

With two families, Christopher's life short but full of love

By DONNA GEHRKE
Herald Staff Writer

Little Christopher was born so impaired doctors didn't give him 10 days to live. He had a open gap in his skull that exposed a deformed brain. His head was enormous from the excess water in his brain. He screamed around the clock.

Two families loved him as he pushed all limits of medical science to live to be 5½ years old: Dr. Michael and Camille Geraldi, who adopted him, and Deborah and David Negri, his natural parents who regularly visited him and brought him home on weekends.

Christopher Negri-Geraldi died Sunday of an internal brain hemorrhage — long after he learned how to crawl, operate his wheelchair, go to school and sing Barney's *I Love You* theme song.

"It was amazing what he learned to do," said his mother Deborah Negri. "We never thought he would be able to lift his head. He lived past beyond what anyone thought he would."

"For 5½ years, he lived a great life," said his other mother Camille Geraldi.

Geraldi, who was once featured on CBS' 60 Min-



MARICE COHN BAND / Herald Staff

DIES AT 5½: Christopher Negri-Geraldi in 1991.

*He learned to crawl,
run his wheelchair, go
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PLEASE SEE NEGRI-GERALDI, 4B

Christopher Negri-Geraldi, 5

NEGRI-GERALDI, FROM 1B

utes program for adopting severely handicapped children, picked Christopher up at Baptist Hospital at birth and kept him at her bedside.

For months before his birth, he Negris had known that Christopher was severely handicapped in the womb. His twin sister Carline was normal.

"She was growing perfectly beside him," his mother said. "It was devastating. It was difficult to experience the joy of a perfect baby and the devastation of having a baby like Christopher."

The Geraldis, who have adopted 35 severely handicapped children in addition to their natural daughters Renae and Jaclyn, helped the Negris cope.

And Christopher surprised them all: The cranial gap healed naturally. He became less irritable when a shunt relieved his

head of the extra fluid. Doctors predicted he would be deaf and blind, but he wasn't.

"He liked music," said Camille Geraldi. "He would sing *Old MacDonald's Farm* and *Happy Birthday*."

He also liked Camille's dog Bernadette.

Christopher became used to sharing bunks with his brother Nicholas Negri and sleeping at his specially made crib at the Geraldis.

His sister Andrea Negri became a devoted volunteer at the Geraldis' Up with Down Syndrome Foundation in Southwest Dade.

Services will be at 7 p.m. Wednesday at the Florida Mortuary, 1495 NW 17th Ave.

In lieu of flowers, his families suggest donations in Christopher's memory to the Up With Down Syndrome Foundation, 9270 SW 150th Ave., Suite 301, Miami, Fla., 33196.