

Emotional meeting with life-saving woman

Pickering man meets woman who donated bone marrow

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By Erin Hatfield

DURHAM -- David Rines wasn't sure what he would say when he met the woman who saved his life.

"I'm a little nervous," he said. "What do you say to someone who saved your life out of the goodness of their heart? She didn't even know me."

His mother, Karen Rines-Howchin, rubbed her son's fragile hand and said, "She's part of you now. We will welcome her into our family."

The Pickering family waited with bated breath on July 16 for the arrival of Tammy Kline, the woman who donated the bone marrow that saved 19-year-old Mr. Rines's life.

Mr. Rines was born in Ajax and has lived in Pickering for the past 12 years. In 2003 he was diagnosed with leukemia.

"I fought it for a few years with treatment," he said. "But, in 2005 I had a relapse while I was on treatment so they determined I needed a bone marrow transplant."

Doctors checked all members of his family, but no one was a close enough

match. Mr. Rines said doctors then looked to the Bone Marrow Donors Worldwide registry and just when they were starting to get desperate a match was found.

It turned out that 14 year's prior, Ms. Kline, a frequent blood donor, was asked to have her bone marrow tested. She proved a good candidate, but it wasn't until last December that she was identified as a match for Mr. Rines.



PICKERING- It's an emotional first meeting as David Rines, and his mother, Karen Rines-Howchin, right, meet Tammy Kline who donated her bone marrow in order that David might live. Ms. Kline, a supply technician with the Canadian Armed Forces is a frequent blood donor. Photo by Rob Mitchell

On March 9, 2006, his 18th birthday, Mr. Rines underwent a bone marrow transplant. It seems to have taken pretty well, he said.

"I've got some problems with my mouth and my gut from it. My skin is pretty rough, but at least I am alive," he said.

Following the surgery, Mr. Rines and his donor were allowed to write to each other, but the letters were censored by Canadian Blood Services so as not to reveal either's identity or where they lived. After one year, they were allowed to meet if both agreed.

"We wrote about our families, hobbies and basic interests," Mr. Rines said. "Just like friends talking and I was trying to tell her I was OK."

They wrote back and forth a few times and, from the very first letter, Ms. Kline expressed her desire to meet Mr. Rines when the year was up.

When that day came the pair started talking on the phone and e-mailing. They sent pictures back and forth and started discussing plans to meet.

The meeting day came sooner than expected when Ms. Kline, a supply technician with the Canadian Forces in Greenwood, Nova Scotia, got a flight for her and her daughter on a Hercules military aircraft. She arrived just before 1 p.m. Monday, welcomed by flowers, balloons and one very excited family.

When the car pulled into the driveway and a vivacious Ms. Kline bounded to meet Mr. Rines, all of the trepidation about what to say seemed to slip away, replaced with hugs and tears of joy. In a simple and sincere expression of gratitude, Mr. Rines wrapped his arms around Ms. Kline and said, "Thank you.

"I still haven't come up with the words to properly thank you for what you have done," he said after they retreated inside the house.

"Your thanks is more than enough," Ms. Kline said, holding Mr. Rines's hand. "And if you ever need any more I am on reserve for you."

Ms. Kline explained she went through the same anticipation waiting to meet the young man she saved.

"I was excited and wondering what they would think of me," she said. "I was just thinking about all they have been through. But, most of all I think I was just anxious to find out if (the transplant) worked."

More than anything she wanted to see for herself that the young man, whom she had never met before, but cares about deeply nonetheless, was going to be all right.