

SPARROW CLUBS

*“Every big accomplishment is a series
of little accomplishments.”*

- David Joseph Schwartz

This is the story that prompted the 7th grader to withdraw his life savings from the bank, that seeded the account, that grew through an overwhelming response of compassion, that saved a baby’s life, that sparked the founding of Sparrow Clubs USA.

Seven-month-old Michael Leeland needed a bone marrow transplant. The price tag was \$200,000 and the insurance company had a waiting period.

Michael’s parents, Jeff and Kristi, intensified their prayers, and then the first of many heroes – a 13-year-old named Dameon Sharkey – stepped forward.

Rare form, perfect match

In the summer of 1991, Jeff Leeland accepted a new teaching position at Kamiakin Junior High in the Seattle area. It meant a cross-state move for his family – his wife Kristi; 9-year-old Jaclyn; Amy, age 6; Kevin, age 3; and newborn Michael.

The Leeland family settled into a new routine on the west side of the Cascade Mountains, but it was short-lived. In February 1992, after fever spikes and numerous tests and hospitalizations, Michael was diagnosed with a rare form of leukemia – myelodysplastic syndrome.

Michael would need a bone marrow transplant, and even then, there was less than a 50 percent chance of survival.

The search for a bone marrow match began within the Leeland family. The odds of finding a perfect donor match among siblings were one in four; the odds outside the family were one in 20,000.

Michael’s siblings each went through the blood work-up. As it turned out, 6-year-old Amy was the perfect match. “Amy, the child who joyfully bounces through life impulsively spending her allowance to buy things for other people,” wrote Jeff in *One Small Sparrow*, his book that chronicles their journey. “She cheerfully spreads the news to everyone—‘Guess what! I’m a match!’”