

## The ultimate Christmas gift

By [Marsha King](#) Seattle Times staff reporter Wednesday, December 19, 2007

Brooke Lundquist always knew the call could come at any time to be a donor for a bone-marrow transplant.

But when the 26-year-old Snohomish County resident was suddenly handed the opportunity to save a life this Christmas season, it seemed like more than chance.

It felt like coming full circle.

"I just believed this was happening for a reason," said Lundquist, who works at Northwest University in Kirkland.



Brooke Lundquist, left, helped raise money to pay for Lexi Frost's bone-marrow transplant in 1999.

Thursday morning, at the University of Washington Medical Center, Lundquist's marrow will be aspirated through a long needle thrust into each hip. Then it will be flown to a hospital, likely somewhere in the United States, for a 60-year-old woman with acute myelogenous leukemia.

Lundquist was identified as the best match out of 7 million people listed on the National Marrow Donor Program.

Every day, more than 6,000 men, women and children search that program for a matching donor. They have diseases — like leukemia or lymphoma — that can be treated by a bone marrow or stem-cell transplant.

"It really is a Christmas gift to me, as well as, hopefully, to this woman," said Lundquist, who has been scurrying to get all her last-minute holiday shopping finished in anticipation of feeling mighty sore for a few weeks.

This is the second time Lundquist's life has been changed by someone with leukemia.

Nearly a dozen years ago, a new family named Frost moved next door to her family's house in Lake Stevens. They had a healthy 4-year-old son, Brennan, and a 3-year-old daughter, Lexi, who was in remission from leukemia after a long regimen of chemotherapy.

Six months after the move, Lexi relapsed. Doctors said her only hope was a bone-marrow transplant. But first she'd have to endure 18 more months of aggressive chemotherapy while she fought a rare fungus in her lungs, then a final week of chemotherapy and radiation to prepare for the transplant.

As the treatment wore on, the next-door neighbors grew to be like sisters. The big one cheered on the little one, who showed the big one how to tough out hard times.

When Lundquist got dressed up to go to a school dance, she invited Lexi over to see her date in a tux. Lexi arrived all fancied up herself and horned her way into the photos.

Lundquist also joined a community campaign called "Team Lexi" to persuade people to sign up for the National Bone Marrow Donor Program, in hopes of turning up a match. The campaign also raised about \$160,000 to help pay medical bills that weren't covered by insurance.

With a 50 percent chance for survival, Lexi received a transplant in 1999 at the Fred Hutchinson Cancer Research Center in Seattle from her then-7-year-old brother Brennan.

During the procedure, Lundquist kept Lexi company playing with Barbie dolls. A few months later, on her way to the senior prom, Lundquist visited Lexi, who was still recovering in the hospital.



Brooke Lundquist, left, and Lexi Frost, 14, with Lexi's brother Brennan, 16. Brooke Lundquist helped raise money to pay for Lexi's bone-marrow transplant from her brother.

Today, Lexi is a healthy 14-year-old who hardly remembers what happened — except that "I proved to myself that I can get through anything." And she can still see Lundquist standing at her hospital bed in a prom dress.

"This is how Brooke is," said Lexi's mom, Michelle Frost, a nurse who works in palliative care at Children's Hospital & Regional Medical Center. "She's one of those people who comes easily out of herself. She never forgot about Lexi."

Inspired by her young friend's courage in the face of so much pain, Lundquist submitted her own name for consideration on the bone-marrow-donor registry. Then, while she was in college, Lundquist ran a marathon in Hawaii raising \$10,000 for leukemia research. Lexi and her family flew over to watch and met her at the finish line.

Lundquist went on to earn a graduate degree, marry and, just recently, start a career.

Then out of the blue a few months ago, Lundquist got a call at work from the Puget Sound Blood Center in Seattle.

From the blood sample she submitted, it looked like she might be a match for a woman with acute leukemia. Would she be willing to come in for further confirmatory testing?

A perfect match is not easy to find, but Lundquist's marrow met six out of six antigens — which are white-cell markers — the most crucial requirement needed for a successful transplant.

"The transplanted marrow will know where to set up shop in the other woman's bone," said Ellen Wong, marrow and stem-cell donor coordinator at the Blood Center. "That's the miracle part of it."

Lundquist admits to being nervous, but also deems herself "lucky" to be able to give back to someone when she has been so blessed.

It will take her body two or three weeks to regenerate the lost marrow; until then, she'll likely feel quite tired. At least she won't have to cook the holiday dinner, she quips.

Lexi sees this turn of events as amazing, even miraculous. In essence, her fight with cancer led Lundquist to join the registry, and, "Now, somebody else has a shot at living."

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