

Bone marrow donors needed

By [KAYLA BUNGE](#) ([Contact](#)) Sunday, Nov. 18, 2007

SHARON — Eugene Vegter caressed his wife's hand as his eyes welled with tears.

"You're forced to think about things you've never thought about," he said, looking in her direction.

Lisa Vegter was diagnosed with leukemia Aug. 24, 2006.

Through energy-sapping chemotherapy treatments and a rare platelet disorder that complicated blood transfusions, a relapse and a trek to a cancer hospital in Houston, the Vegters—Eugene, 43, and Lisa, 41, and children Liz, 15; Cassie, 14; Kaitlyn, 12; and David, 9—have learned the value of each day they have together.

"It's definitely not been easy," Liz said.

"Sometimes we wanted the world to stop and just get off," Cassie added.

Although she's in remission, Lisa needs a bone marrow transplant. None of her nine siblings are matches. Instead, the stem cells, which in the bone marrow develop into red blood cells, white blood cells and platelets, must come from a donor.

There were several matches for Lisa, but not everyone who needs a bone marrow transplant is as lucky. And to bring awareness to the power individuals have to give someone a fighting chance at life, Eugene is organizing a bone marrow donor drive.

"We have received, received and received from so many," he said. "This is one way we can give back for what God has done for us."

It has been the community's outpouring of love and support—from money to meals to hundreds of thoughtful notes, from taking Lisa to the doctor to taking the kids to school—that has made the rocky journey passable.

"It really lifts your spirits," Lisa said. "You don't feel like you're alone."

The experience has left Eugene feeling helpless.

"I've always been a person who could do or fix everything," he said, "but this one, I can't fix."

The Vegters have relied on the power of prayer to answer their questions and fulfill their needs.

“The power of prayer has never been so evident,” Eugene said. “So many answered prayers.”

Lisa said that has put her at ease, allowing her to concentrate on herself—something she wasn’t used to before leukemia.

“This is a horrible, horrible thing,” she said. “But (God) has blessed me with peace through this.”

Her focus now is building her strength in anticipation of the transplant, tentatively scheduled for Wednesday, Dec. 12. She’ll receive a round of chemotherapy the week prior to ensure her body is clear of diseased bone marrow before receiving healthy stem cells.

The transplant is risky. Complications will send Lisa to the hospital many times. There’s a chance, too, that the donor’s cells will recognize Lisa’s body as foreign and attack it.

But the Vegters are willing to make that leap.

They know next to nothing about Lisa’s donor, except that he or she lives in a foreign country, which makes expressing their gratitude difficult. They are allowed to write a letter to the donor, but for the protection of the donor and the recipient they cannot reveal any indication of who they are. The letter is given to the donor on transplant day.

Eugene said the family plans to write a letter together.

“So they can see the lives they’ve affected,” he said. “It’s not just one, it’s a family of six.”

IF YOU GO

The bone marrow donor drive is from 11 a.m. to 4 p.m. Saturday, Dec. 1, at Delavan-Darien High School.

Anyone age 18 to 60 who meets the health guidelines may become a donor. After filling out a short health questionnaire, a potential donor’s cheek is swabbed; the cells are tested for tissue type, and the information is added to the donor registry.

The cost is \$25, which covers the testing. Money is available through the generosity of several individuals for anyone who cannot pay the fee but still wants to be a donor.

BONE MARROW DONATION

-- Donors are placed on the National Marrow Donation Program Registry. Every day, more than 6,000 people search the registry for a matching donor.

-- If a donor is selected as a suitable match, he or she is asked to donate either bone marrow or blood cells.

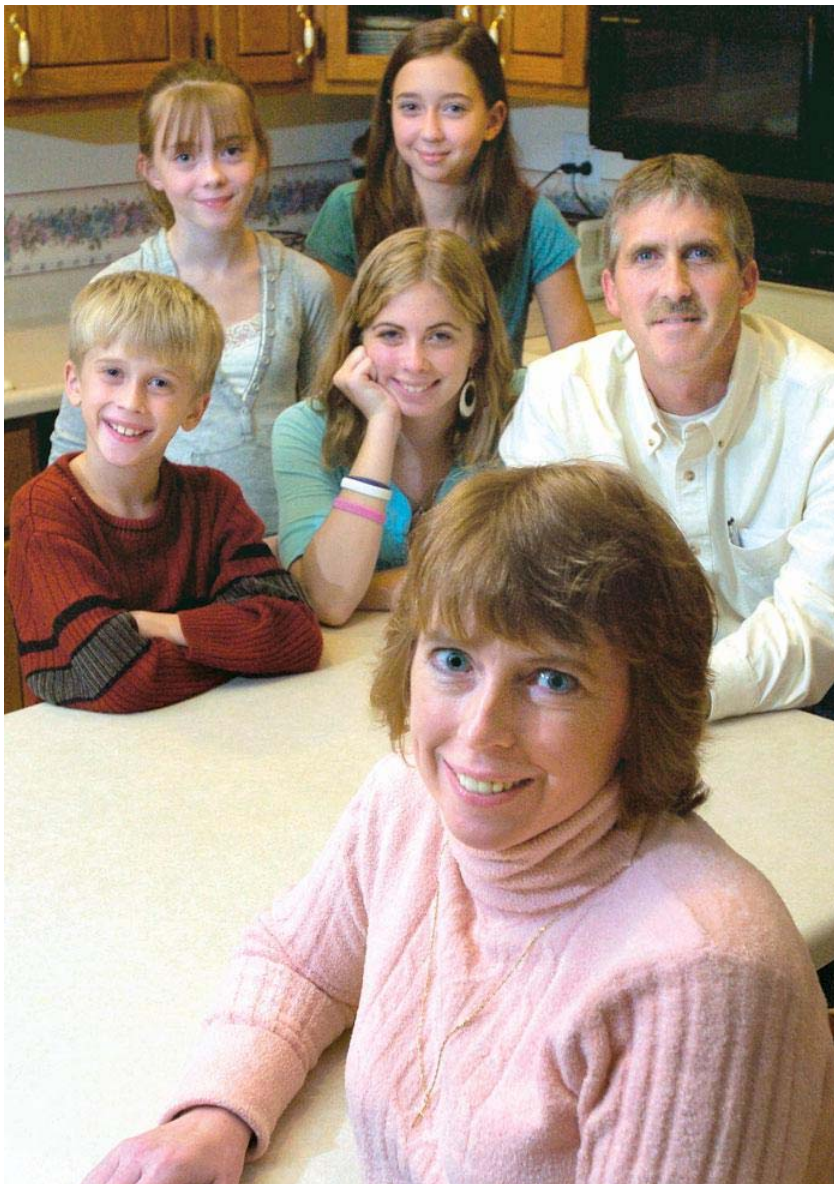
-- A consenting donor has a physical exam to determine if the donation process would pose a risk to his or her health or the recipient’s health.

-- For bone marrow donors, the donation procedure is surgical and conducted under anesthesia. Doctors use special hollow needles to withdraw liquid marrow from the back of the pelvic bone. Many donors receive a transfusion of their own previously donated blood.

-- For blood cell donors, the donation procedure is non-surgical and much like donating plasma. Doctors remove the blood through a needle in one arm. The blood is then passed through a machine that separates out the blood-forming cells, and the remaining blood is returned to the donor.

-- Most donors are back to their normal routine within a few days.

For more information about bone marrow donation, go to the National Marrow Donor Program's Web site, www.marrow.org.



Lisa Vegter (front), who has leukemia, and her family David, Liz, Eugene (sitting), Kaitlyn and Cassie (back)