



-FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE-

Media contact: Edwige Buteau
Phone: (917) 655-3843; Email: Edwige.Buteau@outlook.com

LEUKEMIA SURVIVOR MEETS FLORIDA NURSE WHO DONATED BLOOD STEM CELLS TO SAVE HER LIFE

Heartwarming Reunion Took Place at Recruitment Drive Hosted by Gift of Life Marrow Registry and Miami Beach Police Department to Increase Donor Diversity

BOCA RATON, August 23, 2023 – In a heartwarming and long-awaited moment, a cancer survivor, an African American mom from Powder Springs, Ga., had the chance to meet the nurse whose selfless act of donating blood stem cells saved her life. The reunion took place on August 22, 2023, at a special donor recruitment drive hosted by [Gift of Life Marrow Registry](#), a Boca Raton-based blood stem cell and bone marrow registry, and the Miami Beach Police Department.

Theresa Miller, a 68-year-old retiree, learned she had Acute Myeloid Leukemia in 2021 after experiencing severe weight loss. A visit to her primary care physician, followed by lab work, resulted in the grim diagnosis.

“I was in disbelief,” said Miller. “I felt like this could not be happening to me, especially since I rarely ever got sick. I had an active lifestyle where I worked out several days each week and ate a healthy diet regularly, so I was in total shock about the news that had been shared with me. I’m aware now that cancer clearly doesn’t care about your age, race, gender, etc.

While her doctor said it was possible that an unrelated donor could help her when no one in her family proved to be match, she thought the chances were slim. Miller was aware that many ethnic groups are underrepresented in the global registry, making it difficult to find matches for many patients. For example, while 79% of the white population has the capacity to find a matching donor, only 29% of Black Americans; 48% Hispanic and Latino Americans, and 47% and Asian Americans can find a match.

The factors used to match donors with patients are inherited, much like how hair and eye color are inherited from our parents and ancestors. This means the best chance of finding a match is between two people who share ethnicity or genetic heritage. This made it especially crucial that Paul, a 29-year-old nurse and new mom from Auburndale, Fla., also African American, had joined Gift of Life's registry while attending University of Florida in 2013. She was glad to step up when she received the call that she was a match for Miller.

"I think it is difficult to put your life in the hands of a total stranger," said Paul. "I think it is nerve-wracking to think this person holds your life in their hands. I think she prayed that everything would go well for her and I."

Due to U.S. medical privacy laws, donors and recipients must wait at least one year before learning the identity of their matches.

The pair was introduced by Newly Appointed Miami Beach Police Chief Wayne Jones and had an emotional hug as the event's attendees—the local police officers, firefighters, and community leaders who came to join the registry and support the effort—looked on.

"Thank you for giving me a second chance on life," said Miller. "There are no words for the type of person that you are and for your caring and loving concern for people. And so, I just thank God for having you here for me."

"We are on a mission to cure blood cancer and ensure that every person can find their perfect donor when one is needed," said Gift of Life Marrow Registry Founder and CEO Jay Feinberg. "We are grateful to the City of Miami and Miami Beach Police for their support and tremendous partnership in saving lives."^[GA1]

"Witnessing the emotional connection between a recipient and donor who are meeting for the first time is truly extraordinary," said Chief Jones. "It highlights the profound impact a simple cheek swab can have. Thank you to Gift of Life for making this incredible experience a reality and for the ongoing partnership to help those who live in our great city and beyond."

About Gift of Life Marrow Registry

Gift of Life Marrow Registry is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization headquartered in Boca Raton, Fla. The organization, established in 1991, is dedicated to saving lives by facilitating blood stem cell and bone marrow transplants for patients with leukemia, lymphoma, and other blood-related diseases. The registry houses its own state-of-the-art stem cell collection center, biobank, and laboratory. To learn more about Gift of Life Marrow Registry, visit www.giftoflife.org

###