

A life-saver from across the country

Maryland student donates his bone marrow to Victorian with deadly cancer

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Buddy Kamin, left, meets his bone-marrow donor, Andrew Friedson, for the first time. Wanting to show his gratitude, Kamin flew Friedson and his family to Texas from Maryland.

A year ago, a Maryland college student saved the life of Victoria's Buddy Kamin without ever visiting Texas.

And this weekend, the two met for the first time to celebrate selflessness and to say thanks.

On Friday evening, local furniture storeowner Buddy Kamin sat on a couch in his home, nervously anticipating the arrival of the total stranger who saved his life. Kamin flew 21-year-old Andrew Friedson, his parents and siblings to Victoria, to thank him for taking part in a procedure that saved the 57-year-old businessman's life.

"It's hard to wrap your hands around it," the college senior said of the life-saving process.

THE DIAGNOSIS

After suffering from swollen lymph nodes in March 2005, Kamin visited his doctor and was soon diagnosed with non-Hodgkin's lymphoma.

"I was absolutely devastated," he said.

Kamin's wife, Gormeen Kamin, explained that after the diagnosis, her husband went through many months of intensive chemotherapy and radiation. Since his treatments were so frequent, the couple temporarily moved into an apartment in Houston near M.D. Anderson, where Kamin was receiving his treatments.

"Sometimes it retards (the cancer), but, after a while, it came back," Mrs. Kamin said.

A different treatment

After over half a year of treatment, Kamin's doctor, Dr. Issa Kahouri, suggested a controversial type of therapy, stem-cell replacement.

In order to receive the treatment, the family would need a donor, someone whose bone marrow matched Kamin's. Each of the Kamin's three sons and Kamin's brother were tested. None of them were a match.

M.D. Anderson searched their databases and came up with a match: a 20-year-old Maryland man.

A year after the donation, when the two were able to learn something about each other, Kamin learned the donor was Andrew Friedson, a student at the University of Maryland who was active in student government and serving as his class president.

Friedson, who is now a senior, signed up to be a bone-marrow donor when he was a college freshman.

On Saturday, at a party thrown by the Kamins, Friedson explained that he had been walking through the student center at his college he saw a former high school classmate who was signing students up to give blood for bone marrow donation.

It wasn't until three years later that he would get a call saying he was a match.

"It meant that I truly just might have a second chance at life," said Kamin in regards to Friedson decision to donate his cells.

Friedson, on the other hand, is very modest about the donation.

"I didn't do so much," he said. "I'm glad that I was able to contribute."

The first stem cell replacement treatment didn't take, Kamin said. So Friedson had to donate again, and the second time the cancer went into remission.

Back in the family room on Friday, Kamin, who has been cancer-free for sixth months, explained how the process of meeting began.

First conversation

On the anniversary of the donation, both men were to be at their respective doctor's office and had to say they wanted to meet each other. Then faxes were sent back and forth with contact information.

"The first phone call took 30 minutes to get through the emotional side of it," Kamin said, preparing himself for another emotional greeting.

The fact that their bone marrow matched wasn't the only interesting part of the new connection, he said. The men share the same Jewish faith; Kamin signs his name "M.C. 'Buddy'" and Friedson's grandfather was another "M.C. 'Buddy';" Friedman turned 21 on Jan. 9, the same day as Kamin's father's birthday; and though Kamin once had blood type 0 positive, now after the transplant Kamin has the same blood type as Andrew, B positive.

"It's kind of ironic that (I have) so many things (in common) with this young man," Kamin said.

Emotional meeting

The conversation is interrupted by a knock at the door. A woman announces to Kamin that the family has arrived.

He asks to be left alone as he meets the man who saved his life. He knows he will be emotional and wants to keep that between the two of them.

Friedson is quickly ushered away from his parents, two older brothers and sister and into the room where Kamin is waiting. The doors are shut and the two remain together for over a half hour.

Giving the two men privacy, the Friedson family and Mrs. Kamin strike up an acquaintanceship.

"I'm extremely proud," said John Friedson of his son Andrew's act of kindness. "I think it's obviously the greatest charitable gift you can ever give. It's the ultimate in altruism and he was really fortunate to find a match."

Life's celebration

Fast-forward to Saturday at the luncheon party thrown to honor Andrew, Kamin had invited family, friends and all his doctors, physicians' assistants, x-ray technicians and anyone who helped in his battle with cancer.

"Gormeen and I cannot thank each and everyone of you no matter what role you played at M.D. Anderson," said Kamin to the crowd of about 40 guests, "because this journey that we are on has been made so much easier because of the compassion that each and every one of you have given to both of us."