

"Myla is the biggest blessing," says MS fighter Tamia (at home with Grant, their daughter and Maltese Sweetie). "But we've lived a blessed life."



On the Rebound

With amazing art—and a lot of heart—NBA star Grant Hill and wife Tamia work through tough times

Everybody started crying except for Grant Hill. The NBA star was with his wife, Tamia, and both their mothers last April when doctors at Duke University Hospital gave them the bad news: Tamia, a vibrant R&B singer who had been suffering from mystifying bouts of fatigue, had multiple sclerosis. Still recovering from career-threatening ankle surgery himself, Grant said, "Now we can fight it. It will be okay," remembers his father, Calvin. "He knew at the time he had to be the strong one. Just like when he had his ankle problems, Tamia was very strong for him. The love they have for each other has helped them through their setbacks."

And then some. After four season-ending surgeries on his left ankle in as

many years, Hill, 32, returns against almost all odds to tip off the NBA season with the Orlando Magic Nov. 3. The six-time All-Star and his wife—a former Quincy Jones protégée—still look every inch the golden couple, but beneath the sparkle there's a newfound sense of strength. Along with caring for Tamia—who was diagnosed early and is using corticosteroids to help delay the onset of more severe symptoms—Hill has used his time away from the game to inspire others: He's organized a nationwide tour of his stunning collection of African-American art. "I've realized there's more to life than just basketball," he says.

During his lengthy recovery at their lakeside home in Windemere, Fla., the 6'8" Hill frequently worked out his

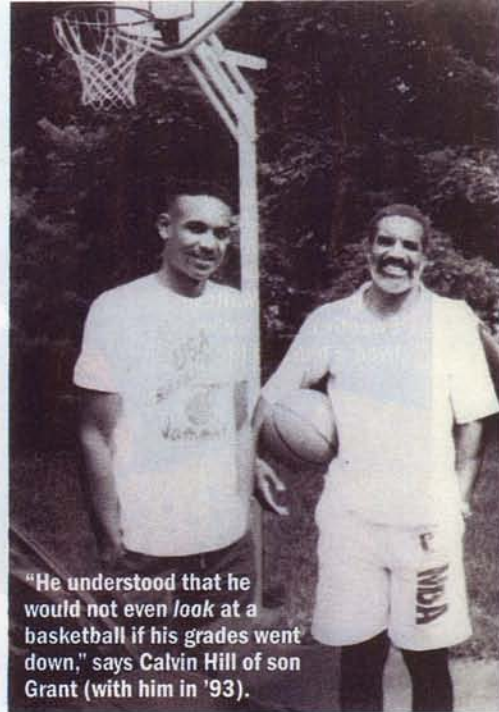


"I didn't want to quit," says Hill (before his '03 surgery).

INSET: PETER COSGROVE/AP



At the Orlando Museum of Art, Hill and his mother, Janet (right), view a piece from his collection with a kids' group he helped organize.



"He understood that he would not even look at a basketball if his grades went down," says Calvin Hill of son Grant (with him in '93).



Romare Bearden's "Morning Charlotte" is on tour ...



...as is "Cartas" by favorite artist Elizabeth Catlett.

rebuilt ankle—now held together by five screws—on neighbor Shaquille O'Neal's basketball court. After Tamia's MS diagnosis, "he was Mr. Mom," says Janet Hill of her son, who stepped up his hands-on child care. "He would feed Myla, change her diapers, keep her occupied." He also got to watch Myla, who turns 3 in January, work on her blossoming vocabulary. ("Myla learned how to say 'ankle' before anything else," he jokes.) During Grant's sabbatical, "we've been spoiled," admits Tamia, 29, who was introduced to him eight years ago by singer Anita Baker. "It will be hard to get used to when he goes back on the road," Tamia says, "but we'll manage."

With Tamia's encouragement, Grant spent much of this time organizing and helping to write the catalog for an exhibition of 46 pieces from his art collection titled "Something All Our Own" (currently on display at Baltimore's Morgan State University until Nov. 30). Raised surrounded by globe-spanning art collected by his parents—Calvin, 57, the retired NFL great, and Janet, 56, vice president of a corporate consulting firm in Washington, D.C.—Grant bought his own first piece as a senior at Duke. He hopes the show will help open minority youngsters' eyes to something other than hoop dreams. To that end, he has funded four \$2,500 college scholarships for students going into visual arts and has partnered with the local museums to pay for busloads of inner-

city kids to see the exhibition at each stop along the tour, which runs until early '06. "It's important for all boys and girls, but especially black boys and girls, to see other successes besides athletes and entertainers," Hill says. "There's a thought among a lot of kids that only the losers go to museums. I want kids to realize that even NBA stars are interested in art, so it can be a cool thing."

That message seems to be hitting home. "Because Grant Hill's name was attached to the exhibition, kids wanted to see it," says Betsy Gwinn, planning administrator at the Orlando Museum of Art, where more than 4,100 students visited the show. "The students catch his enthusiasm," says Gabriel Tenabe, director of Morgan State's museum, where Hill spoke to student groups in September. "People respond to the collection because it is so personal to Grant."

Happy as Hill and his wife are with the warm reception to the show, the couple admit to looking forward to the day some of their favorite pieces return home. Until then they've got plenty to occupy them, with Myla going through the terrible twos and Tamia resuming a limited touring and recording schedule. And oh yes, there's the NBA season. "It was fun to get back out there and run around with the young guys—I wasn't as rusty as I thought," says Hill. "I feel like I've been given a second chance."

By Pam Lambert. Steve Helling in Orlando

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: JULIE FLETCHER/ORLANDO SENTINEL; COURTESY JANET HILL; COLLECTION OF AFRICAN AMERICAN ART (2)