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## Katherine's Diary

THE reception class teacher from Burton, describes in her own words what daily life is like living with Chronic Myeloid Leukaemia (CML). Earlier this year, the 33-year-old from Balfour Street spent nearly eight weeks at the Queen Elizabeth Hospital in Birmingham undergoing intensive chemotherapy. Meanwhile, the Burton Mail launched its Take Five Minutes campaign in a bid to locate a suitable bone marrow donor, not just for Katherine, but for anyone who is in her position, while raising greater awareness of the condition. Thankfully, in September, Katherine was able to announce that a suitable donor had been found in Europe and a transplant was planned for late October. While undergoing gruelling treatment herself, Katherine wants to help others in a similar position and has taken to raising awareness of the condition and generating support for the charities. For more information on how to become a bone marrow donor, call the National Blood Service Donor helpline on 0300 123 2323.

“My German donor can go home proud in the knowledge that he or she has helped a complete stranger in a different country who speaks a different language

**Monday, October 28:**  
Today I was able to imagine that this time tomorrow, I should hopefully have had my donor cells. My German donor can go home proud in the knowledge that he or she has helped a complete stranger in a different country who speaks a different language. Did you go home today with that sense of achievement? If not, sign up today and help someone like me.

**Tuesday, October 29:**  
The day has come – the day when I am going to receive my stem cell transplant. It's funny in life how certain dates attract a lot of activity, and October 29 is one of those dates for us. Not only is October 29 the day I am due to receive my cells, it would also be my late mother's birthday, my late brother-in-law's birthday, and was also the day when one of my aunts died. And so we waited, and waited . . . and waited for the cells to arrive. My visitors arrived at the hospital before 11am so that they didn't miss the magic bag of cells. Unfortunately, storm St Jude had made its way over to Germany and was playing havoc with the flights. My cells did arrive in the ward on October 29 – at around 11pm – but it was just after midnight when they were finally up on the drip stand. I'm still always going to class October 29 as the day when I had my transplant, as this was the day when I first caught a glimpse of the cells in a giant red cool box.



# DAY ZERO: and, after allowing for St Jude's worst, my lifesaving stem cells arrive. Now the hard work starts...

by Rob Smyth  
rob.smyth@burtonmail.co.uk

**IN exactly two hours, 11 minutes and 47 seconds, Burton teacher Katherine Sinfield received the donated stem cells she desperately needed to clear her of leukaemia.**

The transplant happened as planned on Tuesday, but was later than expected because storm St Jude, which left southern Britain battered on Monday, had made its way across to Germany – the source of Katherine's new life.

Katherine, 33, of Balfour Street, said: “I had been expecting the cells all day, and my visitors arrived early so that they didn't miss this once-in-a-lifetime opportunity.

However, the minutes turned into hours and it was gone 11pm when the cells finally made it on to the ward.

“I was really eager to receive the cells on Tuesday, as October 29 is my late mother's birth date, and I wanted to be able to share a birth date with her.

“It was just after midnight by the time my Hickman line had been prepared and the paperwork sorted, but October 29 will always be my official 'day zero', as that's the day the cells were signed into the ward and prepared.”

Katherine, who has been the face of the Burton Mail's 'Take Five Minutes' campaign, said: “The bag containing the stem cells was much bigger than I anticipated – 495.6ml to be precise, and resembled a bag of blood. However, as the cells made their way through the drip system, the actual colour of the liquid was closer to pink grapefruit.

“We sat into the early hours of Wednesday morning watching this lifesaving drip slowly empty, thinking all the time of this very special person – who we now know to be a woman from Germany – who has volunteered to take time off from work and undergo various fitness and medical tests to donate their cells, just for me.”

Katherine's husband and Mail journalist Stephen said: “I'll admit that when I returned to an empty house at 2.20am on a cold Wednesday morning, I cried. The relief was immense, as you cannot describe the tension which builds up over weeks as you wait for the date to arrive.

“We will never be able to thank the German lady who donated the cells, or the charity Anthony Nolan, enough for what they have done.

“We're acutely aware that the hard work starts now, as transplants bring with them many long and short-term side-effects, but we will deal with these as and when they arrive.

“The key thing is clearing Katherine of leukaemia and, hopefully, this is what



**HERE WE FLOW . . . Katherine Sinfield watches as the donated stem cells start to make their way through the drip system.**

these cells will achieve. “Having witnessed such a special event, we really can't emphasise enough how important it is for people to sign up to the bone marrow register. To put it bluntly, we were lucky – we found a donor. Others aren't so lucky and will die of waiting.”

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