

# Gary's Column Angers Shakeeka Richardson's Parents, Others

By Karen Parker  
Post Staff Writer

Kays Gary, columnist for The Charlotte Observer, recently attempted to smooth some jagged remarks he made in reference to the plight of Shakeeka Richardson, and her parents Ernestine and James.

When Gary wrote on January 19, "Lack of money won't prevent Shakeeka from getting the liver transplant that is her only hope for life beyond her third birthday," he angered Shakeeka's parents and many people in the black community who are working to raise money to cover the mounting bills created by the 2½ year-old's illness. The result was telephone calls and letters to The Charlotte Post for another side of the facts.

Shakeeka is the victim of biliary atresia. Medical reports indicate only one in 20,000 live births are affected by the liver disorder. The liver which Shakeeka receives must be implanted within 12 hours after the death of the donor.

When the tot's parents are notified that a liver is available she will be rushed to a Lear jet which is on standby at all times, and flown to a medical



The Richardson family is looking forward to a happier pose than the one taken a year ago, when Shakeeka's liver disorder wasn't as severe. Pictured left to right is her father, James, Shakeeka and her mother, Ernestine.

center at the University of Pittsburgh for the transplant. The transplant itself is estimated at \$100,000.

Gary's reporting that money was no factor in Shakeeka's well-being, ordinarily would have been considered good news. However, the statement wasn't entirely true, according to Mrs. Richardson. Now, she is afraid Gary's article has misled the public to believe their heart-given contributions

are no longer necessary. "If Mr. Gary had contacted family members before printing the story, he would have learned there are a lot of finances that need to be taken care of," Mrs. Richardson said.

She was forced to resign from her job because of the seriousness of her daughter's illness. Mr. Richardson is a bus driver for Charlotte Transit System.

Though Gary wrote another column on the 24th

has already been done."

"I am dropping a check in the mail today to the Shakeeka Richardson Fund..." Gary wrote at the beginning of his second column about the Richardsons. Minus whatever Gary decided to mail to Mechanics and Farmers Bank in behalf of Shakeeka, Mrs. Richardson reported about \$2,000 in private contributions have been logged.

Mrs. Richardson is grateful, and she's always pleased when people tell her they will send a monetary contribution. But many people are renegeing on that promise.

Not just private citizens, but organizations and businesses as well. Take the fundraisers which Gary mentioned in his column. Mrs. Richardson feels that if he had reported the results of those fundraisers he would have been able to report accurately to readers that most of them

were unsuccessful. As a result, the Richardsons received little and in one case no money at all.

According to Mrs. Richardson and Mrs. Jether Funderburk who helps the family document finances, the most successful of the fundraisers was "Shakeeka Day" which raised \$380.

"That money was paid immediately to Presbyterian Hospital (Pittsburgh) for an evaluation examination which Shakeeka had in October. A receipt for that amount is available," Mrs. Funderburk commented.

"When the Mecklenburg Jaycees sponsored their pageant, I was told proceeds would go to Shakeeka," Mrs. Richardson recalled. She continued, "When I contacted them after the pageant, they told me they had lost money on the pageant so Shakeeka

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