

PETOSKEY News-Review

Local man would 'absolutely' donate stem cells again

By Marci Singer, Staff Writer

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When David Marvin, general manager of the Perry Hotel in Petoskey, joined the National Marrow Donor Registry in college, he never realized he might be able to give someone a gift that no one else could.

For Marvin, who still passes out at the sight of blood and needles, the idea of giving blood was a joke — that is until a girl came into the picture.

“I had a crush on a girl in college and when I asked her out, she told me to come and give blood at a blood drive where she was volunteering and we’d talk about it,” Marvin said. “It was a big step for me.”

The volunteers at the blood drive told Marvin that he was not a good candidate to give blood because he was so nervous and told him not to come back. But because he was already there, he was asked to submit a sample to the National Marrow Donor Registry before he left. At the time it was free to join so he thought it was no big deal.

“I thought that someday someone might need my bone marrow and that I could be the one (to save them). And with the registry, you always have a choice whether or not to make a donation,” Marvin said.

Marvin was contacted once in 1998 but nothing became of it. In January of 2006 he got another call from the registry indicating that he might be a match for another cancer patient.

“They said that a cancer patient needed a donation and asked if I would be willing,” Marvin said.

When he agreed, the process began quickly, first with a sample of blood and then with several blood draws, most of which were done at The Perry Hotel. In addition to blood draws, Marvin had to have a full physical and a psychological evaluation to make sure he was stable enough to be a donor. Everything was done in Petoskey before he made the actual donation in Ann Arbor that summer.

“There’s one question from the evaluation that I will never forget. The evaluator asked me what I would do if I donated and the person didn’t survive,” he said. “I answered that question with a question, ‘What happens if he doesn’t get a transplant?’ She said he would die.”

Marvin said for him it was a no-brainer.

“I thought I’ve got to do this. If I don’t do it he dies and if I do, he has a chance to survive and to resume a normal life,” he said. “I had to try. If I were in his position, I would hope and pray that someone would do this for me.”

Marvin said that although initially he was scared, the process of donating his stem cells was not that painful. For him, the most painful part was leading up to the actual donation where he had to have injections to release his stem cells into his blood.

“My blood was thicker than sludge,” Marvin said. “I had flu-like symptoms and my body and bones ached. Right before they harvested my stem cells, I felt like I had the full-on flu, but the second they started taking my blood, I started to feel better.”

The process was outpatient and two days later, he was back at work. One month later he was fully recovered, although he said he was basically fully recovered within a week. He had a physical exam one month after his donation, another six months later and now has a yearly physical because the injections he took were experimental.

Unfortunately, his stem cell recipient wasn't so lucky. Marvin found out while initially his stem cells worked, the patient took a turn for the worse and ultimately passed away.

“I donated my stem cells when I was 30 and at that time, I thought I was invincible. This was a reality check, because the person I donated to was the same age as I was,” Marvin said.

Marvin said that his donation was not that much more difficult than giving blood and that he would absolutely donate again.

“I would absolutely do it again,” he said. “A week of inconvenience in my life to give someone a shot at a new life — there's no doubt about it.”