

Simply Heroic

By Carol Ann

It started out as such a simple and painless thing. One day in 1994 the bone marrow people came to our campus looking for volunteers. Lots of students, teachers, staff and parents lined up for a chance to do a good thing. We all joined the National Marrow Donor Program (NMDP) with the simple and almost painless act of providing a small sample of blood. "Just think", I said to myself, "One day I may save a life with my selfless gift. I'll be praised for my heroic act while protesting that it was really nothing."

Well, to date I haven't been chosen or matched as a donor and now due to age, am probably out of the Program and not likely to become anyone's hero. But I have come to realize that it is truly something to be in the Program and that it's an even bigger something to answer the call to donate. And in the last few days I have come to believe that anyone who finally becomes a bone marrow donor, indeed, becomes a hero to someone.

Our daughter Molly is one of those heroes today. As I write this she is in a recovery room at Baylor Hospital feeling deep pain in the bones of her hips, nauseated from anesthesia, but overflowing with pride for having given part of herself for another's survival. Our whole family is brimming with pride, too.

After eight years of not giving bone marrow a second thought, out of the blue skies of Hawaii came a call to Dallas last month. The woman on the other end of the line identified herself as a staff member in the Honolulu office of the National Marrow Donor Program. She told Molly that the blood sample she had given that day at Punahou had been identified as a possible match for a baby girl, less than a year old, dying from Leukemia---a baby girl who had no matches among her relatives and fewer chances of finding a match outside her family than of winning the lottery. As one possibly carrying that rare ticket, Molly was asked if she would consent to final tests that could confirm her match. Molly agreed and went to Baylor Hospital where an in-depth study of her DNA determined that she had the little girl's winning ticket.

Molly was given a complete physical and was then confronted with the seriousness of making the commitment to donate marrow. She was told that the procedure of inserting large needles into her iliac crests and drawing about 1/2 liter of marrow-rich blood out of them would leave her in considerable pain for at least a week. She was, once again, asked if she would still be willing to provide the donation.

Molly said, "Yes. I've got lots of bone marrow. A baby needs some and my body will replenish its supply. How can I say no?" She signed the papers knowing that at that point the baby girl's family would be told that a match had been found. No turning back. A date was set--- December 18, 2003. Just time to get the Christmas decorations up, the

shopping done. Time to clear schedules for a couple of weeks. Time to reflect on what was about to take place and on the idea of giving a baby girl a new chance to live. Time to say, "I hope and pray that it works and that I can be somebody's hero."

Today, Molly is a little girl's hero. We won't know for a while if her gift saved a life. Information about bone marrow donors and recipients is kept confidential for one year. The donor is given reports on the condition of the recipient at one month, three months, six months and one year. At the end of that time, each party can decide if they want their information shared with the other.

I didn't fully understand what we were offering of ourselves on that balmy Hawaiian day almost a decade ago. Now, through Molly I realize what a courageous and beautiful gift lay ahead for some of us. It was as small as a tiny baby. It was as large as the gift of life.

Molly ('95) and her husband, Ben live in Dallas, Texas not far from her parents, David ('58) and Carol Ann, her sister Pagett ('91), and brother Bill.