

## News Release

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE  
Oct. 15, 2018

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### Eleven Candles, One Wish

**MINNEAPOLIS - Oct. 15, 2018** - When Annie blew the candles out on her birthday cake last year, she closed her eyes really tight and kept a wish to herself. "I'm not gonna tell you, because it's a secret," she says on camera from behind a happy pair of tired eyes. She made the same wish the year before, and her parents have made the same wish every day since her diagnosis.

Annie has been fighting leukemia since 2015. After months of unsuccessful testing to find a genetic match within her large family for a bone marrow transplant, she joined the National Marrow Donor Registry. High-doses of chemotherapy have kept her adult teeth from growing in, and have all but completely exhausted her and her family as they play the waiting game.

Month after month, as the treatment's toll intensified and Annie's body weakened, hope was beginning to fade. Then, just a few days after Annie blew out the candles on her cake, her family received the call they had been waiting for. A match was identified— Annie's birthday wish was about to come true.

Meanwhile, in a messy dorm room in Colorado, college freshman Keith began to pack a suitcase. A couple pairs of pants, a few shirts, two pillows and computer accessories were all he could think of. He was sitting on a plane hurling across the great blue sky to New Jersey before he came to the stark realization that he had forgot to pack socks and underwear. Typical for a college freshman.

Not so typical was the reason for his spontaneous journey. During an orientation event at his new school, Keith joined the National Marrow Donor Registry through Be The Match. *"It took less than a half hour, and I spent the majority of the time I was there talking to friends. It seemed selfish not to help if I could,"* said Keith. Be The Match facilitates thousands of registration drives on college campuses throughout the country each year, all with the goal of connecting patients with viable lifesaving donors.

*"I got the call a few weeks later, and now I'm here,"* Keith says from a hospital bed in Newark. *"It's kind of crazy how fast this is happening, and I can't believe what a good decision this was."* As soon as his DNA sample was processed, Be The Match identified Keith as a 98% match for

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Annie. As standard practice, the organization is covering the complete cost of the procedure, and even ensures the donor's travel and expenses are taken care of in advance.

What Keith didn't know when he joined the registry, was his eligibility for a new educational grant the organization offers to those who successfully complete the donation process. While the reward of saving a life is payment enough, not feeling the burden of tuition next semester is also one Keith welcomes.

*"I'm so proud of you, baby. Me and your dad wish we could be there. We're so proud of you,"* Keith's mom says through the phone as he sheds a tear and covers his eyes with his hand. *"I love you too, mom. Don't worry about me. I'll call you when it's done,"* he says.

Just as Keith hangs up the phone, there's a knock on the door of his shared hospital room. Annie's parents cautiously proceed into the room holding too many balloons to count. *"We didn't think you'd want flowers,"* Annie's dad Mike says. Before Keith could respond, Annie's mom Karen begins to sob. She's able to push out the words "thank you" before collapsing alongside his bed.

Hours later, Keith would complete a procedure that 22,000 others took part in last year alone. He'd be back in his dorm by the weekend with a great story to tell, and a sense of pride for doing the right thing. *"I can't wait to hear about her recovery. I've been emailing Annie's parents, and it's something I'm really invested in,"* he says.

For families like Annie's, Be The Match is a last refuge of hope for the lifesaving treatment they desperately seek. While Annie's road to recovery is on an upward path, there are still thousands of children each year who make the same birthday wish to be healthy and happy. When the smoke from the candles clears, Be The Match will be there to help facilitate the gift of life.

To find out more about Be The Match and to join the registry, visit: [www.bethematch.com](http://www.bethematch.com).