

earth angels

Children on the road back from cancer

Inspired by their toddler's poignant battle to overcome the cancer that eventually claimed his life, Teri and Gene Moran turned their tragedy into hope—and a way to help others survive the nightmare of pediatric cancer.

On January 9, 1990, Teri and Gene paced the halls of Palm Beach Gardens Medical Center grief-stricken, terrified and alone. Their seven-month-old son, Connor, had a brain tumor. His prognosis? The cancer had spread into his brain stem. Radiation treatments were not viable because of his age, and ensuing surgical attempts to remove the growth were unsuccessful.

Fifteen months later, just before his second birthday, Connor's tiny body succumbed. The blond, blue-eyed toddler's fight was over. For his parents, who had launched a nationwide effort to save the life of their son, however, a new battle had begun.

Inspired to help other families through the shock and devastation of cancer, the Morans founded the Connor Moran Children's Cancer Foundation as a beacon of hope. Today, the West Palm Beach-based not-for-profit support and information network serves nearly 100 families throughout Palm Beach, Martin and St. Lucie counties. The foundation provides financial assistance, transportation, housing, medical care and referrals, individual and family counseling, case management assistance, education, and invaluable emotional support free of charge thanks to a government grant from the Children's Services Council and private donations.

This month, BOCA RATON magazine honors Connor Moran's memory and spirit, reflected in the faces of the children embraced by the foundation that bears his name.

The Connor Moran Children's Cancer Foundation will host its annual fundraising gala on March 22, 1997, at the PGA Marriott Hotel. For information about the foundation and this event, call 561 684-3304.

By Judy DiEdwardo. Photographs by Michael I. Price

Within days of the beginning of his teenage years Joshua Reeves learned that he had Hodgkin's disease. Luckily, nine months of chemotherapy was enough to put him into remission and today he enjoys excellent health. But the road back from cancer is not without secret fears and silent prayers.

In the beginning I was most afraid the cancer would never go away. afraid that I would never be well again," says Joshua. But today, the handsome, athletic teen who loves football, basketball and bowling isn't thinking twice about making plans for the future.

"I'm going forward, not looking back. I've been given another chance to do the things I want to do—help my mom, hang out with my friends, go out with girls—and I'm going to do them. In another 10 years or so I even hope to get married."

Joshua Reeves, age 16

Jupiter





Despite the uncertain prognosis of a brain tumor that has left Cindy Gamble unable to walk unaided or stand for long periods of time, her spirit is as strong as her faith. Surrounded by Barbie dolls, stuffed bears and posters of handsome rock stars tacked to her bedroom walls, the self-assured teenager is undaunted by the CAT scans that paint a foreboding picture. She's holding on tight to the present, the future and her lifelong dream:

One day I would like to be a model, she smiles. "But if I can't, I'm happy for the time I have enjoyed—happy just being me."

Cindy Gamble, age 14
Boynton Beach



Leena Chehab was nearly four years old when test results discovered she had Hodgkin's disease. It marked the beginning of an intensive year-long effort to arrest her cancer: daily trips to doctors and hospitals where she received life-saving radiation and chemotherapy treatments. And for the past three years the bright, energetic youngster has been in total remission.

"First I asked myself why this had to happen," says Leena's mother, Fauna. "But then, when I met others who were so much worse off. I knew God had spared us. Today, my Leena is healthy. That is all that matters now."

Leena Chehab, age 8

Palm Beach Gardens

When Adam Luchner's not in school he's on the ice playing left wing for the Rangers, a junior league hockey team at Planet Ice in Palm Beach Gardens where he works weekends and summers. His mother, Karen, who sometimes watches from the stands, is probably the ice rink's happiest spectator. She remembers the day Adam's brain tumor was discovered. He was four years old. Burned in her memory is the surgery and the long months of radical radiation treatments that destroyed the deadly tumor—the same kind of tumor that took the life of Connor Moran.

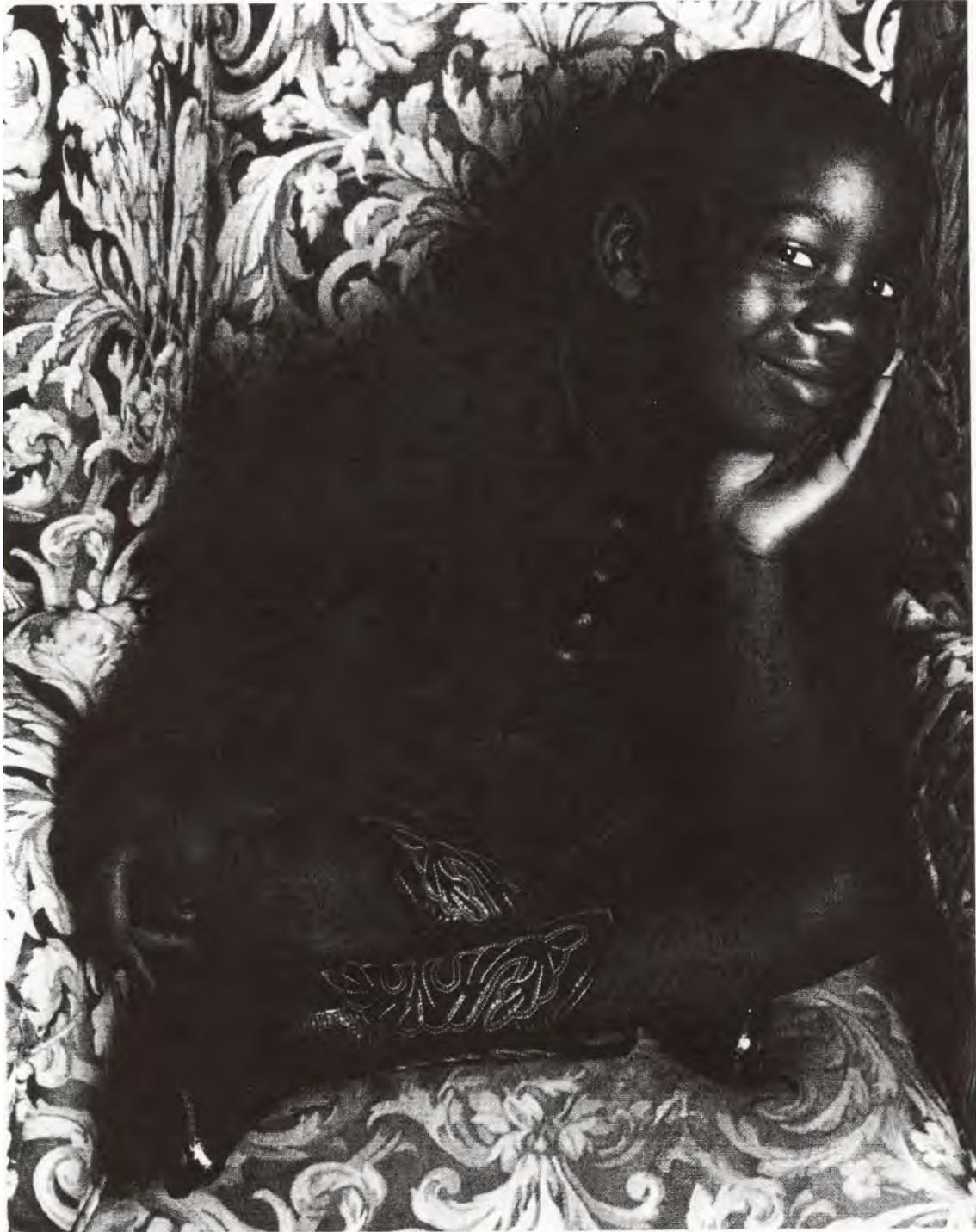
Sadly, the radiation that saved his life left this ambitious teenager with speech and learning disabilities that bring added challenges to a life already touched by such tragedy.

"He's had a lot to deal with in his life, but he just overcomes every obstacle that is put in his way," says Karen. "We're so lucky that Adam is a long-term cancer survivor. But you know, it's never completely behind you. We still count the days, the months and the years. Well always he counting."

Adam Luchner, age 17

Palm Beach Gardens





Diagnosed with a brain tumor just after his fourth birthday, Michael Hannah Jr.'s childhood years haven't been enjoyed at the playground or with his friends. Instead, they have been spent in doctors' offices and hospitals where he has endured aggressive rounds of radiation and chemotherapy—and their painful side effects. Recently, he underwent a bone marrow transplant that may put his cancer into remission.

"He's doing good now," says his father, Michael Sr., about the youngest of his three children. "But we can't rest until it's gone for good. Right now, we're just praying, praying for good news."

Michael Hannah Jr., age 7

Loxahatchee

What began as a doctor's visit for chronic bronchitis turned into a nightmarish odyssey for Reyna Martinez who, at age 12, was diagnosed with leukemia. Question was, did they catch it in time? After 30 months of aggressive chemotherapy, the news is good. She's in remission.

Knowing that the cancer was caught early and her prognosis was good made the years of treatment more bearable. The toughest part was losing my hair. That was pretty hard to take, especially at my age, - smiles Reyna. "And if the cancer ever comes back? Well. I just don't believe God would ever ask me to go through that again."

Reyna says that having cancer has made her stronger and more determined to achieve her goals. "These days, I don't take 'no' for an answer—and I like a good debate!" she smiles. "My mom says I should become a lawyer. I think I will."

Reyna Martinez, age 15

West Palm Beach

