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MONDAY, APRIL 27, 1992

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5-STAR

## 'I Love You — Bye-Bye'

### Grandparents Hold Tight To Crash's Small Survivor

By Kim Bell

Of the Post-Dispatch Staff

COLUMBIA, Mo. — Five-year-old Ashley Dile shocked everyone in the pediatrics unit of a hospital here when she quietly slipped out of her 15-day coma on Easter morning, asking for pizza and her favorite stuffed animal.

"It's like somebody flipped a switch," says Dr. Mary Alice Helikson, a pediatric surgeon. "Two weeks ago, she was not expected to survive."

Ashley is the lone survivor of a two-car collision April 4 near Hermann, Mo., in which seven people were killed. Among the dead were Ashley's mother and only brother. Rescuers think Ashley's mother, Cheryl Christensen, saved her daughter's life by pushing her to the front-seat floorboard seconds before impact.

Ashley's mother and brother, 11-month-old Daniel, were already dead when the unconscious girl was flown by helicopter to the emergency room of University Hospital and Clinics in Columbia.

Ashley's grandparents have been at her bedside every day since the crash. They never volunteered what happened, but Ashley may already understand.

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Ashley Dile feeding her little brother, Daniel Christensen, in a family photo taken before a car accident April 4 near Hermann, Mo., that killed the boy, Ashley's mother and five others. Ashley, who was severely injured in the accident, emerged Easter morning from a coma that had lasted 15 days.