Bear kills veteran N.W.T. bush pilot

THE CANADIAN PRESS
FORT SMITH, N.W.T.

Jean Carter stepped out of a float plane expecting to see her husband.

Instead, she was confronted by a black bear that she later learned had killed him.

Lifelong bush pilot Merlyn Carter, 71, was found dead Wednesday behind the main cabin of their remote sport-fishing camp about 300 kilometres northeast of Fort Smith.

He had gone to the fishing camp on Tuesday to prepare the cabins and boats for the start of the season, expecting his first group of fishermen to arrive Friday, said his eldest son, Dean.

Carter made radio contact with his family Tuesday around 10 p.m., telling them everything was fine and the camp was coming along nicely.

Jean and another son, Myles, flew to the camp Wednesday to bring in groceries and other supplies.

But Merlyn wasn't at the docks to meet them. When Jean got off their Cessna 180, she spotted the bear coming toward her. She tried heading back toward the plane, but the bear caught up.


Merlyn Carter

"She didn't make it back to the airplane," Dean Carter said. "They were screaming, trying to scare the bear off."

The bear was frothing at the mouth as it crouched before Jean. Myles grabbed a ramp used to unload barrels of oil from aircraft and struck the bear once across

As tragic as it is, they're very fortunate two of

Risky stem cell transplant saved baby's life

Four years later, Sandrine set for school

MARGARET MUNRO
CANWEST NEWS SERVICE

Sandrine Dion was just 10 days old when Montreal doctors injected the beautiful baby girl with potent chemotherapy drugs to kill off blood-producing cells in her body.

Twelve days later, they infused Sandrine with stem cells collected from the umbilical cord of an unrelated baby in a risky experimental procedure never before attempted on so young a Canadian. But Sandrine's parents insisted doctors perform the cell transplant: it was the only hope for their baby, who was born with a devastating genetic disease that normally kills within the first two years of life.

The treatment, administered as part of an international experiment, saved Sandrine's life. She is now a curly headed four-year-old who keeps her two brothers on their toes in their boisterous home in Laval, Que. Sandrine is a testament to the power of stem cells and the life-saving value of umbilical cord blood, which has long been thrown in the trash after babies are born.

The blood — readily extracted from placentas and umbilical cords — is a rich source of stem cells, which

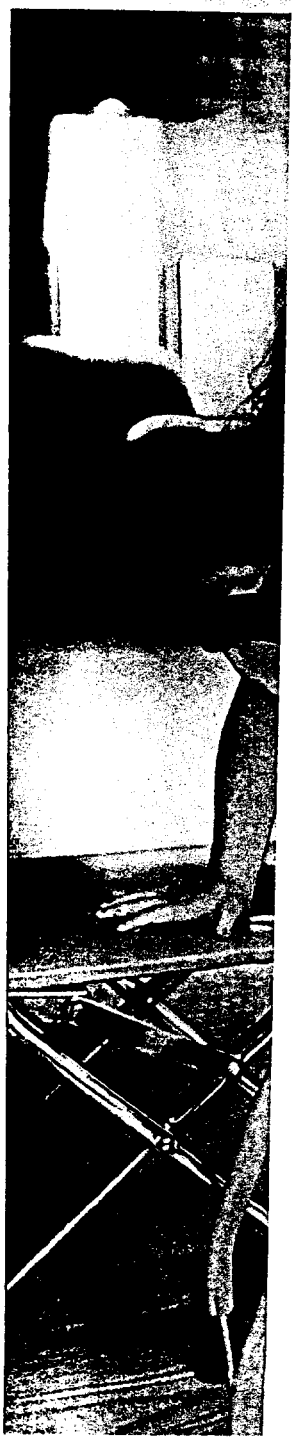
Bernard recalls how Yannick appeared normal at birth, but developed symptoms within months. "They can't walk, they can't talk and towards the end they have to be fed with a special pump," says Bernard, recalling his son's heartbreaking decline and death.

The couple have two other boys, now seven and nine years of age, who are not affected. But prenatal testing in 2000 revealed Sandrine was destined to develop Krabbe.

The defective genes that cause the disease hamper production of the enzyme galactocerebrosidase normally produced in tiny amounts in every cell in the body. The enzyme is essential to maintain myelin, the fatty substance that protects and insulates nerve fibres in the brain. While affected children appear completely normal at birth, discomfort and pain begin within months as the nervous system is destroyed.

When they learned Sandrine was affected, Bernard says the doctors suggested terminating the pregnancy. But the couple learned about the cord blood project headed by Dr. Maria Luisa Escolar at the University of North Carolina. Dr. Martin Champagne, a blood transplant specialist at Montreal's Hospital Sainte-Justine, arranged to enrol Sandrine in the study and performed the transplant.

Labour was induced a few weeks early in the hope of minimizing Sandrine's nerve damage. The chemotherapy knocked out her blood-producing cells and cleared the way for the infusion of cord-



trying to scare the bear off."

The bear was frothing at the mouth as it crouched before Jean. Myles grabbed a ramp used to unload barrels of oil from aircraft and struck the bear once across the face. It stopped, looking stunned.

Then the bear turned and left in the opposite direction of the cabin.

Myles grabbed a gun from the main cabin and shot the bear four times. RCMP say the bear was a two-year-old male.

Myles found his father's body a short distance from the back side of the cabin. His father was unarmed.

The family isn't sure what time he was attacked, but have been told an autopsy will be conducted.

"As tragic as it is, they're very fortunate two of them survived," Dean Carter said.

The Carters ran Carter Air Services and the Nonacho Lake Fishing Camp. The couple were veterans of the Northwest Territories sport-fishing industry, said Dean.

A memorial service for Merlyn will be held June 24 at the sports arena in Hay River, N.W.T.

Merlyn earned his pilot's licence in 1954. After buying his first Cessna 180 on floats a few years later, he never flew as captain of an aircraft he did not own.

He'd moved to the North in his teens from his home in Meadow Lake, Sask., when his father expanded his commercial fish-buying business.

In 1963, Carter set up his own commercial aviation business, which at one time operated seven planes.

"He loved the freedom of the North," Dean Carter said. "He was a person that loved the outdoors."

Alongside his aviation business, he ran several sport-fishing camps that were only accessible by air, sitting hundreds of kilometres from the nearest roads.

"He's an experienced person in these areas," Dean Carter said.

He'd encountered bears before in his travels, and had killed ones who were threatening his fishing camps, he said.

Merlyn and Jean Carter were recently honoured by the Northern Air Transport Association for 50 years of service in the aviation industry.

Merlyn Carter

As tragic as it is, they're very fortunate two of them survived

DEAN CARTER

their toes in their boisterous home in Laval, Que. Sandrine is a testament to the power of stem cells and the life-saving value of umbilical cord blood, which has long been thrown in the trash after babies are born.

The blood — readily extracted from placentas and umbilical cords — is a rich source of stem cells, which can turn into all types of blood cells and perhaps other cell types as well. While not as versatile as the controversial stem cells drawn from human embryos, cord stem cells are accessible. And they are proving a lifeline for individuals with a growing number of "transplantable" diseases.

Sandrine is part of a landmark study that has proved cord blood can save infants with Krabbe's disease, until now an inherited killer that destroys the nervous system. The study results, published recently in the New England Journal of Medicine, suggest cord blood transplants might also save children with dozens of other dreaded genetic diseases.

Sandrine's parents, Bernard Dion and Dominique Caron, had no idea they were carriers of Krabbe, which is extremely rare, until their first-born developed the disease. They then learned they each have one of the genetic mutations linked to the disease.

Their son Yannick died on his third birthday in 1993.

a blood transplant specialist at Montreal's Hospital Sainte-Justine, arranged to enrol Sandrine in the study and performed the transplant.

Labour was induced a few weeks early in the hope of minimizing Sandrine's nerve damage. The chemotherapy knocked out her blood-producing cells and cleared the way for the infusion of cord-blood stem cells, which took over blood production. The new blood cells produced the missing enzyme, and carried it to every corner of her body.

"Spillage" of the enzyme from the blood cells is absorbed by Sandrine's other enzyme-deficient cells, says Escolar: "You only need a tiny little bit." While there is speculation some transplanted stem cells give rise to neurons, Escolar says there is no evidence to prove it at this stage. But she says healthy cells definitely cross the blood-brain barrier. There is also evidence some of them turn into neural cells called microglia, which are involved in brain maintenance and protection.

The research team detailed the life-saving effect of the transplants performed on Sandrine and 10 United States children, the eldest now six years old, in the New England Journal of Medicine in May.

"The breakthrough is that we were able to show that if you intervene very early you will change the natural his-

Sandrine, whose brother c plans to start school in the

tory of the disease," sa Champagne. "You preve neurological damage."

The study adds to mour ing evidence cord blo transplants might save ch dren with 45 other so-call lysosomal storage diseas similar to Krabbe, says Esc lar, including Hurler Sy drome and Tay-Sachs disea Enzyme replacement thera is available for some of t diseases, but is prohibitiv expensive at more th $300,000 a year and is not effective as transplants, s says.

Cord blood transpla have been shown to help cl dren with Hurler syndro and research is underway explore their effectiveness