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## Crash victim Michael Wright remembered as 'brilliant'

By [Michael Scott Davidson](#)

Published: Saturday, June 20, 2015 at 6:33 p.m.

As a boy growing up on Dixie Avenue in the '70s, Michael Wright read through his family's encyclopedia set from A-to-Z.

Once he finished the volumes, he started again.

"If you asked him a question he wanted to have an answer for you," said his younger sister, Norrece Wright. "He was a brilliant man."

Michael was born on July 10, 1966; he was the second oldest of his parents' four children. This weekend, family and friends gathered to say their goodbyes to the 48-year-old.

On the night of June 9, a car fatally struck Michael as he crossed Washington Boulevard in his wheelchair. His funeral service was held at Bethlehem Baptist Church on Saturday.

As Norrece, 46, prepared for her brother's visitation on Friday, she shared how his thirst for knowledge, and his enthusiasm to share it, shaped the lives of those around him.

Before Michael was a teen, she said, he was able to explain why he could not walk. He told her he had spina bifida, a birth defect affecting his spinal cord.

"He said 'I have little to no blood circulation from my knees down,'" she recalled. "He said 'I can feel a little bit, but I basically don't have any feeling.'"

Then Michael handed her a pen and told her to poke him in the foot. He was disabled, but he was not timid.

As a child, Michael refereed neighborhood kickball games, caught lizards with his bare hands and did his share of chores around the house, Norrece said. He was known to sit on a skateboard and use his hands to propel himself from his home to his uncle's barbershop, a 5-block journey each way.

"He was in the middle of everything," Norrece said. "If he could think it he'd do it."

During his teenage years, Michael spent much of his time with Derrick Lathan, a younger boy from his neighborhood. Lathan, now 43, said the two would live at each other's house for days, passing the time by playing the Space Invaders videogame, dueling in chess — a game Michael adored — and seeing who could answer more Jeopardy questions.

"I was the Jeopardy champion at my house, but not when Michael was over," Lathan said. "He was that big brother that I really didn't have."

As a young adult Michael continued to help those around him. For a time he lived with his sister's family, cooking, cleaning and helping raise Norrece's children while she attended classes at Sarasota County Technical Institute.

One of the tykes Michael looked after now has a family of his own. But Terhon Wright, 30, said he hasn't forgotten how his uncle taught him to play chess in the third grade.

The two played frequently, and Terhon wound up placing second at Emma E. Booker Elementary School's chess tournament the next year. He remembered the excitement of telling Michael the news.

"I felt like the student returning to the master," he laughed.

For the last four years or so, Michael had lived at the Crossbreeze Care Center on 18th Street, Norrece said. He was known to leave the facility and travel around Sarasota.

His sister believes he was headed back to the care facility when he was struck in the crosswalk of Washington Boulevard at about 8:45 p.m.

"That stretch of highway was no stranger to Michael," she said. "He was going home. Just like you get in your car and go home."

Norrece said she has forgiven Malik Clyburn, the 19-year-old who drove the sedan that struck her brother. The young man and his family came to her Bradenton home in the days following the accident.

"He fell apart in my arms. He cried, and I assured him that there was no malice and there was no anger," Norrece said. "That's not the kind of woman I am, and that's not the kind of man Michael was."

Now her family is healing and moving forward. Still, Norrece holds onto a green pouch containing small mementos of her brother.

A penny. A rubber band. A blue clip from his care facility. These were the items Michael was carrying when he died.

"We were taught to always at least have a penny in your pocket," his younger sister said. "He stayed true to that."

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