

## Stranger's gift helps teen make graduation

BY JACK WILLIAMS | THE (ARKANSAS) DAILY CITIZEN  
Monday, June 25, 2007



Rachael Otto had her bone marrow transplant in '06

future in front of her because she was afraid that she wouldn't have a future."

Rachael was diagnosed when she was 2, said Kimberli Otto, her mother.

"When she was first diagnosed it was scary because it was unknown," she said. "This was before the Internet, so there was no way to research this stuff."

After drug treatments and transfusions, she became stable until May 2005. When her condition worsened, it was clear that her only chance to survive was through a bone marrow transplant, Kimberli Otto said.

Warren County teenager Rachael Otto was staring death in the face at 17. She had dealt with aplastic anemia her whole life, but now the disease had destabilized.

"I was depressed because I thought I wouldn't make it to senior year or to graduation," she said.

"The worst parts were being too sick and too weak to see my friends."

She made it to her graduation party, and so did someone who helped her get there.

Danny Joslin, a Searcy, Ark., resident, donated bone marrow that saved Rachael's life. He then drove to Deerfield Township two weekends ago to meet Rachael at her graduation party.

"When her father introduced me to her, she gave me a quick hug, started crying and then hugged me longer," Joslin said. "She was scared of the



Kimberli, Rachael and Jerry Otto are grateful Arkansan Danny Joslin donated his bone marrow

Aplastic anemia occurs when someone's bone marrow stops making enough blood-forming stem cells, according to the Aplastic Anemia & MDS International Foundation's Web site. Patients with aplastic anemia have low counts of red blood cells, white blood cells and platelets.

Rachael Otto's platelet count was so low that she could have bled to death in five minutes if she had been injured in a car accident, her mother said. She had to receive blood transfusions every time she caught a cold because her body could not produce white blood cells. But before her condition destabilized, she led a more-or-less normal life, except that she could not play sports.

"At times, I was kind of jealous watching my friends participate on the field," Rachael said.



Rachael Otto and Danny Joslin.

Joslin registered to become a bone marrow donor when a family at his church had a child, Dakota Hawkins, who was diagnosed with leukemia.

Several others at his church joined Joslin in registering to become bone marrow donors.

"Seeing what the Hawkins family went through, I just saw an opportunity to save a life," Joslin said.

Doctors took several blood samples from Joslin to determine if he could donate bone marrow to Dakota. The blood samples indicated that Joslin's bone marrow was incompatible with Dakota, but he was a more-than-suitable donor for Rachael, he said.

"It was a perfect match," Joslin said.

Dakota died, but Joslin gave his bone marrow. Joslin left Dakota's funeral to fly to St. Louis to donate his marrow. On March 31, 2006, Rachael received that marrow.

"I felt ecstatic," she said.

While the Ottos were told that doctors would likely find a suitable donor on the register, they were "just grateful" that someone would donate their marrow. To show their appreciation, Rachael's father invited Joslin to her graduation party. Rachael said she did not know he was coming.