of your family. Send a postcard, including your name and address, to: FC's Most Loyal Reader, 375 Lexington Ave., NY, NY 10017.



I have heard that being biased against those who are overweight is the last acceptable prejudice. It is amazing how people who would never dream of saying negative things to others about race or religion think little of making hurtful, personal remarks about another person's weight.

*Katie Brown  
Chattanooga, Tennessee*

## Hope for ADD

A family triumphs over attention deficit disorder. (Profiles in Love)

My son was diagnosed with ADHD after a difficult time with his teacher. We medicated him, which was an incredibly hard decision to make, and noticed an immediate difference. Once a lagging, moody child, he suddenly became happy, interactive and thoughtful.

*Cathy Crimaldi  
Chicago, Illinois*

Contact Children and Adults with ADD at 499 Northwest 70th Ave., Suite 101, Plantation, FL 33317, or www.chadd.org for support groups in your area.

*Claire Bonnafe  
Hudson, Massachusetts*

## FAMILY CIRCLE'S Call to Action

The FAMILY CIRCLE call to action on bone marrow was enormously successful—on every front. More than 9,500 readers have requested our donor-discount coupon, an unbelievable, "heartwarming" response, says National Marrow Donor Program spokeswoman Andrea Carter.

Congressman C. W. Bill Young, R-Fla., was overwhelmed by the 16,000 postcards he received (pictured below). Christopher McCurley, age 6, finally met his donor, Emmanuel Rossy, face to face (right). And our own employee drive signed up 79 potential donors as well.

We want to thank every one of you who took action. Nicki and Harry McCurley, parents of Christopher, are especially appreciative of your efforts. (They still help conduct donor drives—even though their son is now healthy.) They were very emotional the day Emmanuel came to see them at their Lubbock, Texas, home on October 10. An excited Nicki immediately told Emmanuel, "Thank you for the gift of life."

And Harry's reaction? "Emmanuel is a champion. And he's now a part of our lives."



"I just feel so blessed," says Nicki McCurley (with, from left, husband Harry, son Christopher, Emmanuel Rossy).



Congressman C. W. Bill Young, R-Fla., with the 16,000 postcards his office received.

## A Letter From a Congressman

During my service in Congress, I have never seen such an overwhelming response on any issue. Postcards and letters poured into my office in an unprecedented volume. You will be pleased that my colleagues on the House

Appropriations Committee approved my request for an 18 percent increase for the National Marrow Donor Program (NMDP) and a 15 percent increase in funding for biomedical research, including bone marrow transplantation. There are many heroes who have made this effort such a success: the United States Postal Service, The Marrow Foundation, the NMDP and you, the readers. My colleagues and I thank you for your commitment to this lifesaving program. With best wishes, I am

*Very Truly Yours,  
C. W. Bill Young, Member of Congress*

## How to reach us

THREE WAYS TO CONTACT US: Write to Your Letters, FC, 375 Lexington Ave., New York, NY 10017; fax us at 212-499-1987; or e-mail us at [fcfeedback@familycircle.com](mailto:fcfeedback@familycircle.com). Personal replies are not possible; all letters become the property of FAMILY CIRCLE, and may be edited prior to publication.



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## FC Connection NEW

### Message to the Editor

Share your thoughts. Call 1-888-399-8973 and leave a voice mail for our editors. MEMBERS: Use your FAMILY CIRCLE Connection card, and call anytime.

Photo: Kris Hundt (top right).