

Polish donor, local recipient of bone marrow transplant to meet next month

Written By CONSTANCE SCRAFIELD

Next month, Temine and Mike Ash of Caledon will finally get to meet Temine's 'genetic twin,' the Polish lady who 27 months ago gave her a life-saving bone marrow transplant.

The Ashs' century home south of Orangeville is cosy with old wood and old-fashioned mouldings, bright, bold wall paper on the kitchen walls; an over all air of contentment, of apple pies and country life. We sat around the kitchen table, while Temine and Mike Ash told us their fearful story, with the joyful twist.

'It came out of nowhere,' Mike began. 'Temine noticed the symptoms in one week. There were bruises on her legs and arms.'

'I had been helping my father move,' Temine began to explain, 'and I thought I had hurt myself but the bruises were all up my legs and, then, on my arms as well.'

'One morning her gums were bleeding ' her mouth was black with blood,' Mike continued to relate, 'She was sent by the doctor to get some blood work done.'

'As soon as it came through, the doctor called and told us to go to Brampton 'emerg' right away,' Temine said. 'We thought it might be a bad case of the flu.'

In Brampton, there were more and other blood tests. Then, a frightening, lights-flashing ambulance trip to Princess Margaret Hospital.

'I asked them why their were using their warning lights,' Temine said, 'and they told me it was Friday rush hour and they were trying to get me there before five o'clock to catch the nurses and the doctors before they went home for the weekend.'

'They were waiting for her when we got there, two doctors, and they had a bed and a room ready for her,' Mike said.

Recalling her fear at the time, Temine added, 'I wondered, Did they think I'm going to die? I had a friend who had this and she died.'

Temine was given stabilizing medication to stop the rampage. They did a bone marrow biopsy, which was extremely painful on that same Friday.

The results came back by the next Wednesday: the diagnosis was advanced and very dangerous leukemia AML (acute myeloid leukemia). Induction chemotherapy was started immediately.

'Every patient is unique,' Mike informed us. 'She had the worst type, the highest risk you can possibly have and it was inevitable she needed a stem cell transplant.'

The search for such is world-wide and the process to volunteer is easy: just a simple swab to register DNA.

'They swab the patient and start searching constantly through the computers everywhere. It took months to find a match. There were 35 million potential donors on a data match,' said Mike, outlining the process.

'The fact that it came from Europe says something,' Temine noted. 'There's not enough education about this for young people. They only want young people. Once you're over 35, they're not interested.'

She told us about her donor, Ewelina: 'Once they found her, they asked her if she would donate her stem cells in Warsaw, where they harvest the cells. She was little anemic, so, there was a delay.'

There was delay on this end, too, because Temine had to go to Cleveland for the transplant, as the facilities here in Ontario were full. (There have been improvements since that time and Princess Margaret and Sunnybrook have both increased their capacities.)

In Cleveland, the delay was due to a Trump convention being held there, during which the hospital was placed on hold for the few days.

Transport of the stem cells was another matter. 'The cells were escorted by one person who picked them up at the hospital in Warsaw, in a special container, and brought them right to the hospital in Cleveland.'

There are marvels about this particular transplant. The donor was a perfect match, 10 out of 10.

'The odds were one in 13,000,' Mike commented.

When they were finally able to connect with the donor, Ewelina said she had been placed in a 'comfy chair and it doesn't hurt a bit.'

In fact, she went bungee jumping the same day and did a run the following day. That story was yet to be shared for some time.

For Mike and Temine it was all far from over, for they had had lives and businesses before this occurred and the consequences of the two months in Princess Margaret and many weeks in Cleveland could have been very hard on their circumstances. However, a strong community was behind them and raised funds to help out.

They have two adult sons, Michael and Jeff, both of whom they say have 'wonderful girl friends.'

Temine was sure, 'I don't think I'd be here without the support we got from so many people.'

One of her cousins set up a go-fund-me page. ?Before I knew the page was up and it we didn't have it, we would really have been in rough shape.?

A friend of Temine took a leave of absence from her work to be with her every day for two months. Other friends rallied to assist in any and every way they could.

For the transplant and hospital time in Cleveland, OHIP

paid the medical side of it and the American Cancer Society, gave Mike free room at its local Hope Lodge.

Despite the help, they were forced to sell Temine's family business.

Mike admitted, ?It was the most humbling experience of my life. I had no idea that the community was beyond anything I would have imagined. There's nothing I wouldn't do for the people that helped us.

?We're so overwhelmed by everybody's help and support ? we wouldn't be here without them.?

They have only praise for the treatment Temine received. ?The care she received in Cleveland on was on the same level as Princess Margaret,? Mike assured us. ?Princess Margaret is doing all the follow-up,? and they mutually agreed that Temine ?will be a guinea pig for the rest of her life. This is so complex.?

Now, at home and doing well, Temine is ?doing the things I love. I'm working in the travel industry with Expedia Cruise Ships. I love to travel. And doing tai chi ? this has really helped. I'm doing it with my dad and I don't want to give it up.

?On airplanes, I wear a mask and use clorox wipes on the seats and everything.?

They had to wait two years before they could have the information of the donor, essentially for the sake of knowing that the recipient, Temine, had survived. At more or less the same day and time as Mike and Temine were looking to contact Ewelina in Poland, she was working on contacting them.

It was as much like a reunion as a first time meeting, for, as Temine remarked, ?She's family. I have her stem cells in me and my blood type has changed to hers.?

Mike made the startling observation, ?Temine and Ewelina are now genetic twins. No two people on earth are more alike than they are.?

Temine expressed their desire, ?We want to spread hope to other leukemia patients out there and to encourage young people to register their DNA on One Match.?

There was a brief and joyous conversation with Ewelina on Face Time. A beautiful young woman, she was ready to chat even though it was 11:30 p.m. there. Full of smile and happiness to be speaking to her new Canadian family, she is looking forward to coming to Canada later in December.

We had the chance to ask why she volunteered to donate her stem cells.

?I don't know,? she replied. ?I just like to help people. It doesn't matter whether it's in Poland or somewhere else ? if it's another world.?

She added, ?It's normal.?