

THE WHITE HOUSE

WASHINGTON

January 18, 2000

Send to
Dore

J. Gaston Williamson
Number 7005
14300 Chenal Parkway
Little Rock, Arkansas 72211

Dear Gaston:

Happy Birthday! Hillary and I send our
best, and we hope the coming year brings
you good health and abundant joy.

Sincerely,

Bill

Jm

copied
Aurrie

A Teacher's Gift? Why, Most Certainly

By EMILY YELLIN

CHAPEL HILL, N.C., Dec. 17 — Jane Smith, a middle school teacher in Fayetteville, N.C., was always telling Michael Carter, a student of hers, to pull up his baggy pants. What Ms. Smith did not know was that Michael suffered from kidney disease and that the illness, and resulting dialysis, left him routinely sore.

So when she complained once too often about those pants, "finally he got exasperated with me," Ms. Smith recalled, "and said: 'I can't. I'm on dialysis. I need a kidney transplant.' And I said: 'Well, I have two. Do you want one?'"

That extraordinary offer led the 14-year-old Michael and the 42-year-old Ms. Smith to the University of North Carolina Hospitals on Thursday to prepare for transplant surgery. Michael is to get his new kidney, and Ms. Smith is to add organ donor to the roles she already has in his life, as his teacher for both home room and general science.

The operation, which had been scheduled for today, was postponed after Michael developed a low-grade fever. The antibiotics that he is being given at the hospital to fight the infection, so far of undetermined cause, meant that he could not be given immune suppressant drugs that transplant patients receive to ensure that their bodies will not reject the new organ.

But the delay is only a minor setback to Michael and his parents, Richard and Deborah Evans, who have learned to endure a lot more.

"This too shall pass," Mrs. Evans said today.

Michael, the second of five children in his family, was found to have kidney disease when he was only 16 months old. At 13 years, one kidney stopped functioning entirely. He has been receiving dialysis ever since.

For more than a year, a donor was sought from among Michael's

friends and relatives. But medical tests failed to find a match.

Then, soon after the beginning of the current school year, Ms. Smith, an eighth-grade teacher at R. Max Abbott Middle School in Fayetteville, learned of Michael's illness.

"I instantly knew that this was something I could do," she said, "that there was no pain I could suffer that would be as great as what Michael was going through."

After a battery of tests and many anxious moments, teacher and student were told that they were a match, and the surgery was scheduled to coincide with the school's Christmas break.

Ms. Smith, the divorced mother of

An ailing boy finds a kidney donor. It's his teacher.

a 12-year-old boy, says she has never had second thoughts about her decision. Michael's illness "is holding him back," she said. "He's got a good mind, and he's got the desire. But he just hasn't had the physical energy to follow through."

Mrs. Evans is still stunned by Ms. Smith's generosity.

"I've never had anyone to reach out like that," she said, "someone outside my family. It says a lot. No matter what you're going through, no matter how difficult the situation may appear, there is an answer out there. You just have to be patient."

That Michael is black and Ms. Smith white has also inspired many, not only people here in North Caroli-

na but also those across the country who have seen reports about the two of them on national television.

Through it all, though, Ms. Smith has played down her role, saying she hopes the story will simply call attention to the need for organ donations.

"In this world you need to realize that there's a bond," she said. "There's a connection between you and everybody else you see."

Ms. Smith and Mrs. Evans are both devout Baptists, and say their religious faith has helped them through the experience.

"God chose us together," Mrs. Evans said, "to accomplish his purpose" — to extend Michael's life and raise consciousness about organ donating.

Ms. Smith — now back in Fayetteville, 60 miles to the south, waiting for the surgery's new date — says that when she found out in October that she was a match for Michael, she spoke to her own son first.

"I told him I was not going to be taken away from him because of it," she said, "and that Michael had a need, and this was something that was a miracle that we could fix."

As for Mrs. Evans, she reacted to news of the match by going to the school, finding Ms. Smith and sharing a hug.

"It was like our whole soul became one," she said.

Then, Mrs. Evans says, she offered up special prayers.

"I said to the Lord, 'Thank you for that lady, thank you for Jane Smith.' I was so grateful, but I was getting bold with the Lord. I was getting tough. I said: 'Don't you ever let her want for anything, Lord. Don't even let her want for a Kleenex. God, don't you let her tire go flat.'"

"I mean, I was going down the list, because I couldn't ever repay her enough for what she had done."

THE NEW YORK TIMES,

SATURDAY, DECEMBER 18, 1999

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