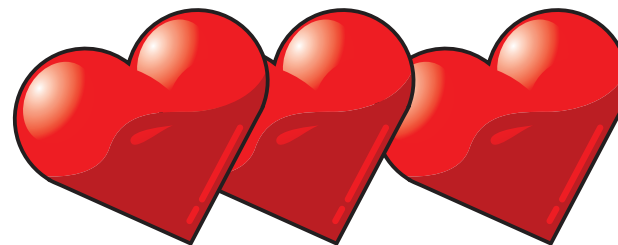


Gifts of the heart

Help this family at a Valentine's dance



By Isabelle Southcott

Terrie Stewart is my friend. Like me, she has a son in Grade 7 at Assumption School. Unlike me, Terrie has leukemia.

In early December, Terrie drove to Vancouver with her son Jordan and her parents to be admitted to Vancouver General Hospital. On December 15, Terrie had a stem cell transplant.

Terrie was first diagnosed with chronic lymphocytic leukemia in 2006. In 2009, she had chemotherapy, which put her into remission for over a year but now, it's back.

"Having a stem cell transplant is the only cure for the leukemia that I have," Terrie told me one cold December night. We were sipping Chai tea in her living room and chatting about what lay ahead in the coming months while our sons, Jordan and Alex, goofed about her house.

Terrie is a single mom and a Teacher Assistant at Assumption School. She has been on sick leave since September. The earliest she will be able to return to work will be September 2012.

"I began getting sick in 2003," recalled Terrie, who is now 46. "I basically got any flu and cold that came along. I was sick all the time. I did not have a fully functioning immune system because of the leukemia."

"Chronic lymphocytic leukemia or CLL as it is called for short, normally happens in elderly people but it can happen to people who are younger like me too," said Terrie.

The white blood cells in people who have CLL are immature. This means they can't fight infection. "In my particular CLL there is a genetic change in my chromosomes which means that it is more aggressive than other forms of CLL. Having a stem cell transplant is the best chance I have of a cure."

Although both of Terrie's brothers were tested to become donors, neither one of them were matches. A match for Terrie was found through the Canadian Blood Services registry, onematch.ca, the Canadian stem cell and marrow network. Most Powell Riverites are familiar with the Bruce Denniston Bone Marrow Society, which educates people about the need to register with onematch.ca. "We are particularly looking for young people and ethnic people to register," said Danita Senf, the society's national executive assistant.

When Terrie heard a stem cell donor had been found for her she was overjoyed.

"If anyone is interested in becoming a donor they should visit onematch.ca," she said. "They make it pretty easy for people."

Within two weeks of the operation, the donor stem cells

began grafting into Terrie's bone marrow and her immune system should begin to work. "It is fantastic that I even have this as an option."

Before the operation, Terrie met another Powell Riverite who'd had a stem cell transplant. "This man had it done five years ago. He had lymphoma and he's still cancer free," she said.

Terrie will have to remain in Vancouver until the middle of March and maybe longer. Jordan wants to be able to visit his mom while she is in hospital. All he wants is for his mom to get well.

Jordan is an amazing young man. "It's been hard on Jordan," says his mom, "but he has his faith."

It is that faith that is carrying Jordan through these difficult days. "He is very sure that I will be cured. He has his hockey, Powell River Minor Hockey, which is a good outlet for him and

a great place for him to be a kid. The school is such a supportive community with special teachers like Mrs. Bigold who organizes meals for us and little treats for Jordan."

Terrie knows it won't be easy but she knows she will get through it. "I think that I just have to keep believing and keep things as normal as I possibly can."


All that along with an amazing support system of family, friends, coworkers who make meals for her and Jordan and her church, The Faith Lutheran, will be there for Terrie and Jordan every step of the way.

People from her church will be praying for her, as will Jordan's classmates and all the other people

who know and love her at Assumption School.

While Terrie is fighting for her future, her friends back here in Powell River are doing what they can to help. They know money is tight and it is important that Jordan be able to visit his mom while she is in hospital.

Dance for Terrie: Gifts of the Heart is a fundraising dance that has been planned for Terrie for **Friday, February 10** at the Carlson Community Club with music by Jim Baron and Friends. There will be amazing appetizers by Pierina Canil and a silent auction as Powell River gathers to show their support for this brave woman. Tickets are available at the *Powell River Living* office, Assumption School, The Bruce Denniston Bone Marrow Society and Breakwater Books.

For more information please call Isabelle Southcott at 604 485-0003 or email isabelle@prliving.ca or Bonnie Krakalovich at 604 485-0003 or email bonnie@prliving.ca 



HAPPY TOGETHER: Terrie Stewart with son Jordan before her treatment.