

## GIFT OF LIFE

# Marrow donor gets thank you

*By Jan A. Igoe - The Sun News, Wed, Jul. 25, 2007*



Lee "Bo" Thompson of Greenville is consoled by Lynn Rackley, his sister, and Beverly "Chris" Whitworth of Nottinghamshire, England after an emotional thank you to Whitworth for donating her bone marrow to save his life.

Many strangers scarcely acknowledge one another, unless it's to sneer at a driver refusing to yield, but Beverley Whitworth of Nottinghamshire, England, gave life back to Lee "Bo" Thompson of Greenville - a man she'd never met - through a bone marrow donation three years ago. They began corresponding about a year after the transplant.

Whitworth, along with her husband and two sons, spent the week as Thompson's guests in Greenville. When Bo Thompson, 38, asked his

uncle, photographer Jack Thompson, to join them at the beach, Uncle Jack had something more elaborate in mind. Whitworth was honored by local dignitaries and celebrities at the Springmaid Beach Resort and Conference Center on Tuesday for her courage and selfless generosity.

"I was very sick in 2001. It's really upsetting knowing you almost died," said Bo Thompson, who underwent a year of chemotherapy for acute myeloid leukemia, leaving doctors optimistic about his recovery. But a year later, the cancer was back. Without a bone marrow transplant, his chances of survival were slim.

According to the National Marrow Donor Program, which has facilitated 25,000 marrow or blood cell transplants since 1987, only 30 percent of patients find a match within their families. Thompson's three sisters were tested but weren't compatible.

Finding a qualified donor through bone marrow registries could easily take nine months, assuming one could be found. The odds of a match are about 1 in 20,000. The international registries located Whitworth in 2½ weeks.



Beverly "Chris" Whitworth of Nottinghamshire, England receives a key to the North Myrtle Beach from mayor Marilyn Hatley. Whitworth gave her bone marrow to Lee "Bo" Thompson of Greenville and was the honor of a reception at the Springmaid Beach Resort. Whitworth received keys to the cities of North Myrtle Beach, Myrtle Beach and Surfside Beach.

Whitworth, 46, who works in intelligence, joined a bone marrow registry in England 10 years ago when a colleague was diagnosed with leukemia. "If it hadn't been for that test, I wouldn't be on the register. We got as many people as we could," she said. "It's just a simple blood test."

Although the officer died waiting for a match, her data remained on file. Whitworth made several trips to London, about 170 miles from her home, for blood work, a complete physical and the marrow extraction under anaesthesia, that saved Bo Thompson's life.

Jennifer Walters, senior community manager for the American Cancer Society, recalled when bone marrow transplants were just "an off-the-wall idea," but research was funded by the society.

Brookgreen Gardens sales and marketing associate Molly Mercer invited the Whitworths to see Brookgreen. Mercer said she remembered that when she attended high school in Georgetown in the '60s, another student had leukemia.

"She was so sick, she took her doctor as her date to the prom. She died shortly after," Mercer said. "We didn't know anything about leukemia. Everything was so new."

Every year, at least 35,000 people with life-threatening conditions would benefit from a marrow or blood cell transplant, according to National Marrow Donor Program figures. There are 96,949 candidates for organ or tissue transplants, according to the United Network for Organ Sharing, but the majority will never receive them unless the donor supply increases dramatically.

Solo artist Clay Brown and Billy Scott of The Prophets serenaded Whitworth as she swayed appreciatively in her seat. North Myrtle Beach Mayor Marilyn Hatley, Myrtle Beach Mayor John Rhodes and Surfside Beach Mayor Roy Hyman each presented her with a key to the city.



Beverly "Chris" Whitworth of Nottinghamshire, England hugs Myrtle Beach mayor John Rhodes after receiving a key to the city. Whitworth gave her bone marrow to Lee "Bo" Thompson of Greenville and was the honor of a reception at the Springmaid Beach Resort.

"I wish we had some other keys to present you," said Greg Rowles, emcee and featured singer at Alabama Theatre. "A lot of people want to embrace you. You've touched people all around the world."

Whitworth was nervous before the procedure and sore afterwards, but never doubted God, she said.

"Bo's sister told me that while he was having the transfusion, he had such peace, he fell asleep. Doctors and nurses who went into that room said there there was an almighty presence with him that they had never experienced before," she said.

Her son, Scott Whitworth, now 15, was terrified for his mom before the marrow extraction, but won't hesitate to follow in her footsteps.

"You see super-heroes on TV ... she's twice the hero they are," he said. "As soon as I'm 18, I am going to put my name on the register."

In the U.S., about 44,240 new cases of leukemia will be diagnosed this year, both chronic and acute. The disease will afflict 10 times as many adults as children, although leukemia accounts for about a third of all childhood cancers.

"Please join Beverley in doing whatever you can to continue making these miracles happen," Walters said.

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