A Bone Marrow Donation, my story

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It all began back in the fall of 1991. A co-worker of mine asked to talk to me one Saturday morning while at work, toward the end of our shift. I knew it was pretty important by the look on his face. You could always tell when Mike was serious and when he was in a jovial mood. Being serious was part of his job. He was the United Food and Commercial Workers Union Steward for our local.

I didn't know what he wanted to talk to me about. I wasn't really a big union supporter. Well, I was a big union supporter every three or four years, when it was time for a raise and a change in our benefits. Other than that, I just paid my union dues every week and didn't really want to have much to do with any union activities.

He pulled a 3.5"X5" photograph out of his shirt pocket and showed it to me. It was a photo of a young boy. He was smiling to beat the band. He had short blond hair, was about six years old I would say and was flanked by a beaming man and woman who were obviously his proud parents.

Without much delay, he said “His name is Timmy and he's dying.” A cold electric shock went through my body. I saw a small tear well up in his eye and believe me, Mike wasn't the kind of guy who gets teary-eyed very often if you know what I mean.

After taking a brief moment to compose himself, he went on to explain that this happy, cute and obviously well cared for child had a particularly acute case of Leukemia. He explained that the child's doctors thought that his only chance of survival would be a bone marrow transplant.

He then went on to explain that they could not find a suitable bone marrow match within his extended family. Their only hope at that time was to conduct a bone marrow donor drive and hope that someone who agrees to donate bone marrow at the drive would be a perfect match for their son. It was likely that Timmy would die within six to eight months without finding a suitable bone marrow match.

His eyes dropped to the floor as he explained that the odds of finding an unrelated bone marrow match were about one in twenty thousand. Again, that cold electric shock of realization shot through me, comprehending the fact that the situation was pretty desperate for this young boy. He knew Timmy since

he was born and it seemed that this young boy's life was hanging in the balance.

I was not the kind of guy who volunteers for things for the most part. My immediate reaction was that I felt sorry that this family was going through this extremely difficult ordeal with their little boy, but what can I do? I didn't have any extra money to give and I was about to make some lame excuse on why I couldn't be of any help.

I glanced back at the photo of the boy and his parents, as another co-worker came up from behind us, obviously curious about what Mike was saying. Mike went on to explain that the bone marrow donor drive was being held that morning and that when we got out of work, he asked if we would help participate by agreeing to a free blood test.

He said that we could all carpool and go over in as few cars as possible. Mike seemed very enthusiastic about trying to help this family. From what I gathered, this family was friends of him and his wife. I resigned myself to the fact that I wouldn't be getting home as early in the day as I had thought.

I thought about the injustice and unfairness of a parent having to bury their child. A few of the co-workers on the crew said that they would go and one volunteered to be one of the drivers. I decided to go ahead and give it a try. I had nothing pressing to do that Saturday morning and well, it seemed like a good portion of the crew would be going too and I didn't want to seem like a thoughtless heel.

When we got there, I realized that Mike had been a busy guy that morning. The line at the elementary school where the marrow donor drive was being held was quite long and it had quite a few of my co-workers in it. It was a chilly November morning and it was drizzling. You know the kind of cold misty morning that makes you yearn to curl up beside a fireplace with a fleece blanket and a cup of hot French vanilla cocoa.

We must have spent at least forty minutes out in the rain before we even got to the black iron railing and granite steps of the school. There were at least thirty people in line that were still outside the school. Once inside, there was a maze of lunch room tables set up with women dressed in those blue hospital nurses' scrubs, with flowered shirts. There were brochures and pamphlets to read concerning the National Marrow Donor Program and about the process of donating bone marrow. I kept myself busy in the line reading them, while chatting with my co-workers.

The winding line of potential marrow donors was being divided up into four separate lines with a chair at the end of each line. Across from each chair there was a nurse posted on the other side of a long set of lunch room tables and there was some type of interview going on with each seated potential donor.

After at least another forty five minutes or so, it was almost my turn at the interview table. There were very hushed tones, almost whispers coming from the mouths of the nurses doing the interviews. The hushed tones coming from the interviewees were at the same inaudible volume.

I was straining to hear the questions, mainly because I wanted to have my answers prepared beforehand. But I couldn't make out a single word. And I soon found out why.

The interview process asked some *very* personal questions. The kind of personal questions that you wouldn't even want family members around when you had to answer them. They were questions about intravenous drug use, whether you had ever paid for anyone for sex. Whether anyone you ever had sexual relations with anyone had ever used intravenous drugs and whether you had ever had sexual relations with members of the same sex and so forth.

Some of the questions weren't as embarrassing. Such as, do you have asthma or have you ever had to use an inhaler and other such medical condition questions of the heart and lungs and other diseases.

If someone answered a "yes" to any of the two pages of questions, they were asked for a brief explanation and were most often dismissed before they got to the table where the blood was being drawn.

After all these questions were completed and all my answers were in the "no" column, I was asked whether or not I wished to remain in the National Marrow Donor Registry even if I was not found to be a match for this young blond boy from the photo. I said that yes, I was willing to stay in the registry in case anyone else needed my bone marrow type.

I figured that the likelihood was pretty remote anyway. I didn’t think that I would ever be called on to save someone’s life, so I didn’t see any harm in staying in the marrow registry. It was completely free and didn’t cost me a dime anyway.

I wasn't nervous about the blood test. I had voluntarily donated blood twice before through a blood drive run by the Red Cross. The first time I donated blood was when I was in high school and it was mainly to get out of the

punishing cardio-vascular exercise that we had to endure at the end of football practice.

I was then shown to the next table, where my blood pressure was taken and I got the alcohol swab, the needle stick and gave a single small vial of blood to be tested. Just as I got up from that table, I saw that one of my co-workers was being rejected and had to make his way back outside to wait for us. Upon exiting, I asked him why he was rejected and he explained that it was because he has had asthma and the steroids used in the inhaler disqualified him from donating bone marrow.

After we were done, we all piled back into the car and headed back to the parking lot at work and we all went our separate ways. After arriving home, I told my wife Kelly what had transpired with the donor drive. My son Joseph was almost two years old and with wavy blond hair, similar to the boy in the photo. You see, I had my own young son with blond hair and a contagious smile and I felt good about trying to help this boy with Leukemia.

I looked at him there playing on the floor for a long moment, not saying anything and I silently wished that I was the one who could save Timmy who was slowly dying of Acute Dysplastic Leukemia a few towns away.

A few weeks to a month had gone by and I found Mike one morning and asked if anyone had been found who was a suitable bone marrow donor for the boy. Mike shook his head no and said that there was no word yet and that they were still doing all the testing involved. I checked back with him a while later and his sad, long face told the story without me asking. There was no suitable donor. No match was to be found. Nobody, nowhere…

Periodically I checked with Mike to see if there was any progress on a suitable donor, but instead what I received from him were updates on how young Timmy was beginning to fail and how weak he was beginning to get. The reports from Mike got worse as the weeks wore on and I had told myself to stop asking.

It wasn't more than a month later; Mike had called in sick a couple of days in a row. I asked if he was alright and if he had the flu. I was told that little Timmy had died and he needed a couple of days off for the wake and funeral. That cold, electric shock went through my body once again.

I imagined having to bury my own child and the injustice of it all made me both angry and sad at the same time.

Once Mike got back to work, I approached him to see how he was doing with young Timmy's death. He had a copy of a pencil drawing of Timmy that was done by a local artist for the family, taped to his desk. The drawing of Timmy remained there, taped to his desk for the next few years.

I asked Mike for Timmy's parent's address so I could send a sympathy card to them. I ended up writing them a full two page letter instead of simply sending them a card that didn’t really express what I wanted to say anyway.

I told them a story of a young rose who unfortunately grew too close to a stone wall. This young flower never received the nourishment that a flower should get from the sun and the earth. The young rose never grew the way a flower should grow and it quickly became sick and very weak.

As time went on, the young flower began to wither. His colors had begun to fade and they weren’t as brilliantly red as they once were. His stem began to thin out and the ends of his leaves began to curl up. The plants around him, who had been there his whole young life, searched tirelessly for something that they could do. They called out to anyone who they thought could help, but there was nothing, no response came. All they could do was to try to comfort the young rose they knew so well.

They even tried countless times to get the attention of the Gardener in hopes that he would take notice of the plight of the young rose. Nobody knows why, but the Gardener never seemed to notice the situation. It was so hard for the plants and other flowers that were closest to the rose to see the predicament that he was in and that they were powerless to help. Watching this young rose begin to fade away was the hardest thing they would have to endure.

Just as things were darkest and most desperate for him, the young rose caught a glimpse of sunlight through a tiny crevice in the wall and he began to lean toward it, seeking for a better look at the source. It felt wonderful to him to have the warmth on his young face once again.

As he got closer to the light, it became brighter, warmer and more inviting. He leaned more and more, stretching his stem and reaching toward the light. Then, suddenly, in a less than a moment's notice, the young rose slipped right through the stone wall and began a new life in full view of the sun on the other side.

Every so often, the young rose looks over his shoulder at the wall. He wonders when those other flowers that were closest to him, would figure out a way to get through the wall too. He still waits patiently there for their arrival, in a new land, where the sun never goes away, colors never fade and every tear is quickly wiped away by the Gardener who is always there.

As time went by, I had forgotten somewhat about Timmy and what his family went through. Then one day I got a call from the Dana-Farber Cancer Institute in Boston Massachusetts. Dana-Farber is one of the major National Marrow Donor Program's Donor Centers here in New England.

They said that I was a potential match for someone who needed a bone marrow transplant. They asked if I was still interested in donating bone marrow. I said "Sure." They said they would mail me a package of information with directions on how to get to the Dana-Farber Cancer Institute in Brookline Massachusetts. They wanted me in there within three days or so and I scheduled an appointment that was convenient.

I remembered the odds of a patient finding a perfect match from outside their family at one in twenty thousand and I found it hard to believe that after these many years, I actually matched someone. Maybe the effort I made to help out little Timmy wouldn’t be for nothing after all, I hoped.

On the day I was scheduled to go in, my wife Kelly was working, so I asked my Dad to drive me in. The second level of becoming a bone marrow donor is called the "Confirmatory Typing" stage. Most of us who know what we're talking about call it just CT.

Upon arriving for CT testing, I was given a two page questionnaire with all kinds of medical history questions and yes, including the same old questions about paying for sex, using intravenous drugs, traveling outside the country and if I've ever been to the country of Africa and so forth.

Again, I answered "no" to every question except for the one question that asked me “Are you feeling well today." After the questionnaire, I was brought in for the blood tests. That's really all there is to CT testing. They draw anywhere from six to a couple dozen tubes of blood for testing. On one of my later visits, I think I remember counting twenty-eight glass vials.

I was told that I would be contacted about the results of the test, whether I was chosen to donate bone marrow or not. I found this out to be not entirely true. I had been contacted a total of about five or six times for Confirmatory Typing over the ensuing years and a couple of times, I never got a call back. But that's only a minor complaint about the process.

A few weeks after a CT done in 2002, I got a call from Dana-Farber again. They said I was a perfect match. They asked me if I would be willing to consent to donate bone marrow. They said it was a big decision and that I didn't have to answer then. They offered to give me a phone number to call and that I would be given time to discuss it with my family.

I said that I had already decided that I would go ahead with it if I was ever called upon to actually go through with the procedure. He said “That's great!” and they would be sending along a packet of information for me to go through.

They then asked me to set up an appointment to come in for more testing, a physical exam and a consultation with the surgeons at Brigham & Women’s Hospital which was affiliated with the Dana-Farber Cancer Institute and was where the surgery would take place.

At this point, I would have liked to have had a blood pressure cuff and oxygen monitor on me, because it was hard to believe that I was actually the one chosen to go through with this life changing procedure. It was almost like hitting the lottery in a way, only without the big cash prize.

I was told that my wife had to be with me, because there were some documents she had to sign off on as well. I was also told to allow at least six hours for the day of the physical exam and consultation.

Well, the day came quickly and in we went. By this time, we knew how to get to Dana-Farber Cancer Institute by heart. It's right in front of Brigham & Women's Hospital and situated in the heart of the Longwood Medical Center in Brookline, right on Brookline Ave, just down the street a ways from Fenway Park in Boston where the Red Sox play baseball.

As I remember, we left in plenty of time, but Route 9 was terribly busy and we were about ten to fifteen minutes late. I was worried and nervous a bit, but my wife said something like "They're not going to be mad and turn you away, just relax."

Upon arriving, I had to go to the front desk and ask for a specific person (I forget his name). The woman at the desk got on the phone and said "He's here." The Donor Center Coordinator arrived and almost immediately put me to work on paperwork. I was given the same old questions I previously mentioned about sex, drugs, AIDS and medical history. I was also given a host of new paperwork. There were life insurance documents, a host of sign-offs and other forms that made me a bit apprehensive to put a pen to.

There was also a paper in the stack that said I would be donating my bone marrow to save the life of a seventeen year old girl who was dying of Acute

Myelogenous Leukemia. That's all they'll tell you. All you get to know is the age, sex and disease of the recipient. If the recipient survives one year, the National Marrow Donor Program will allow you to exchange contact information and meet as long as both parties agree.

There was also a "Consent to Donate" form. I would be signing this form in the presence of the two surgeons immediately after the consultation later in the afternoon. Once this "Consent to Donate" form was signed, the patient would begin a series of treatments that I'll go into a bit later.

The guy at Dana-Farber laid out the itinerary for the day, so we knew what we were going to be doing. He assured me that he was going to be with us all day. After the paper work and more blood tests, I was going to have a complete physical exam. After the exam, I was to meet with the two surgeons at Brigham and Women's Hospital, who would be performing the bone marrow harvest.

I didn't like the term harvest. It made me feel like I was a stalk of corn to be plucked and husked. But I suppose the term fit appropriately.

After the consult with the surgeons, it was going to be lunchtime. I would be giving a pint of my own blood just in case I needed blood after the harvest was done. Donating your own blood to be replaced after surgery is called an *autologous blood unit*. After that, we were going to be done and we could go home.

After the paperwork and blood tests, it was time for the physical. They took my height and weight, put me on an EKG monitor and did an electrocardiogram. Then a doctor did a quick and very basic physical exam and sent me off for x-rays.

After the physical, Kelly and I were off to meet with the two surgeons. After reading all the paperwork, brochures, pamphlets and booklets I was mailed, we were pretty confident that we knew what to expect. The two surgeons left no stone unturned and laid out everything for us in painstaking detail.

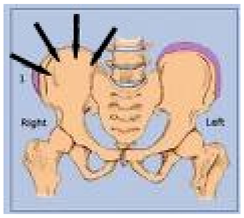
They asked me what kind of anesthesia I was interested in having. They said that I could be awake during the bone marrow harvest with a locally applied anesthetic called an epidural, where I wouldn't feel anything below my belly button or so.

They also said I could have general anesthesia, where I would be put out and be unconscious during the entire procedure. General anesthesia was what I chose. I don't know how I would have reacted to having two big men stab me

in the back while a laid there awake listening to them go at it. The decision wasn't that difficult to make.

They said that once I was unconscious, they were going to lift me off the table and put me onto an operating room table. Then, they were going to prepare my lower back area for the harvest. Each surgeon would make a tiny incision on my lower back and they would insert needles into the Iliac Crest portion of my hip bone.

The Iliac Crest is the heaviest and thickest portion of the hip. If you look at the image below for a moment, it's the portion of the hip, which is rounded and is the upper most portion of the hip bone.



They said that there would be a total of about four to six punctures through the skin, but that they would have to go into the hip bone, a few times through each puncture. What they would do, is pull the needle from the bone, tip it to one side or the other and go back into the thick part of the hip, in another area and draw out more.

I'm not exactly sure how big the "needles" are, but I know that they're big enough to extract bone that has to be filtered out. I would guess that they're somewhere between a plastic coffee stirrer and a very narrow drinking straw; anyway, here is an image of one that I have found.

He explained that taking bone marrow is not the same as drawing blood. The marrow pools in the tiny cavities of the bone. Once they draw marrow out of the bone from one area, that area of the hip would deplete of marrow to a certain degree and then, they would have to try another area of the hip. This would continue until they got enough of the marrow needed by the recipient. It would usually take about an hour and a half.

They said that is was likely that I could be released from the hospital that evening, but they wanted to keep the option open of keeping me overnight in case my blood counts weren't coming back good enough.

They told me what to expect in the days following the surgery and what my limitations would be. The surgeons also gave me a definite harvest date. They said that after signing the "Intent to Donate" form, the patient had to undergo a regimen of radiation and chemotherapy to basically destroy her immune system.

She was going to have to live in one of those plastic bubbles to keep away from all bacteria, viruses and infections. The stem cells in my bone marrow would then be used to rebuild her immune system completely from the ground up.

They told me not to do anything risky during this time period. No motorcycle driving, no skydiving, no anything that might risk my life unnecessarily. The result could be the death of two people, me and the seventeen year old female Leukemia patient.

Once the consult with the surgeons was over and the paperwork finished, it was time for lunch. The Donor Center Coordinator paid for our lunch at the cafeteria of Brigham and Women's Hospital. I think I had a cheeseburger and from what I remember, it wasn't as bad as I thought it would be. Sometimes hospital food gets a bad rap and it really wasn't too bad.

The guy from Dana-Farber said that we were to meet him at 5:30AM on the day of the surgery in the Brigham and Women's Hospital lobby. He said that the actual surgery would be scheduled for about 7:30 AM, but there was a lot to do and go over before the surgery and the two extra hours in the hospital prior to the harvest would be necessary.

After lunch, it was time to give an autologous pint of blood for my own surgery in case I needed blood after the harvest. Once down there, they had some questions for me and I had to present positive identification. They wanted to make certain that my donated blood unit would not get lost or misplaced.

I was given a card with a sticker on it and another one was placed on the blood unit bag. A third copy was to go into my records at the hospital. I was led off into another room where my blood would be taken. Now I know how a pin cushion with a central nervous system would feel like. I think I've probably been stuck with well over one hundred needles since this process began, ouch!

As usual, they had a hard time finding a vein to start the flow. The first girl couldn't get it. She was quite young and was having a difficult time, so she handed the task off to a woman in her mid fifties who looked everything like the professional phlebotomist she was.

After about a minute, she had a good flow going and my long day preparing to give bone marrow was coming to a close and I could soon go home. As I remember, it was just about six hours on the nose from when we first arrived. We headed back home right after the unit of blood was taken.

Once I got back to work the next day, I made sure that I spoke with my immediate supervisor, manager and personnel coordinator and asked for a vacation to coincide with the surgery date I was given. I told them that I may need a few days of "light duty" work as bending over and lifting may not be completely up to snuff when I get back to work. My employer was very accommodating and they understood what I had agreed to do for this total stranger that I hoped to meet some day.

The vacation and light duty were on the schedule at work and set in stone. We had my mother-in-law all set up to put the kids on the bus and be there for them when they got off the bus. The bone marrow harvest was set for about a month away.

The date for the bone marrow harvest was closing in fast, just a couple of days away in fact. I was getting a little apprehensive about it. I had never had any type of surgery before and I had never had any general anesthesia either. Then the phone call came.

It was Dana-Farber Cancer Institute. It was just under forty eight hours before the harvest was to take place. I was told that I would not be needed. The National Marrow Donor Program wanted a specific type of testing done during the procedure that Dana-Farber and Brigham and Women's Hospital did not perform. They had worked up another donor to the same point as myself and chose him to go ahead with the harvest instead, from an entirely different donation center in another part of the country.

I felt like all the air had left my balloon. I was relieved, disappointed and angry all at the same time. Everything I had gone through was for nothing. The blood unit I gave for the surgery would be added to the general supply of O positive blood at the hospital.

The more I thought about it, the angrier I got. How could they bring me to the very brink of going through with this procedure and then tell me that I wouldn’t be needed?

I decided that I didn't want to participate in the National Marrow Donor Program anymore. I was disappointed and a bit angry and I wanted out. I didn't want to deal with all the trips into Boston anymore. I didn't want to have to think about getting a ride in and out and having to have my mother-in-law take care of the kids. I thought it would solve a lot of problems if I just told Dana-Farber that I was angry that they did that to me and I wanted out of the program.

I was tired of all the travel, all the arrangements, all the questions and all those damn needles. I was done. Or so I thought…

Kelly, my wife told me that she understood that I was angry, but that I should calm down for a while. If you still want to leave the program in a couple of weeks, tell them you want out then, she said. But calm down for a while and think about it first.

I did what my wife suggested and I waited to make a decision. She was right as usual. I calmed down enough to make an informed and logical decision and I decided to stay in the program in case someone else needed me.

Almost two and half years passed by. I heard nothing at all. No more CT testing, no more blood tests. No contact from Dana-Farber at all. No paperwork, no phone calls.

Kelly and I decided to move to Maine, being sick and tired of life and politics in the People's Republic of Massachusetts. I secured a job in Maine, while Kelly did most of the work selling the house. I moved to Maine in October of 2003 and Kelly and our two boys moved up in December after finalizing the sale of our house.

I got back online in February at my in-law's new house. They had moved to Maine just prior to us from Massachusetts as well. I went to the Dana-Farber Cancer Institute's Web site and changed my address and phone number for the National Marrow Donor Program.

We purchased more than six acres of land in Southwest Maine and built a home. It was quite a challenging and rewarding experience, but it's something that I really don't want to do ever again.

Sometime around October of 2004, a few months after moving into our new home, Dana-Farber called again. They said that I was a match once again for a patient needing a bone marrow transplant. They set up a time for me to come in, which was about three days or so after the phone call.

The same old set of questions was asked. The same forms that I had filled out at least six or seven times before were there again before me. The Donor Center Coordinator was a woman in her early thirties I would guess, named Kristie. After leading me through the paperwork, she had a Ziploc baggy full of vials for the phlebotomist. There were about twelve vials from what I recall.

We were in and out pretty quickly. Once again, I was told that I would be hearing from her one way or the other on the results of the Confirmatory Typing tests.

About a month and a half later, another call came from Kristie, we were told that I was a confirmed perfect match for the recipient, but that the patient was not ready yet for the transplant process to begin. She said that if the transplant was going to go through, that she would be calling back.

It wasn't until months later on March 9, 2005 when the next call came. This time they asked me to consent to donate bone marrow and that I would be given time to consider it with my family. I immediately said that I have already decided to go ahead and go through the procedure if I was needed. "Great..." she said.

She asked me to help her schedule a day to come in for more blood tests, a physical exam, and a consultation with the surgeons and to donate a pint of my own blood for the surgery.

By this time, Kelly and I already knew everything about the process. Even so, we still got all the same brochures, pamphlets and booklets. I could probably recite them pretty much word for word myself without even looking at them.

The only thing that was different this time was that the two surgeons who would be performing the bone marrow harvest were two different doctors. That's it; everything else went just as it did the first time I was called upon to do this for real.

All the time going through the paperwork again, additional blood tests, physical exam, EKG, X-rays, consultation with the surgeons and the autologous blood unit, I kept thinking that this time I won't be chosen again. I was convinced that they would bring me up to the brink of going through the surgery and then tell me that I wasn't needed once again.

That was the case until, Kelly mentioned to Kristie that we had been all through this stage before and asked if there's a chance that someone else could still be chosen.

Kristie looked at us both with some surprise and said "Oh no, not this time, this time he's it... he's the one." Her words still echo in my ears. Again, I had that cold electric-like shock go through me. I then realized that maybe I will actually be going through with this possibly life saving procedure this time.

The paperwork indicated that I would be giving bone marrow for a 57 year old woman suffering from Myelogenous Dysplastic Leukemia. I tried to imagine what she might be like. Where do she and her family live? What does she do for a living?

I won't bore you with all the details of the paperwork, blood tests, physical exam, EKG, X-rays, consultation with the two surgeons and donating an autologous blood unit. I will only expand on this by saying that they increased the life insurance for the procedure to one million dollars, the disability insurance to $5000 a month, the surgeons were Stephanie J. Lee M.D., M.P.H. and Eric Jacobsen M.D., and lunch was pepperoni pizza.

Kristie assured us that we would have no expenses during the whole process. She explained that a Best Western Hotel would be available for up to three nights at no expense for our convenience. Since we had to come in all the way from Southwestern Maine, a hotel stay at Longwood Medical Center, a five minute walk to Dana Farber, was a great option.

The bone marrow harvest was to be on Wednesday April 6, 2005. We were to meet Kristie in the lobby of the Dana-Farber Cancer Institute no later than 5:30AM.

I made all the appropriate arrangements at work for a Tuesday to Wednesday one week vacation. They were again very accommodating. My personnel coordinator responsible for making sure I got paid appropriately is actually a participant in the National Marrow Donor Program Registry and she was very interested in the process.

We told Kristie that we would take her up on the offer of a two night stay at the Best Western at Longwood Medical. We said that we would want Tuesday night April 5th, the night before the surgery and Wednesday night April 6th, so I wouldn't have to have a three hour ride home after just getting out of a hospital bed.

We made all the appropriate arrangements, which meant that we completely relied on my awesome mother-in-law to get the kids off the bus on Tuesday afternoon, get them off to school on Wednesday morning and spend the day at our house and get them off to school again on Thursday. I don't know what we'd do without having her there whenever we need her, thanks Mom!

We had lunch at Applebee's on the way down to Boston, which Kristie indicated the program would also be happy to pay for. We had a leisurely ride into Boston. It was the very first time I can remember heading into Boston without any kind of time constraint and it felt good.

We were supposed to be able to check in by 3:00PM at the Best Western. We pulled into the parking garage just before three o'clock. We had to wait about ten minutes for our room to be ready. We were called up to the desk, given the room key card and up we went.

It was all the way up to the fifth floor. I was hoping for a view and a good sized room, but we got a small room and a spectacular view of an interior stairwell out the window. Oh well, it was free and we had the evening to relax.

I wanted to get to bed relatively early because I had a big day ahead of me. Not to mention that we had to meet Kristie by 5:30AM. I set the bedside clock for 4:30AM, but it wasn't necessary. I was awake well before four O'clock staring at the ceiling and solving all the problems in the world.

Kelly and I got ready and made our way downstairs to the hotel lobby by about five minutes past five O'clock or so. By ten minutes past five, we were outside in the cool early April morning air.

I have always liked to be a little early for appointments. Being fifteen minutes early for a scheduled appointment is what is called "Lombardi Time". It's taken from the famous football coach of the Green Bay Packers, Vince Lombardi.

The trophy shaped like a silver football that's given out each year to the winner of the Super Bowl, is called the Lombardi Trophy. When Vince Lombardi used to call a team meeting on the hour, he fully expected every player on the team to be seated and attentive by quarter of the hour.

Kelly and I made our way toward Dana-Farber, well before sunrise. The city, however, was already awake. There were people here and there dressed in white hospital physician's coats, carrying clipboards. There were rubbish trucks picking up the compactor dumpsters and bringing in fresh ones to start

the day. And the traffic out on Brookline Ave had begun to emerge from its overnight slumber.

We had been to the Dana-Farber lobby eight to ten times during daylight hours, but for a brief moment, neither one of us could make out where it was. We had in fact, walked right by it and missed it, in the gloom of the pre-sunrise of the streets of Boston.

We went in and a security guard stepped forward as soon as we approached. This was mostly because it was before official Dana-Farber business hours and anyone entering the lobby at quarter past five in the morning, not dressed in white and carrying a clipboard was obviously going to need some guidance.

We told him that we were there to meet Kristie and that I was having a bone marrow harvest this morning at Brigham & Women's next door. He gestured toward some seating, just off the lobby area and told us that she would be with us shortly.

I tried to act completely calm and normal, but my anxiety about the procedure, pain and recovery, had begun to rise over the last half hour and I didn't want my wife to sense it. I was eager to get the day over with, but I was a bit apprehensive as to what the day might bring.

The minutes that passed in the Dana-Farber lobby, seemed a lot longer than the sixty seconds that each minute was supposed to be made up of. Each set of footsteps that I heard, sent an almost undetectable shudder through my body in anticipation of the unknown of the day ahead.

I had never had any type of anesthesia before, short of Novocain at a dentist's office for a cavity filling. I had no experience before with an intravenous line. And I had never even had a hospital "johnny" on before. I had a certain degree of anxiety about waking up from the bone marrow harvest and needing a few of those blue-green beanies to vomit into. I always thought those vomit containers were way too small. If I needed to throw up after waking, I wanted an old fashioned two and a half gallon bucket.

It was quickly approaching 5:30AM. It was probably something like 5:27AM. The automatic door to the lobby opened and it was another security guard. It wasn't very easy to sit patiently. There was a portion of me that yearned to get up and start pacing back and forth, but I knew Kelly would tell me to calm down and just sit and be patient. So I faked being patient and stayed seated.

Kristie walked in at exactly 5:30AM. I set my watch by the atomic clock from the U.S. Government's Naval Observatory. You can get the exactly correct time

through their Web site on the Internet at www.Time.gov. She walked through the lobby doors at precisely 5:30AM and silently I thought silently "Boy, she's good!"

She was wearing those blue-green hospital scrubs. She was no longer wearing the very professional and business-like pants suit and blazer that I've seen her wear in our past visits. Now, she was *really* dressed for business. She was carrying a clipboard jammed with consent forms, insurance forms and forms that protect the hospital, doctors, donor center and so forth.

In her other hand was one of those small blue and white coolers that you'd bring a six pack to the beach in. Of course, I knew right away that this cooler would contain about a quart of my bone marrow in a few hours and would be on its way to the Leukemia patient's hospital room; wherever that was.

She approached us and with a broad smile asked us if we "...always hang out in hospital lobbies at this time of the morning?" trying to break the apprehension and anxiety that she must have known I was having. She looked at me and asked if I was ready to go. I don't remember what I said, but I'm sure it was more of an incoherent mumble than a confident, cheerful and animated and well-enunciated statement.

We, of course had been to Brigham and Women's Hospital twice before, so I knew which direction to walk in. Before I could even realize it, I had begun to lead Kristie and Kelly on the way over. I really just wanted to get the day over with. I was about four steps ahead of both of them.

I started toward the entrance to the hospital that we've used twice before and she stopped me and told me that it's too early for that door to be open and explained that we would have to go in through the main entrance of the hospital. So I thought that maybe I should slow down a bit and let her lead us.

She took Kelly and me to a small registration desk off to the right of the main lobby. Kelly and I sat down and went through the process of providing all the information the hospital needed. The paperwork contained all the usual stuff like contact information, medical insurance, my regular physician's name, address and phone number and so forth.

Because of the fact that someone's life was on the line, the identification and registration process was very thorough. Mere paperwork and the fact that Kristie was with me, was not enough for them to identify me. I think the woman at the registration desk had asked for me to identify myself more than three times and then also produce a driver's license and another form of identification. She then also asked me to verify everything afterward. I felt

assured that they had no tolerance whatsoever for any form of patient misidentification.

I was then brought down to a very small lab, where a few initial tubes of blood would be taken for reference. These I guess were to get an initial blood count and some other tests that had to be done prior to the bone marrow harvest. One of the tests was to cross reference the autologous blood unit that I donated, just to make certain that it was really me.

The young man taking the blood samples had a difficult time finding a vein as usual. He inserted one needle and was not able to hit the spot. So he did what quite a few inexperienced or rather impatient phlebotomists do, which is to go fishing around with the needle for a decent vein.

He had a very thick Jamaican accent and I had to really focus on his speech to follow what he was saying. I was about to say 'Hey mon, how about getting someone else to do that…' I hate phlebotomists that go fishing for a vein once they get the needle in. You know, get the spot right before you stab…

After at least a full minute of fishing around and trying to get a vein started, he was able to fill up the required vials. Kristie then brought us off to the Pre-Operative Admissions Waiting Room and she left us alone. She said she had to go back to Dana-Farber for a bit and would be back before I went in for the surgery.

She told us that in a while, we would be called to go downstairs to the PACU, which stands for the Post Anesthesia Care Unit. She said that they would get me into a "johnny" and go through yet another registration process with a nurse down there.

Soon after Kristie departed for Dana-Farber, another nurse came into the waiting area and called my name and verified my identification. Then I got the wrist band, with my name, patient number, date of birth, doctor in charge and the current date of 04/06/05. I was now an official patient at Brigham & Women's Hospital.

The waiting room was tastefully designed. They had original artist's drawings of all kinds of passenger vehicles from America's past hanging on the walls. Many of these were automobile concept cars from the 60's and 70's. Most of which, I could immediately tell never actually made it to the manufacturing stage.

I had started pacing by now. Sitting still with a magazine or engaging my wife in small talk, was not to be on my agenda in that waiting room. I made my way from picture to picture, looking at all the failed vehicle concept cars, wishing I could draw like that.

There were a few other families that had come into the pre-operative waiting room. One guy had a large contingent of family members with him. Overhearing some of their conversation, it became obvious that he would be undergoing open heart surgery in the coming hours. I felt relieved a bit, that I was only there for a bone marrow harvest and not something as serious as heart surgery.

After what was probably only twenty minutes, but seemed more like forty, my name was called and Kelly and I went downstairs to the PACU.

We were brought to the end stall on a row of four or five beds. There were another four or five beds directly opposite mine on the other side of the rather large room. I had mentioned to Kelly that I had to go to the bathroom in the waiting room upstairs, but the closest bathroom was nowhere in sight and I figured I'd be okay to wait.

Kelly mentioned it to the nurse and I said that I could wait. The nurse replied, "Oh no you don't, if you've got to go, you've got to go now!" She brought me to the other side of PACU, did my business and I returned to my PACU stall. The heavy set African-American nurse in charge of registering me and preparing me for the procedure, told me "OK, Marc, it's time to get naked."

She said "Take everything off and put this "johnny" on, but don't tie it. Then get yourself under the blankets and I'll be back in a few minutes."

Once she came back, she verbally verified my identification and then took my wrist and turned to see my identification bracelet to ensure her of the fact that I wasn't fibbing. She then proceeded to ask me a host of questions on whether or not I'm allergic to anything. Most of these questions, I had already been asked in the pre-operative admissions upstairs. They were mostly concerning inquiries about allergies to medication or latex and such things.

Two anesthesiologists came in to say hello and to ask me the same regimen of questions. One was a woman in her fifties, with short blond hair. She was definitely a pro. She told Kelly and me exactly what was going to happen, leaving out nothing.

She explained that after I'm completely registered, that she'll be inserting an I.V. I'd be connected to the EKG and blood pressure cuff and that I'll be given a sedative through the I.V. to relax me and help to relieve some of the anxiety that I might be feeling... yeah think! Then you'll be wheeled into pre-op and we'll be putting a drug in the I.V. line and you’ll be given an oxygen mask. Within twenty seconds, you'll be completely out and we'll be closely be monitoring your vital signs. Once you're out, we'll be putting an oxygen tube down your throat, but you won't be aware of it.

When you're done, you'll be back here in PACU and we'll wake you up. You might feel like you have a sore throat due to the anesthetic. Once you’re conscious enough, we'll ask you to rate your pain on a scale of 1 to 10. This scale will help us properly adjust your medication to regulate your pain.

She asked "Do you get motion sick?” I responded with a nod, explaining that roller coasters and tea-cup rides ruin my entire weekend. She said that they would be placing a patch behind one of my ears to ease any feelings of nausea.

She gave me a Novocain shot in the top of my left hand, which hurt like heck. She then started the I.V. and got the saline fluid flowing at the proper rate.

Next, the male anesthesiologist introduced himself and briefly reiterated everything the woman had just told me. He was wearing the same blue-green scrubs as everyone else, but he had a Buffalo Bills bandana on his head instead of the hospital issued head garment. He then asked me “...what type of procedure, are we doing today?” The look on my face must have said what I was thinking. I hesitated and said to myself; don't you know what I'm here for? He explained that he "...just wanted to make sure that we were all on the same page here."

I told him that I was in here for a bone marrow harvest. I'm sure he already knew, but I think he wanted to make sure that I was aware of what was going on and he was trying to gauge my level of awareness. In my opinion he asked me also to be absolutely certain that the right procedure was being done on the right person.

He asked me if I knew who I was doing it for. I said that I didn't have a clue. All I knew was that it is a 57 year old woman, who has Leukemia. "That's commendable, very commendable...to be doing that for a stranger."

“How was breakfast this morning?” He asked. Of course, I wasn’t supposed to have eaten anything since late last night and I smiled, knowing that he was just making sure I hadn’t eaten anything. I said that the last thing I had was about 6:00PM last night. He just nodded knowingly and said “Good”.

By the time he finished speaking, the PACU nurse who originally gave me the "johnny" was back. She said she had to finish up registration and that she had more paperwork for me. She asked me if I had considered making out a

health care proxy. A health care proxy would allow Kelly to make decisions about my health, if I was not able to do so myself. I signed it and she finished up the registration process.

Next, came time for getting hooked up to the machines. I was attached to the EKG, blood pressure cuff and oxygen monitor. The EKG stickers had to be placed on my back, because I was going to be on my belly in the prone position during surgery I imagine.

Kristie showed up again, with her familiar blue and white cooler and clipboard. She asked me if I was okay and did I have any remaining questions. I said that I felt fully informed and didn't have any questions.

The marrow harvest was scheduled for 7:30AM and it was about 7:25AM. The waiting was over. It was crunch time and time to head into the unknown.

I was given the drug in the I.V. line and again it was explained that it was a drug to make me relax and to help prepare me for surgery and to ease any anxiety. I looked forward to it hitting my brain, because I felt pretty stressed out not having been through anything even remotely like this before.

Dr. Eric Jacobsen showed up and said hello. He spoke with Kelly and Kristie and moments later, Dr. Lee showed up. The anesthesiologists and the doctors were talking amongst themselves and each other and the drug they gave me started to relax me and my head and shoulders started to sink into the bed. I had not realized that my body had been so tensed up. Within a few minutes, I would be feeling pretty drunk, as if I had been into the whiskey bottle on an empty stomach.

Kristie explained to Kelly where she had to go to fill my pain medication in the hospital's pharmacy and she told her that she was going to show her where to wait and that it was time for her to say goodbye. Kelly and I said a brief goodbye and she didn't seem nervous at all, although I'll bet she was a little stressed out as well.

As soon as my wife left, Dr. Jacobsen and Dr. Lee and the two anesthesiologists grabbed the bed and untangled all the cords and tubes from the wall. They moved the bed away from the wall and we started towards pre-op. By this time, they could have run the bed down a stairwell and I wouldn't have cared too much. I was feeling pretty intoxicated, without having to drink a single thing.

They wheeled me into pre-op, which was about sixty or seventy feet away. The male anesthesiologist again explained that once I'm out, they'll be lifting

me onto the operating room table and turning me onto my belly. He then explained that he was putting the anesthetic agent into my I.V. and asked me if I was claustrophobic. I said that I wasn't claustrophobic and he explained that he would be placing an oxygen mask on my face and some people who are claustrophobic can freak out with the mask because it covers the whole face.

Another big guy came into the room and my first impression was that he was there mainly for the lifting and turning of my two hundred forty pound body, which was soon to be purely dead weight.

The male anesthesiologist spoke with him about Drew Bledsoe being traded to the Dallas Cowboys, which I had not heard of. As the chemical agent was being put into the I.V., I inquired about the trade of Bledsoe and about the fact that he would be working again with Bill Parcels. I honestly don't know how coherent I was. He said something about the trade of Bledsoe that I don't remember, as he placed the oxygen mask on my face.

He told me that they would all be there when I woke up and that there wasn't any need to worry and that they were going to take good care of me. I took about three or four deep breaths into the mask trying to get the whole thing over with and then I heard faint voices.

The voices were of two nurses in PACU that were waking me up. One was on each side of my bed. My first thought was disbelief that the procedure was over and done. I don't remember even falling asleep or anything.

Once I opened my eyes for a moment, they asked me to rate my pain on a scale of one to ten. Ten being the worst pain you've ever experienced. It was only then that I was aware of some heaviness in my lower back and that it felt as if I was lying on top of something across my lower back. Without even consciously thinking about the number, I responded that it was a "three". It felt as if I was hearing somebody else's voice say that and not my own and I thought to myself, boy that was weird.

My throat didn't really feel sore, but I had a very "itchy" throat and I had begun to cough into the oxygen mask. They took the oxygen mask off my face and put the oxygen tubes up my nose, boy that was different, I thought.

A few moments later, a nurse came over to draw blood. I gathered that that was to check my blood cell counts and to gauge whether or not I was going to need my autologous unit of blood. She was having a difficult time getting a vein on my right arm; no surprise there! She explained that it wasn't a good idea to take the blood from my left arm, because that's where the I.V. was, but it had the best vein and she did it anyway.

My wife was brought in to the PACU and she came to stall number thirteen where I was placed. She spent the next half hour or so with me and the PACU began to get very busy and she was asked to go back to the waiting room and call the PACU Unit around noon to see what the progress was and whether or not she could come back. This was at about 10:45AM.

Kelly then left me and filled my pain medication, which was 20 tablets of Oxycodone at the hospital pharmacy and she came back in just after noon. Kelly was able to sit with me there in PACU beside my bed until an upstairs room opened up.

Soon after Kelly left, a man in his early thirties in a white doctor's coat came into my stall and pushed back the curtain a bit to get closer to my bed. He then grabbed his name tag, still attached to his coat and brought it to within a foot of my face. The name tag said "MARC RICHARDSON" on it.

I was still under the influence of the medication and anesthesia and I was not completely conscious and alert yet. I felt as if I was still in the midst of a very slowly clearing fog.

I nodded and said "Yup, that's me." The doctor responded “Nope, that's me.” We have exactly the same name and I just had to come in here and say hello." "How are you doing?" he asked. He commented about what a nice thing I just did, glancing at my chart and seeing the bone marrow harvest information. Then he left, saying that it was nice to have met me. It was kind of neat meeting someone with exactly the same first and last name, even spelled the same too.

I was given my own (autologous) blood unit back, through my I.V. line. They just replaced the bag of saline, with the bag that contained my donated blood from the day of my physical. They checked very carefully that the unit of blood they were attaching was indeed mine. They cross referenced it at least two or three times, comparing stickers and paperwork. I was felt confident that they were careful that I was getting my own blood back.

They were having a very difficult time finding a room to open up and we stayed right there for hours. I was just "vegging out", trying to keep my mind off the pain of the I.V. and the ever growing discomfort in my lower back. Shifting to my side was more comfortable, but getting there was not easy. Most of the time, I just laid straight on my back.

Somewhere around two O'clock, the pain began to grow to a point where I would rate it a solid six on a scale of one to ten. I mentioned this to a nurse,

who was covering for my regular nurse who was at lunch. She picked up my chart and with raised eyebrows, she said "Wow, okay, you haven't had any pain medication at all yet...I'll get you something good."

She came back in a few minutes with a good sized syringe full of morphine and pumped it into the I.V.. She said that this would help and she would be back in a little while to check on me. As soon as she turned around, the morphine hit my bloodstream and it hurt like heck. The morphine entering my bloodstream through the I.V. felt as if someone had whacked my arm with a tennis racket. After about thirty seconds or so, the pain went bye-bye and the morphine did its stuff.

I laid there patiently waiting for a room to open up, while Kelly sat next to me reading her book. I spent the time looking around the Post Anesthesia Care Unit and paying attention to the people and conversations going on around me. I had a book with me, but I really wasn't in the mood to read.

Men and women, some in white coats and others in the blue-green hospital scrubs, walked quickly back and forth. Some of them were in deep thought about an upcoming medical procedure and others wondering when they'd finally be able to get home.

There was a man in the PACU stall across the aisle, no more than ten feet away. He was in his eighties and was never left by himself. He wasn't looking very good at all. It looked to me, like he was going to be leaving the game of life and cashing in his chips so to speak, in the coming weeks.

To describe him, I would say had very thin hair, he looked gaunt, very lean and pasty and you could see more than two thirds of his entire eyeballs. He looked something like a deer caught in the headlights on a back country road. The poor guy, I thought to myself.

I was happy that I was lying there after having simple day surgery. I was relieved that what I was experiencing was only having felt like I was kicked in the fanny by a horse and not something where life itself hung in the balance.

There were eight or nine people crowded into the tiny curtained off stall. They were about to start some kind of procedure, right there in the PACU on this elderly man. They were asking him all sorts of questions, seemingly important questions that he couldn't answer or didn’t know. I was surprised to see that he had no family members with him, to help him answer questions and to comfort him in this time of extreme stress.

They were trying to place some kind of stainless steel tube down his throat. I was trying not to look into the stall, but it was all happening right in plain sight, directly in front of me. When one of the doctors yanked the curtain shut for his privacy, thank goodness.

Upon opening the curtain again, an argument had begun between two doctors. A thin woman doctor in her early forties and an older male doctor with gray hair in his sixties were having a vibrant discussion to put it mildly. Their argument, was heated, but was still in hushed tones, so you couldn't make out the words. The only thing I could make out was the older male doctor trying to explain that "it's not my procedure and I'm not comfortable with it."

My mind began to wander and occasionally my thoughts went out to the Leukemia patient, who was waiting somewhere in a plastic bubble for my marrow. My bone marrow was probably on a commercial airline flight with a courier, with that blue and white cooler on his lap and accompanied by a plethora of paperwork.

I wondered if her family was there with her in her hospital room. I wondered how much damage the radiation and chemotherapy had done to her. I wondered what she was like. I wondered what her family was like.

Were they self centered liberals, who thought they were entitled to my bone marrow? Were they thinking of my bone marrow as just another drug or medication, that might hold the hope of a cure? Were they conservative, born again Christians, who appreciated the personal sacrifice and thanked God that real hope was on the way...

I wondered to myself if they were being updated on the progress of my marrow harvest. I also reflected on whether or not I was ever actually going to meet them. What was that going to be like, I pondered?

I was getting quite hungry and my lips were very dry. I had not had anything at all to eat since early in the evening on Tuesday and even then, it was just a snack. My last good sized meal was at the Applebee's Restaurant in Biddeford, Maine, more than twenty seven hours before. I really just wanted a drink of water, but all they would let me have is ice chips.

Finally, we were told that a room opened up on the fourteenth floor. Kelly was told the room number of 31-2 on the fourteenth floor. I was wheeled up there in the PACU bed, shortly after she left and she was sitting there by the window, when I arrived. Bed number two, was up against the window. I could see outside, but I couldn't sit up very long to see much. Sitting up put too much weight on my lower back and it hurt too much.

I was given some water to drink and a chocolate ice cream cup. I had never thought that Boston water would taste so good. It had been about twenty one hours without anything to drink and I was thirsty, big time thirsty.

The nurse said that the doctor that did the procedure would be up to see me soon. I just nodded, wondering whether it would be Eric or Stephanie. It didn't matter to me. I liked them both and they both knew their stuff.

Dr. Eric Jacobsen came into the room and asked me how I was feeling. I don't remember what my reply was, but I'm sure I downplayed my pain. He asked me if one side hurt worse than the other. I smiled at him and said, "Yeah, your side hurts worse." Of course I had no clue which doctor had which side.

I told him that my right side was a little worse. Eric paused for a moment, orienting my body in his mind and said "Damn, that was my side...” I'm sure I was smiling back at his somewhat sheepish grin.

He gave us instructions, told me what to expect in the coming days and answered any questions I had left. I asked him about the small pieces of bone that broke off the hip bone during the harvest and I asked if they were simply going to be reabsorbed by my body and he said yes. I think he was partially surprised by my correct assumption.

He said that I was going to be quite sore and stiff and told me not to go running any marathons. He said that I should not return to work for lifting and bending for at least four or five days. I told him that I have a Tuesday to Wednesday vacation and that I had six days before I would go back to work.

He asked Kelly if she had gotten the pain medication yet and she said yes. He said that I would probably need some pills in the next few days, but that beyond that, there wouldn't be much need for them. That's why there are only twenty tablets. The other reason is that Oxycodone can be habit forming.

He said that the procedure went very well. When they have to take out a quart of marrow, they expect the procedure to take about an hour and a half. He said that Dr. Lee and he had removed a quart of marrow and quite a bit of blood in about forty minutes. That was much quicker than either of them had expected.

I lifted the head of my bed with the bed controls on my right, so I could see Dr. Jacobsen a little better and I thought it might make me more comfortable. However, it was putting a lot more weight on my lower back and the harvest sites. Within a minute, of having the bed raised, I had began to get light headed and nauseous and thought that I would be vomiting in the next few minutes if I didn't do something quick. I let my bed down, even further than it was before and the nausea and extra pain went away pretty quickly.

He told me that I had a pressure bandage that went all the way across my lower back. He said that tomorrow morning in the shower, to let the warm water run on the bandage and that it would loosen the adhesive. He said then just go ahead and take it off and then put on the bandages that we'll send you home with.

Before he left, Dr. Jacobsen asked me if I felt comfortable leaving the hospital sometime in the next few hours, or if I wanted to stay overnight. He said that either way is acceptable. You could be released this evening as long as you're able to get up and walk around and go to the bathroom soon.

I told him that from the beginning, I wanted to try to be released in the evening if it was possible. There was no room for Kelly to sleep in the room and she would have to walk back to the hotel and come back in the morning. I didn't want to leave for only that reason either. The guy in the next bed couldn't speak English and he was getting phone calls every ten minutes. I wanted out before supper time.

After Eric left, my nurse told me what I would have to accomplish before I was able to leave. She said I had to get up, walk around and be able to void my bladder in the bathroom, rather than using the portable urinal I had been using. I would also have to eat and keep down solid food. I agreed and said that I would do my best.

She asked me if I wanted to order some food and I of course said yes. She came over with one of those oversized Popsicle sticks and told me that she would have to check my gag reflex before she would order any food for me. I hate having that plank of wood shoved down my throat, but I passed the test. My resulting gag was just what she was looking for.

Soon after, I got a turkey sandwich, melon wedges, imitation apple juice and a couple of other things, almost all of which I ate right up. About the only thing I didn't finish was the chicken noodle soup, because it was terrible.

Soon after eating, I had to pee again. This time, I thought to myself, I'm getting up and going in the bathroom. It's amazing how far away ten feet can be, once you've had surgery and you've been in a bed for about eleven hours. I accomplished the feat, which wasn't as easy to do as it might sound.

I was Okayed by Dr. Jacobsen to leave and I was discharged by 6:30PM. My nurse gave me the option of a wheel chair to the door of the hospital, but I

refused, explaining to her that I should probably just go ahead and walk out under my own power.

She removed my I.V. line and disconnected me from the wall and soon I was to be free again. Getting dressed again was very interesting. Of course I could not bend over at all, so Kelly had to put on my socks and tie my sneakers.

Walking out of the room, taking the elevator down and making my way to the Brigham and Women's Lobby, was a lot more work and took a lot longer than I had anticipated. I really should have taken the wheelchair ride.

Once I got into the lobby and looked at the exit. I stopped in my tracks. It was an automatic revolving door. It was turning at a constant speed that would have been fine yesterday, but now, there was no way in heck I was going to be able to keep up with the seemingly blazing speed of that revolving door. Of course I knew that the door wasn't really going that fast, but I also knew that the door would hit my behind before I could get through the interior space between the panels.

Then my wife and I both saw a side door, with a push bar and I knew that was my answer. For a brief moment, I thought I was trapped and that I *really* should have accepted that wheelchair ride.

Once outside, I tried to carefully navigate my way over to the hotel entrance. My goal here was to stay on level pavement the whole way. Stepping off a curb was a challenge that I didn't want to take on at that point.

I felt as if a horse had reared back and kicked me on butt and then a little league baseball team ran over me as well.

After about the longest three hundred yard walk of my life, we had finally made it to our hotel room. The only thing I could do was lie on my side or on my belly and watch television.

Kelly was getting hungry and she asked me if I wanted to order room service. Room service was going to be fully paid for by Dana-Farber and the National Marrow Donor Program anyway, like every other expense we incurred, so I was all for it. I like spending somebody else’s money, it was fun.

We had room service and I ordered a pepperoni and sausage combination pizza, which was actually very good. I am very particular about my pizza and I was impressed. Kelly had fish and chips. We spent the evening watching whatever was on television, which wasn't much.

Over the next few hours, I tried desperately to find a position where I really felt comfortable, but no position was perfect. Lying on my side was the least difficult, so that's what I focused on.

Sleep was fitful and intermittent. I woke up about every two hours with intense thirst and an equally intense need to urinate. This would happen for the next few days. Intense thirst and urinating at least twelve times a day lasted at least seventy two hours. I imagine that this had something to do with my body scrambling to make more blood, marrow and stem cells to replace what I had just given away.

Upon waking, I finished the last three slices of pizza that I couldn't finish from the evening before. After watching a little morning news on the television, it was time to get into the shower and get ready to check out. I really just wanted to get back home and begin my recovery and continue my vacation.

I recalled and restated to my wife, the orders Dr. Jacobsen had given us yesterday. Which was to let some of the warm water from the shower go onto the pressure bandage, let it loosen the adhesive and take it off.

My wife helped me get into the shower. Within a couple of minutes, I had mustered the courage to let the water get onto and into the pressure bandage. She noticed it first. It seemed as if the whole bottom of the tub was filling up with blood.

The punctured harvest sites on my lower back had begun to sting and ache quite a bit with the warm water running over them and it seemed as if the wounds were bleeding quite profusely. The first thing I thought of was Alfred Hitchcock's movie *Psycho* and the shower scene, with all the blood in the tub. The only difference was that my tub had quite a bit more blood in it than Janet Leigh's tub did. The scene was like the shower scene in *Psycho* times ten. It looked like the tub was full of blood almost up to my ankles.

With the pain and all the blood, I began to get lightheaded and nauseous. The tub began to spin on me and I tried to get out, as I moaned to my wife that I was getting lightheaded and I was about to fall over. She said that she was going to try to get me to the bed and that she didn't want me to fall in the tub.

I slowly pried the pressure bandage off and I clumsily dropped it into the small bathroom rubbish barrel, almost missing it, blood spattering on both the floor and the walls.

She got a towel around me and got me to the bed and told me to breathe properly to avoid passing into unconsciousness. She has a lot of experience with passing out, as does a few members of her family, so I obediently breathed as she instructed me to.

The nausea went away and we both realized that I really wasn't bleeding anymore. All the blood came from the eight to ten ounces of blood that was trapped in the bandage from the long day before. The bathroom however wasn't looking as well. There was blood all over the tub, floors and even some on the walls. It looked like a grizzly murder scene in there like you'd see in some 'R' rated movies.

She took out the bag full of bandages of various sizes and chose sponge gauze to tape over the harvest sites. After that fiasco and clean-up, we got dressed and headed downstairs for breakfast at the Longwood Grille. It was part of the lobby floor of the Best Western at Longwood Medical Center.

I wasn't terribly hungry, because I had just finished up the pizza from the night before. So I elected to get just a bagel and cream cheese and a cup of coffee. Kelly got eggs and home fries, which were surprisingly good. After breakfast, we went back to the room for a bit more rest before the three hour trip home, back to the foothills of the White Mountains in southwestern Maine.

By the time we got back into Maine, it was getting towards lunchtime. We did some shopping at Kohl's, where I pretty much just made it to the dressing room area and took a seat. We then went back to Applebee's for lunch, just like we did on the day before the marrow harvest.

We made our way back home and I really couldn't sit that long in my computer chair. Having an online business at www.SaveTheGuns.com and being away for a few days, I just wanted to get back to work, but sitting there too long just wasn't possible yet.

As I mentioned before, I had to sleep on my side and I kept waking up every few hours for a big glass of water and a trip to the bathroom. By Friday, there was still some oozing and pink spotting from the harvest sites and Kelly changed the band-aids every day. By the weekend, the spotting was turning yellow and by the time the weekend was over, I wasn't wearing the bandages anymore.

By Monday, I felt as if I was finally walking normally again and by the time ten days had passed, there were no more twinges of pain. But what I still felt was strange. It was difficult to put words to the feeling. It felt for the next few

weeks as if I was still missing something, I mean like I was still down a quart, so to speak. I tired easily and had to sit down often. Then after about three weeks or so, I was back to normal and good as new.

Within a month or so after the harvest, Kristie called to see how I was doing. She said that the recipient had mailed a card to me through the donor center. It was a thank you card. You know the kind of thank you card that one would send to a good friend. On the outside of the card were blue butterflies and a printed message that said, "There are special moments when one person reaches out to another and makes a difference that no one else can make." On the inside, in neat penmanship, she wrote "Thank you for being there for me, when I needed you most."

It's unfortunate that she signed her name. I think that some of her children and other relatives also signed their names too. Because of the rules set forth by the National Marrow Donor Center, there can be no exchanging of names, addresses, phone numbers or even areas of the country that you live in. Kristie explained in a post-it note that she had to cut the card where they had signed their names.

In the following week, I sent a letter back to the recipient. All communication between us must first go through the National Marrow Donor Program and the local Marrow Donor Center, which for me was Dana-Farber Cancer Institute as I mentioned before.

My letter was relatively short, just saying thank you for the card and explaining that the harvest went very well. I said that my wife and I were fully informed and that nothing came as a surprise. I also said that I had never had any kind of surgery before and that I was a bit nervous.

I told her that I hope she continues to improve. I also told her how I got into the National Marrow Donor Program, back in 1991, with a photo of a young blond boy.

In August of 2005, I received an update from Dana-Farber on the patient’s progress. Everything is going “very well”. She has 100% donor cells according to Kristie. Also according to her, the entire bone marrow donation and graft process had gone “textbook perfect”.

I really don’t want the patient and the patient’s family to treat me like a hero of some sort. I feel that all I’ve really done was to give the hero of the day the sword and shield they needed to defeat the dragon. I merely supplied her with the weapons she needed to fight her battle.

I know that to some readers, that might seem a bit corny, but I don't feel as if I saved her life at all. I feel as if I've properly equipped her to fight the fight of her life. I've volunteered to give her the weapon she needed to win and that's where my participation ends. The rest is up to her and her family.

I don't know if I'll actually ever get to meet this person face to face. However, I look forward to the point where we might be able to talk with each other on the phone. Who knows, she might even have access to e-mail and everyone knows how much I like to e-mail.

As the months went by, I looked forward to April of 2006, when the one year waiting period would lapse and I could communicate freely with the now completely healed recipient of my bone marrow.

April 6, 2006 came and went without a call or a letter. About a week after that, Kristie called asking whether or not I was interested in exchanging contact information with the recipient and her family.

I said that I would be happy to and that I was looking forward to it. She mailed me some paperwork that authorized the release of the information to the patient.

About three weeks later I got my last call from Kristie as of this writing. She told me that unfortunately the recipient of my bone marrow, who was now completely healed could not bring herself to contact me and that our contact information would *not* be exchanged.

Kristie explained carefully that the patient is "*extremely shy*" and lives a very simple life and she's seriously introverted. She cannot muster up the courage to even speak with me at this time. She was encouraged by her doctors and her marrow donor center to no avail. She's simply too timid and skittish to contact me and she prefers not to have any communication with me at all.

Kristie explained that the recipient and her family are extremely grateful for what I did. They can't understand why someone would voluntarily go through a bone marrow harvest for someone they didn't know and may never even meet.

I hope that one day; she'll muster up the courage and try to contact me through the National Marrow Donor Program again.

If you want to know if I'd do it again, I'd say yes I would. If you had asked me during the first two days after the harvest, my answer would have been different.

That's my play by play and my detailed blow by blow narration of my bone marrow donation. I hope you enjoyed reading it. If you want to learn more about the program, you can visit the National Marrow Donor Program on the Web at www.marrow.org.

I'm glad I had the opportunity to do this for someone. I'm glad you took the time to read it as well. Please feel free to pass this story onto others. I'm happy to be able to tell you about my experiences in the National Marrow Donor Program and how I got started on this adventure with a photo of a young blond boy on a rainy and chilly Saturday morning.

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