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The Ryan Gibson Foundation sends our most sincere thanks to Mr. Robert Miller of The Dallas Morning News for publishing the following article on the foundation. With the help of supporters such as Mr. Miller, we are making progress towards our goal. Links to his email address and column archives are listed below.

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Frat brother's dream is alive

Foundation carries on student's work to find a cure for leukemia



04/20/2003

By **ROBERT MILLER** / The Dallas Morning News

Donald Ryan "Gibbie" Gibson was one of those rare golden youths whose inspiration and compassion transcend his death.

He died on Jan. 30, 2001, at age 25 from pneumonia after a bone marrow transplant for leukemia. Now one of his fraternity brothers has started the **Ryan Gibson Foundation** to carry on Mr. Gibson's dedication to finding a cure.

Family and friends marveled at the sacrifices Mr. Gibson made to help improve bone marrow transplants, despite his own medical setbacks.

Mr. Gibson had chronic myelogenous leukemia, a relatively uncommon form of the disease. About 5,000 cases are diagnosed each year in the United States, and more than half of those who receive a bone marrow transplant survive long term disease-free.

He was diagnosed in July 1995 after his first year at **Southern Methodist University**.

Mr. Gibson had long wanted to be a doctor, so he majored in biological sciences, with minors in psychology and electrical engineering.

Determined to fulfill his dream, he returned to SMU in the fall. But in February 1996, he withdrew to receive a bone marrow transplant.

After leaving the hospital, Mr. Gibson developed a severe reaction to his medications and spent most of the next eight months at **Baylor University Medical Center**.

In December of that year, he was released, and, after about a year's recuperation, he was able to return to SMU for the 1998 spring semester.

"He had a terrible time with the transplant, but he finally got through it all," said Dr. **Robert Collins**, who was then at Baylor and is now director of the Hematopoietic Cell Transplant Program at the **University of Texas Southwestern Medical Center at Dallas**.

The bone marrow transplant cured Mr. Gibson of leukemia. He graduated - as a **Phi Beta Kappa** - from SMU and planned to go to medical school in fall 2000.

He had been accepted to UT Southwestern, **Duke University Medical School** and the **University of**

Arkansas Medical School in Mr. Gibson's home state.

During this relatively tranquil period after his bout with leukemia, Mr. Gibson participated in bone marrow transplant research conducted by Dr. Collins at Baylor.

Before he entered medical school, though, the beating to his immune system led to side effects, then pneumonia and death.

Turning point

But Dr. Collins explained that the research Mr. Gibson helped with may mark a turning point in bone marrow transplant treatment.

The procedure used with Mr. Gibson was the same as it has been for the last 20 years. "It's just too toxic" for some patients, Dr. Collins said, and the cure is accompanied by many potential side effects.

"We didn't know as much about the immune system as we know now," Dr. Collins said. "What we were working on is what he had."

Since then, the research Mr. Gibson was involved in "has been successful in many ways with identifying immune cells from transplant donors" and "separating the harmful cells from cells that could be successful," Dr. Collins said.

"These insights have led to new clinical approaches that we're about to test" at UT Southwestern. He said the course of action has been laid out over the next five years beginning in May "so that by the end of the year we should have a real good feel for how this is working out."

The ultimate goal, Dr. Collins said, is to make bone marrow transplants better.

Mr. Gibson was a **Pi Kappa Alpha**, a "Pike," just like his father, **Don Gibson**, who is president of **Bank of America** for the state of Arkansas and director of the Arkansas chapter of the Ryan Gibson Foundation.

The elder Mr. Gibson noted that his son's fraternity brothers lived the ideal of fraternity in the noblest sense of the word.

Loyal friends

"They were there with him during the good times. They were there during the bad times, visiting him constantly while he was in the hospital," he said.

"They took the fraternity flag to him when he was in the hospital to cheer him up" and did a thousand other things to show they cared.

Ryan's mother, **Carol Lynn Gibson**, said she and her husband "feel very honored that Ryan's best friends would set up the foundation and carry through with it for the past several years."

"We're so excited that Ryan's dreams are being carried on, and it's an honor to us to have so many friends in Dallas who continually remind us of his love for medicine.

"It keeps our spirits up to see people working so hard for a worthy cause," she said.

The Ryan Gibson Foundation, Mr. Gibson said, was founded by **Scott "Hook" Harmeling**, Ryan's pledge brother and president and director of the Dallas chapter of the foundation.

Mr. Harmeling is a real estate mortgage banker with **Churchill Capital**.

The foundation has \$30,000 in seed money from fund-raisers and recently contributed \$10,000 to UT Southwestern and Dr. Collins for his research.

Other Dallas fraternity brothers on the Ryan Gibson Foundation's board of directors are **John R. Weber**, a commercial real estate developer for **Weber & Co.**; **Homer Martinez**, a securities broker for **Merrill Lynch**; and **Wyatt E. Pettus**, an economist for **Mary Kay Corp.**

The address of the Ryan Gibson Foundation is 5001 LBJ Freeway, Suite 900, Dallas, Texas 75244.

Dr. Collins said Ryan's death "was so tragic. He was a great person, with a dry sense of humor and incredible compassion."

"He would have been a great doctor. In his quiet way, he touched a lot of people."



Robert Miller is a columnist for The Dallas Morning News.

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