

Lives In The Balance

*Register as a volunteer bone marrow donor,
and you could save a life.*

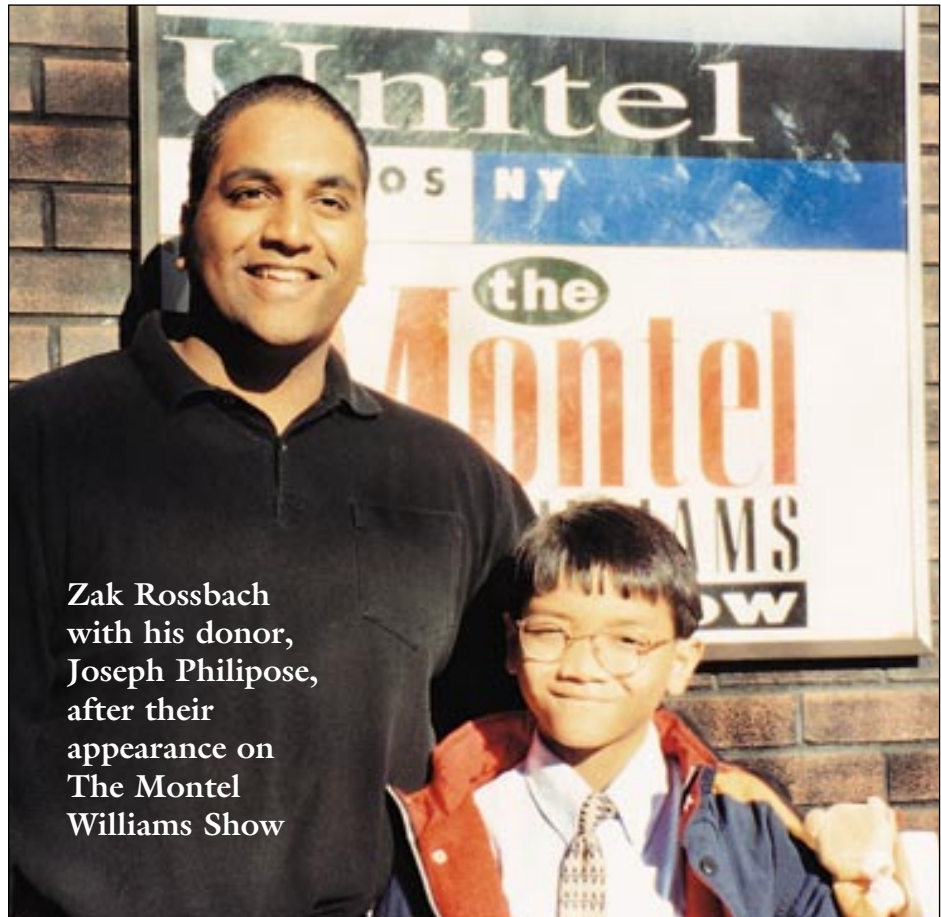
For 30,000 people in the U.S. each year diagnosed with blood disorders such as leukemia and aplastic anemia, a bone marrow or blood stem cell transplant could mean the difference between life and death. Donors are usually found among a patient's family members. If no match is found in the family, a compatible donor is likely to be someone of similar ethnicity. For adoptees who don't know their birth-families and have little chance of locating them, finding a donor becomes a challenge—and adoptees of color face particularly sobering statistics. According to the National Marrow Donor Program, an African-American patient searching the NMDP's registry of volunteer donors is 30 percent less likely than a Caucasian to identify a suitable match. Asians and Pacific Islanders are 13 percent less likely to find a match; Latinos, 9 percent. The stories of Zak Rossbach and Kailee Wells tell us how much finding a match can mean—and how pressing the need for more registered donors remains.

Zak's Story:

*Finding One Donor
Among Millions*

BY GARY ROSSBACH

In July 1997 our son, Zak, adopted from Thailand in 1993 at age five, became very ill with a rare disease, severe aplastic anemia. Conventional medicine failed to help. We were going to lose him. One thing saved Zak: the National Marrow Donor Program locat-



**Zak Rossbach
with his donor,
Joseph Philipose,
after their
appearance on
The Montel
Williams Show**

ed one (only one) partial genetic bone marrow match for him in a worldwide search. In September 1998 we spent five months in the University of Minnesota Fairview Hospital Bone Marrow Transplant Ward. Zak spent the following summer recuperating, and he is now thriving! It was a harrowing experience, but we made it. We recently enjoyed a wonderful Make-A-Wish Foundation cruise.

I know we are not the only family to shepherd a child through a bone marrow transplant. Many children (and adults) with leukemia or cancer require this rad-

ical treatment. But children adopted from other cultures and ethnic groups are at greater risk because they have no siblings or blood relatives to provide the genetically matched bone marrow necessary to save their lives.

The Thai Adoption Center in Bangkok conducted a media appeal in Thailand for Zak, with no useable results. (Birth relatives came forward in response to the publicity, but they could not provide a match.) Fortunately, in December 1997, Joseph Philipose, a wonderful young man of Indian heritage, registered during a donor drive at

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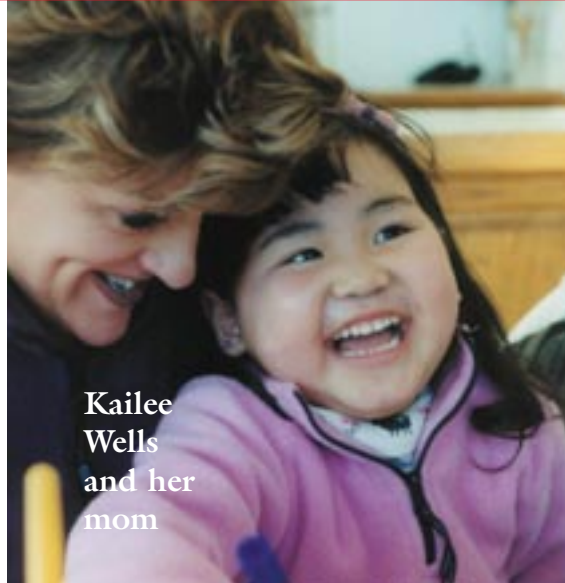
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his law school—and he saved our son's life. Zak was, at the time, one of only about 200 Asians to receive a bone marrow transplant. Out of nearly three million registered donors in the U.S., only about 280,000 are of Asian heritage.

Zak and our family have become advocates for such groups as the NATIONAL MARROW DONOR PROGRAM (www.marrow.org), ASIANS FOR MIRACLE MARROW MATCHES (www.asianmarrow.org), THE MARROW FOUNDATION (www.themarrowfoundation.org), and the APLASTIC ANEMIA & MYELODYSPLASTIC INTERNATIONAL FOUNDATION (www.aplastic.org).

With so many sick children and adults in need of matched marrow donors, we know what a gravely important issue this is for adoptive families.

Gary Rossbach and his wife, Kim, are the parents of Katie, Alyssa, and Zak. Gary's employer, American Airlines, sponsors NMDP marrow donation and courier delivery of marrow to transplant hospitals. This story is reprinted with permission from the summer 2000 issue of Spence-Chapin Update.



Kailee Wells and her mom

Kailee Wells Needs a Bone Marrow Transplant

BY MARTHA OSBORNE

You've traveled across the world to adopt the child you have longed for. She's perfect, and as

the years pass, she continues to capture your every emotion. A few days after her fifth birthday, she has a tummy ache. Her nose is running, and her fevers get so high that you go to the emergency room. It's not long before you get the news. Your beautiful daughter has aplastic anemia. It is every parent's worst nightmare. And yet it is one family's everyday reality.

Kailee Wells was adopted from China at the age of 14 months. Now five years old, she lives with her parents in New Mexico. To put it very simply, Kailee's bone marrow is not making new red blood cells. Without successful treatment, she will die. It takes a long time to match bone marrow, and Kailee's doctors are trying hard. Her biological family would be the best probable match, but nothing is known about them. Asians and Pacific Islanders are a little more likely to match, but people of any race could have her bone marrow type.

Kailee needs our help, and she needs it now. The entire adoption community—our friends, our extended families, all of us—needs to be tested. A simple blood test will tell if you match Kailee or some other person waiting for a bone marrow match.

Kailee's family has set up a web site (www.kaileegetwells.com) and would appreciate e-mail from you. While you're there, consider downloading a flyer about Kailee's situation and distributing it to everyone you know.

Whether you are waiting for your first child or have completed your eighth adoption, I know your heart can recognize this family's anguish. She could be my child. She could be yours. Let us all adopt Kailee and make her our own. Your help and prayers are her greatest hope.

Martha Osborne is the editor of Rainbow Kids, the online magazine for parents of children adopted internationally, from which this essay is reprinted. You can visit at www.rainbowkids.com.

How You Can Help

Register as a potential marrow or blood stem cell donor. Registering as a donor is as simple as getting a blood test and filling out a brief health questionnaire. It only takes a small blood sample to determine your tissue type, and once listed on the NMDP's registry, your tissue type will be compared to the tissue types of patients around the world who need transplants. The cost for tissue typing ranges from \$45 to \$96. Some donor centers can defer the cost by asking for a donation of whole blood or blood components. After the initial testing, all medical expenses are covered by the recipient or the recipient's insurance. Call the NMDP at (800) MARROW-2 for more information, or visit www.marrow.org. The website features a clickable U.S. map that makes it easy to locate an NMDP Donor Center near you.

Contribute money. Many potential donors lack the resources to pay for tissue typing and testing. Many potential recipients cannot handle the considerable costs of transplants and treatments. Contributions are always needed for scientific research, donor recruitment, and awareness campaigns. For more information on making a contribution, contact The Marrow Foundation, 400 Seventh Street, NW, Suite 206, Washington, DC 20004; (202) 638-6601; tmf@nmdp.org; or visit www.themarrowfoundation.org.

Volunteer. For recruitment drives, community events, and the day-to-day business of educating the public, local volunteers are always needed. Find a local recruitment center on the NMDP Web site and ask them how you can get involved.

Spread the word. Forward informational e-mail messages. Download and distribute flyers. Be as informed as possible—and point friends and family in the direction of articles, websites, and other information sources. Talk about it.