

## An Angel Among Us

When I was 22 years old, my father was diagnosed with Stage 4, Non-Hodgkin's Lymphoma. He lost his battle and his life just one day after his first chemotherapy treatment at the young age of 45. My life as I knew it was shattered. I never realized how much I would miss his guidance and wisdom as I was venturing into manhood. With a new understanding of how fragile life is, I carried on, moved to Los Angeles where I married my wife Julie, had two amazing children, Jake and Erin, and started a successful real estate business. Life was good!

Fast forward to 2002 – on a cool Sunday morning, I received an unexpected call, and was informed that what I assumed was a slipped disk, was in fact a tumor in my spine, aggressively spreading to my liver and spleen. Like my father, I too was diagnosed with Stage 4, Non-Hodgkin's Lymphoma. Oh My God – I have cancer!! There I was, 41 years old and my greatest fear was now a reality.

How does one react to news like this? Well, I was terrified . . . in a state of shock, so angry that I wanted to rip this cancer out of my body. How could this be? How will I take care of my family? Will I even survive? The level of uncertainty became the only constant. During that frightful Sunday, I felt I was frozen in the longest day of my life.

Where do we go from here? Our first move was to meet with Dr. Barry Rosenbloom, at Tower Hematology Oncology. With incredible compassion and confidence, he guided us through this difficult, and life changing process. After the many tests, scans and biopsies, and anxiously awaiting results, I finally started chemotherapy. With that first treatment behind me, I began to fight back. I only focused on the cure. Be positive and stay strong. That is my motto.

Although I responded well to the six rounds of chemotherapy, it was necessary to attack this disease more aggressively. I needed a stem cell transplant. We were so fortunate to work with Dr. Stephen Forman the leading scientist who “wrote the book” on stem cell transplantation, right here in our community, at the City of Hope. Julie and I have developed a tremendous amount of trust and respect for Dr. Forman and his incredible staff. I am in awe of his knowledge, humanity and dedication. At City of Hope they say, “There is no profit in curing the body, if in the process we destroy the soul.” I'm here to tell you that they actually practice what they preach.

What is a stem cell transplant? Basically, they blasted me with high dose chemotherapy and total body radiation to destroy my immune system, and then brought me back to life by infusing me with new stem cells.

Faced with the enormity of having to go through this treatment, I packed my bags for a six week hospital stay at the City of Hope, instilled with the confidence that this next step would lead to a complete recovery. The next three years brought with it an odyssey of doctor visits and medical procedures.

I am blessed to have a very positive outlook on life, and especially as it relates to my recovery. I went to each and every appointment expecting positive and upbeat news. Instead, the reports were typically neutral at best, and often times negative. I never regained my energy and became dependent on transfusions. After a three year battle, I was forced to come to grips with the fact that the only option for me was a SECOND stem cell transplant.

This time, an unrelated donor would be supplying the cells to sustain my life. Dr. Forman and his colleagues, through the National Marrow Donor Program, were able to find a donor with an exact genetic match to me. Anonymously, a wonderful woman and complete stranger generously gave me and my family the most incredible gift of life – her stem cells. She is my angel. This is a bond for which I will be grateful forever. Everyone can be that angel. It is remarkable that just by sitting in a chair for a few hours we all have the power to save a life and give the most incredible gift of all . . . hope.

There are approximately 7 million people registered on the National Marrow Donor Program. Out of 7 million, there was one genetic match to me. Only 1 out of 7 million people matched me! Incredible odds. . . I am truly the luckiest man in the world.

There are no words to describe how it feels to actually meet your angel. Sandra, born in Panama and living in Alexandria, Virginia, walked off the plane and into our lives. We have waited for this moment for over a year to meet the woman that donated her stem cells to save my life. Walking gingerly toward us was a beautiful Latino woman with an incredible smile. Within a split second, Sandra was wrapped up in our arms with tears glistening across our cheeks. While we were expressing our gratitude between the hugs, Sandra kept thanking us and telling us that this experience was the most incredible thing that has happened in her life. I found it amazing that my angel was thanking me!

My son Jake took it upon myself to help save others and pay it forward. He created a foundation called Be An Angel + Save A Life ([www.beanangelsavealife.org](http://www.beanangelsavealife.org)) to register more people on the National Marrow Donor Program. Each time we add a donor to the registry, there is a potential to save one life, one father or mother, one child, one family, one community. The process to register as a donor is so simple today. Everyone can sign up to be on the donor register with a simple cheek swab. The donation process today is just blood procedure. Just by giving a few hours of time, you can Be An Angel and Save A Life.

There is an overwhelming need for stem cell bone marrow donors to treat blood cancers like Lymphoma and Leukemia. There are people searching today whose lives depend on finding a genetic match. We want to bring hope to patients who have been told there is nothing left for them. We will continue our mission until everyone understands how easy it is to Be An Angel + Save A Life and until there are genetic matches for everyone in need of a stem cell transplant.

My angel not only saved my life but allowed my wife Julie to have a husband and my children, Jake and Erin, to have a father. I am forever blessed to have an angel in my life.

Be positive and stay strong.

Ed Sachse  
Cancer Survivor  
Stem Cell Transplant Recipient