
Ankica Begić
INDIJANAC KOMANČ
MOJ BRAT PO KRVI
Ispovijed iz sterilne jedinice, dnevnik liječenja matičnim stanicama
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PROFIL
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Preface - prof. dr. Mirando Mrsić

It is a challenge to write the foreword for this book, but also, at the same time, an honor, because throught it the reader is introduced into a world in which no one would like to be. A world full of anxiety and fear, but also a world filled with boundless hope. Those of us who are healthy think that that world consists only of sorrow and suffering, but, dear reader, at the end of this book you will see that that world is also filled with laughter and joy and, above all, hope. Ankica, the author of this book is not only a writer but also a person full of humor, hope and faith in a better tomorrow and that is what helps her to go through life. This same optimism and hope were a characteristic of Ana Rukavina, who appears throughout the text asan invisible ray of light. But the book, or rather to say, the diary of a person filled with hope, is not just a literary piece of work, but is also a kind of educational text for all those who find themselves in the same or a similar situation.

Not a single person is quite ready for such a situation, and many questions that we would ask ourselves, when and if we find ourselves in such situation will be answered in this book. The course of treatment told form the perspective of a patient, but still deeply connected with doctors, medical nurses and all others involved in the treatment gives us aan insight into the other dimension of life. As one Croatian proverb says: *"A healthy man has many wishes, and an ill man only one - to be healthy"*. This proverb portrays the entire essence of this book.

This book is the symbol of hope in recovery, but also hope that can not be found in medicine, a scalpel, radiation, such kind of hope and healing can be only brought to us by an unknown Man. Without this Man would be no healing and that is a clear confirmation that all of us carry the medicine in ourselves.

Our stem cells are a cure and that is the second value of this book. The human dimension of giving has been clearly demonstrated through this book. How can a person interpret getting the news that, evethough no one in your family is suitable to be a stem cells donor, you find out that someone far away is your perfect match and that person is your hope of recovery? Pages of this book give us days filled with anticipation and joy because such a person who can save her life exists. The writer enabled us to witness her desire to get to know this person, to say her thanks, because all the wonderful people, women and men who are a part of a huge family of voluntary stem cells donors, and who are rewarded for their selfless actions only through one thing, a gift of new life.

For that reason we want to say thank you a million times.

And as sometimes, or even as a rule, life events do not follow one after the other, but often run parallel, in this book we are witnesses of the writers search for her own biological family. I recall a similar event from our practice, when we treated a young patient suffering from a severe damage to her bone marrow. We folloewd all routine procedured and found out that the patient did not share her mother, father and brother's DNA. That obviously came as a surprise to us, and later after talking to the family, we found out that the patient was adopted as a baby and that in fact she had biological parents and siblings but that it was kept secret from her. As that was the only possibility of curing the patient, we contacted her biological parents and siblings and found that one of them was a match and can donate stem cells to her. The transplantation was successful and the patient was cured. If there had not done the transplantation, the family would have probably never be reunited.

In this book, the transplantation reunited a family as well.

Ankica Begić is a person who has never said I can't or I manage to do something. Consequently, in this book, we are wintesses of a search for an anonymus donor, and despite all obstacles, etical and administrative ones, her success in contacting the donor. Knowing Ankica, I am sure she will meet her donor.

And at the end of this preface, dear readers, allow me to give my account of this book in which I was also, to one extent, a part of our writer's life. But before doing so I would like to correct one small detail in the book and say to Ankica that MD Mrsić is not an atheist and that believing in good always results with good and also that the other Ana will always watch over the Fundation. There are not many people who are so optimistic and full of joy even in the times of hardship, so because of all said the thought of the treatment will not be successfull does not even come to your mind.

And that is the main thought of this book and the thought I want to share with you, readers of this book. Beleving in good and in a happy ending is already half the success in treatment.

Introduction

Dear Readers!

I'm not a writer, not a poet, so please forgive me for my writing style. As Ana Rukavina said, life just happened and you can learn from it too.

When I was reading Anna's letter, "I want life", published in Gloria in 2006, I did not even imagine I would be needing a bone marrow transplant, that Anna would die and that her mom would establish a foundation that would enter the World Register and that I would find a matching donor in the Register. I was reading the letter and crying, believing that Ana would get better and not knowing that the same was instored for me.

When I found out I was going to get a transplant, an idea came to my mind that I could keep a diary and write down everything that was happening to me. I thought it would be good to find a publisher so people would be able to read my diary and realize that in the times of hardship, when you have reached the end of the tunnel, all we are left with is faith. Faith, hope and a ray of light which sheds light on the path you have to cross.

In my life, faith and hope are constantly present. Love and support from your dearest is very important. Love gives you the strength to keep going forward. Eventhough a friendly hospital staff is important, support and love of your family and firends is imperative, so that you are aware that you are not alone and that you have something to hope and fight for.

I had support from my husband, children, friends, hospital staff, the crew of "Mission Together", my father's relatives and people from the Foundation, and especially Marija Rukavina. Surrounded by so much care and love, I fought, forthe sake of myself and for them.

This is my life experience, in which two stories that run parallel interweave. One story is about the transplant, and the other about the search for my biological family.

I dedicate this book to Ana Rukavina and her mom Marija Rukavina, to whom all of us who have received a transplant from the registry owe our life. For us she was a living Mother Teresa.

For all those who stood next me and who will read this I want to say a big THANK YOU!

DOCTOR:

> *Essential thrombocythemia is a chronic malignant disease characterized by the increase in platelet count and spleen enlargment. Platelets are blood platelets whose task is to create cloths in case of tissue injury, but they are also partly involved in defending your body against infection. In the case of a large platelet count there is at risk of spontaneous formation of blood clotting and thrombosis formation, in other words blockage of blood vessels. In some cases, the thrombus may break off and cause pulmonary embolism, a stroke or heart attack. Essential thrombocythemia in its initial phase is treated with drugs that do not allow the increase of number of platelets over 400000-500000 count. Today, interferon treatment has been stopped because new drugs have been developed. Besides thrombosis, the most dangerous complication of the disease is rupture, a rupture of the spleen without any external cause, because in with such patients, the spleen may increase so much that it fills 2/3 of the abdomen. In such cases, emergency surgery is the only option.*
>
> *Over the last ten years diagnostics and treatment of essential tromboicitemije have improved. JAK-2 gene, which plays a major role in the prognosis and treatment outcome, has been discovered. In most cases disease is long-term and stable, while in only few cases, the disease can progress and lead to the complete disappearance of the bone marrow due to scar conversion (fibrosis) of the bone marrow. The only treatment is stem cells transplantation.*

At this stage, patients are confronted with mortal danger for the first time, therefore, it is in the human nature to exibit fear, phobias and insomnia. If the patient is unable to overcome this situation on his/herown, it is advisable to seek psychiatric help, where the doctor will in some cases combine pyschotheraphy with medication, prepare the patient to accept the diagnosis and to continue the treatment. Religion is a personal matter of each individual and, according to some experience, positive thinking and faith significantly contribute to the success of treatment.

An introduction into the transplantation

I got sick in January 1995. I wasn't even aware I had measles because I didn't have a temperature. I thought the needle rash on my face was a food allergy. I also didn't notice that two lymph nodes, size of a pea, behind my ear were swollen. I worked for the Ministry of the Interior in Ilica 336 and was on duty on Friday at Epiphany and during the weekend. When I got home on Sunday and started to change my clothes, my husband noticed I had a rash all over my body and took me to Šalata emergency room. The dermatologist said that I should go to the Clinic for infectuous diseases Dr. Fran Mihaljević. The blood test confirmed I had measles. They told me to rest and drink tea, and that I should have another blood test in two weeks time. After that my platelets number had gone to 452, where normal scale is from 140 to 440. My GP in Šarengradska Dr. Seni Milicic immediately sent me to a hematologist at Vinogradska hospital.

It was Wednesday. Dr.Vlatko Pejša, a professor and head of hematology department at the Clinical hospital Dubrava, was on call. He immediately conducted a preliminary exam and sent me to do further blood testing. He told me that was suspicious of something and that I should have a bone puncture test done.

As I am always cheerful, that day I came to the waiting room smilling and telling jokes. He looked at me and said that the findings and my general condition are not in concord and that they should do a bone biopsy to be 100% sure.

At that time the Cytology Laboratory in Vinogradska hospital was being adapted so the biopsy was done at Zajčeva hospital. The first biopsy didn't hurt a lot. I lay for two hours, my husband came to pick me up, I took a Ketanol and went to finish my the rest of my shift.

When the results came, Dr. Pejša told me I had a chronic malign platelets condition called essential thrombocythemia (ET - Trombocytchemia esencialis). He told me that I could live to be a 100 if I would lead a normal life, stress free life. In the contrary, gene mutations and transition into a more severe form of the disease may occur because essential thrombocythemia is less malignant than other forms of the disease.

Of course, that was a shock for me. I was 31, had 8 and a half twins and was renting a flat.

I was consumed by fear. I lost my appetite, all I did was drinking coffee and crying. When I took the results to Dr. Sena Miličić and bursted into tears in front of her, she told me that I would not be able to cope with it on my own and that I would need professional help, so she gave me a referral for a psychiatrist at Rebro hospital.

I was admitted by Dr. Goran Tocilj and everything became clearer. She told me that she could see the fear in my eyes and that in all her years during the War in Croatia working with vicitims and veterans she had seen no one being so afraid. I was afraid of dying, leaving my children motherless and fatherless because my husband would find a new wife and marry her and my children would be left poor and hungry. She told me that it was essential for me to accept the disease because othervise I would end up in a mental hospital. The children would be ashamed of their crazy mom , the husband of a crazy wife, and my children would become orphans with their mother still living. She prescribed Amozyl to improve my mood, which I soon stopped taking because I didn't need it.

I came home, talked to my husband, thought hard about it and moved forward. It was Friday, and on Sunday Mass ceremony was held in Marija Bistrica. My husband drove me there, I confessed and recieved communion. Then I went on the hill and next to the cross I prayed and asked Mother of God to me to help me go through all of that. I prayed and cried, and when we got home, I fell asleep. The other day when the kids came home from school, we all sat down at the table and I tried to explain everything and make it as painless as possible.

I told them I was sick, but that I will live much longer and I will teach them how to cook and clean, and that they will all help, and in my mind I thought it was good for them to know how to take care of themselves. If I something happedned to me, they would know how to cook, so at least they wouldn't be hungry.

We did a major clean up, and then the cooking lessons started. First I taught them to make pancakes. I put

newspaper on the floor in front of the stove and taught them to flip pancakes in the air. Pancake that

fell on the newspapers were eaten by Sara, our dog, and we ate the ones that were successfully flipped.

Little by little, the boys had learned a lot, cooking and cleaning. When I come back home after the transplant, I'll teach them to iron and wash clothes. The more they know the better, because you never know what situation one can find himself in.

What mess we would be in if my husband didn't know how to do all the house chores? Who would do the laundry, who would do the ironing? And if their father knows how to do all those things, why shouldn't they? When they get married, they should help their wife and by doing so everyone will be happy and satisfied.

Dr. Pejša my prescribed a drug, Litalir. I took it for two years, eventhough I had problems with tolerating it. It caused enlarged spleen, fatigue and nausea in my case. After two years he switched it to Myleranom. This drug made me disoriented. Sometimes I would get of the buss or the tram and I wouldn't know where I was. It would last only for a second or two, but it felt awful as if I was going mad.

I told Dr. Pješa the problems the drug was causing. He ended the Myleranom therapy and prescribed interferon injections. At first I would go to daily hematology clinic, on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays to get the shots, and later my firend and neighbour Ana administered the shots.

In August, before she went to the seaside, Ana taught me how to give myself shots, and while doing so my hsband would hold my hand. I took interferon for 20 months and had no side effects. The disease entered into remission and was under control, I felt good and didn't need therapy.

Remission lasted for eight years, and then the platelet count began to decline. Professor Pejša told me to do a blood test, which showed that the gene mutated. They did a biopsy, which was extremely painful - instead of once, the doctor drilled my pubic bone three times - the bone was dry. Half an hour later a doctor from the cytology department came to do a sternal puncture test. She also drilled my sternal bone three times and also said that it was dry and that it didn't contain any bone marrow.

After that procedure it took me ten days to be able to bend or lift my hands over my head. Despite that, I continued working. I had to run a family household. A lady put the clothes on the ironing board, and the boys put all the ingridients on the kitchen top so I wouldn't need to bend.

The results came. Diagnosis: myelofibrosis. I regularly go to check ups, and the number of platelets is slowly dropping. Prof. Pejša says that there is no cure, except for bone marrow transplantation. In order to start the procedure, all treatment options need to be exhausted, in other words not until platelets are still in limits of normal, the minimum limit. A year later, in 2008, Dr. Ozren Jaksic preforms another pelvic bone biopsy and the finding indicates that the disease is advancing.

I ask Dr. Tatjana Štos to preform the bone marrow punction because she is very competent and quick. She presses her ear to the sternum, tapping her fingers on the bones she locates a place with bone marrow and fills a test tube completely from the first go. While she is doing it, I tell jokes. That's my way of getting rid of fear and it hurts less, and in a moment it is over. She had already done the procedure for a few times. I thank her and I say that she does the procedure with such an ease as telling a joke, being that her surname, Štos, when translated to English means "a joke". Whenever I mention that we laugh to tears.

My husband takes me home, and I am in a lot of pain. I am lying in the living room, and my mom in the bedroom. My husband says to her: "You see how your daughter is hurting, and you do not even ask her how she is."

And she says to him: "Everyone thinks he or she is hurting the most." And goes back to her room. I say to my husband that something must be wrong with her mind because I know how much loves me, she dedicated her life to me. I thought she had Alzheimer's, but later, unfortunately, we discovered that she had a brain tumor (glioblastoma). All my life she the details about my father a secret, but she has always told me that I had a sister Marija, my father's daughter from his first marriage.

When Prof. Pejša told that I would need a bone marrow transplant, he asked me whether I had any brothers or sisters who would get tested and see whether they were a match. I told him about Marija but he said that only same parent's children can have a corresponding antigens.

Despite that, I asked my mom to help me find Marija and to give me more details about her, because, if we found her she would certainly get tested, and if she was a match, she would give me her stem cells and in that way save my life.

Until then, I kept my disease a secret from my mom because I didn7t want to upset her since she survived the war in Bosnia. In 1995 she fled from Bosnia and in 2002 she had a heartattack.

But one day I was so angry and miserable and I asked her to tell me the truth about my father and Marija, because all my life she was saying that he was dead. She looked me, and I wept inconsolably. She stroked my hair and said it was a mistake not telling me about him. She admitted that he may still be alive. We both wept. She said she would tell me everything and that she would help me find them.

Mom stayed with us until the day she died, and my husband took care of both of us while we were sick.

My platelet number was dropping and I was losing weight. Prof. Pejša prescribed interferon injections three times a week. In 2007 and 2008 interferon injections had no side effects. At the beginning of 2009, when interferon was prescribed to me I had all the possible side effects, except for suicide. My temperature was 39 and 40 º C, despite taking Panadon 2-3 times a day to lower my body temperature. I had chills, nausea, vomited and had pain in my legs, which were full of bruises. My legs hurt so much that I could barely move.

When I went get a referral for a check up with prof. Pejša, my GP Dr. Milicic my doctor told me when I got to the hospital, not to let them send me home because it was only a matter of time before something inside of me bursted and bled. On Tuesday I had a check up at Dr. Pejša's office, and on Friday my spleen bursted. I lost 16 pounds and my skin was yellow-gray. I was the living dead and as thin as a skeleton, but still I had faith, I prayed and laughed.

In the morning I would get up at 6 and start cooking. At 9 I would give myslef an interferon injection and can no longer stand on my feet. I had to either sit or lie down.

About 50 bruises covered my legs. Every two or three weeks I would go to Rebro hospital to get my dose of platelets.

One day our neighbours came to visit us at about 3 p.m. I wanted to lift my neighbours little daughter Aneta, who I looked after while her mom studied for exams in college. I did not know that I wasn't allowed to lift heavy objects. I felt a sharp pain on the left side of the abdomena, where the spleen is, and when I was putting Aneta down I felt an even stronger pain. At that moment my spleen bursted.

My husband drove me to the emergency room Rebro where they did blood tests. They sent me to get

my abdomen, X-rayed, gave me platelets, blood, IV and pinkillers. At the same time I had my period, and throughout the year my periods lasted longer because there weren't enough platelets to stop the bleeding. In the morning, they wanted me to visit a gynacologist in Petrova hospital. I told them that I didn't have pains in the lower part of my abdomena but on the left side high above the pelvic bone. I spent the whole night in the ER and in the morning they sent me home, but it still hurt so much that I wan't able to walk upright. At home, I vomited and my temperature rose to 38.7 º C.

I called 911 and they instructed me to go to Rebro hospital. By the time we arrived to Rebro I was in such pain I sreamed. I begged them to give me an ultrasound or CT scan of the abdomen because I felt pain exactly on the spot where spleen should be located, and on top of that last year my spleen had been enlarged twice its size. They did a Ct scan and an ultrasound and looked at each other strangley. I was admitted and stayed in hospital until Monday. They gave me blood, platelets, IV, antibiotics and painkiller injections, while food wasn't allowed. At 6.15 p.m. primarius Dr. Zeljko Jelinčić came and told me that I was in a critical situation. He said that after 25 years of experience this was his first case where he had to preform spleen and colon cancer operation. He was afraid of doing the procedure. He said my spleed was three time its size, it ruptured and because of that I had internal bleeding. He said that the operation would be extremely dangerous and that there was a 90% chance I was going to die. I told him that I would give my written consent to operate because death was a better that living with such pain. I told him I had faith in his competence and that Mother Mary would perform a miracle. I wasn't afraid at all, because deep inside I felt peace and had faith that everything would turn out just fine. At that moment I was thinking about my mother, because she had no one except me.

I called my husband and told him my spleen had ruptured and I might die, and if I died I wanted him to remarry, not to be a bured to our sons, and not to argue with them. I asked him to cook something for my mom, who was in hospital at the oncology department because of glioblastoma, and to help her to the bathroom, and after she wouldn't be able to take care of herself to take her to Marof, where she would be provided with all the care she needed by an educated staff.

They took me to the OR. I told them that I had always been saying that I would die with a smile on my face and a cup of coffee in my hand. I was not allowed to have coffee because of the operation, but I was allowed to tell jokes. While they were wheeling me to the OR I was telling them jokes and they laughed so hard that at one moment they had to stop. When we arrived in front of the OR I crossed myself, said a prayer of Our Father, Hail Mary, Glory Be and fell asleep.

The surgery took all night. It was very difficult. At about 8 a.m. my husband cam to the ICU to find out how I was doing. The nurse told him that the operation was successful, I gained conscious, but that they still needed to see whether my temperature would increase and whether I would become septic.

At around 2:30 p.m. I dream that I am in a small room, alone, surrounded by darkness, can't see a thing. I am terribly afraid and going in circles. Suddenly, I see a ray of sunshine in front of me cominf from the sky and at that moment the entire room is eluminated, but I am still in the dark. The ray transforms into a white 5 pellet flower, and the flower transforms into a big white door. The door transform into a golden crown from which Mother of God appears dressed in white and floating above me, facing me she extend her hand to me. I jump to get a hold of her hand. Only an inch more and I could hold her hand, but at that moment I hear someone calling out my name: "Ana, Ana, wake up!" I open my eyes and see my friend Jasna. She came to visit me, I woke uo, look around the room and say: "Thank you God and Mother of God for keeping me alive." I am sure that Mother of God was the one who showed me a way out of darkness, she kept me going. That was the line between live and death.

At about 6 p.m. the doctor came to do his round. I extend my hand to Dr. Jelinčić and say: "You have saved my life, I will be eternaly grateful to you until the day I die." He tells me: " Thank the One I have faith in, becuase your condition was the most critical one I have ever had."

After 24 hours I was transferred from the ICU to the department of oncology, and a week later I was discharged and could go home. My bowels weren't affected and the sepsis dissapeared. Thank god, everything ended up good.

When I went to get my stiches out after spleen operation I asked dr. Sandra Bašić-Kinda to give me her honest opinion. She went through my file and drew my blood. Platelets number was 165. The spleen results have shown that it "ate" everything the bone marrow produced. Dr. Kinda confirmed that my spleen had ruptured as I was lifiting my little neighbour, and that a month before the event a hematoma formed and started to disintegrate.

She told me that there is no cure for fibrosis, except for transplantation. Since I had no spleen, and the spleen's job is to produce and purify blood when the bone marrow can't, the only available treatment is a bone marrow transplantation. There is a 50 – 50 risk. If they find a donor and I survive the transplantation, I will be a healthy womanm but if I am affraid to have a transplantation, I will have about 4 to 7 years to live, but after 4 years pass I will be depending on transfusions. Immediately I told her that I would take the risk. I love life and I can't spend my days crossing of the days I have left on the calendar. Dr. Kinda promised to present my case to the transplant council and introduce me to prof. Boris Labar.

My mom died on 8th October 2009. At the end of October I go to prof. Labar to arange the transplantation.

HZZO (Croatian Health Insurance Fund) approved the transplantation. They found the first donor in the American register, but the Americans couldn't contact him for 2 months because of address change. I was extatic when they located him. He agreed to have his blood tested for typing, but in a three months time because of some personal problems. We got the results of blood typing on 15th of June 2010. Dr. Labar told me that we have a match, a 10 out of 10 match and that I should just sit and wait to get called for the transplantation.

That day I was the happiest person alive. A request for setting a date of the transplant was sent to the Register. The Register notified us that due to illness my donor was permanently erased from the registry. I was so miserable that I wanted to die so I couldn't feel a thing and my misery could end.

The next day when I woke up, I thought to myself, every evil has its good and that Good had a plan for me. For goodnes sake, what would have happened if I had had the transplantation and because of it had gotten an incurable disease. Another donor was found in the American registry whose blood was also sent to CMC Rebro for typing and he was also a 10/10 match. Three weeks afterwards they did a final typing and set the transplantation date. God closed one door, and opened another one, all you need is faith.

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A diary of stem cell treatment

September 15th 2010, Wednesday

My husband has been in Bosnia for 10 days at his mother because she is ill, and I started work and on September 8th 2010 I had a uterus polyp operation which is benign, but had a risk of bursting in sterile units and cause bleeding. We agreed I would come to Bosina by bus and return with him.

I arrived at Prijedor at 8:30 p.m. My husband waited for me and took me to the village. I ask him how the mother-in-law is and he says that when she recieves blood she is Ok and when the blood goes bad she is bad. At 9:15 p.m. we arrive in the village. The mother-in-law woke up when we arrived. I give her a shower and change her diaper. SheFor dinner she has just a bite because she has no appetite. My husband goes to bed, and the two of talk for a long time, not realizing that it is our last conversation.

She told me the wrongdoings she experienced with family inheritance after which I realized why she had kept to herself and had hidden her feelings. She had built a wall around herself so hat no one could hurt her. It was hard getting close to her and find out what was on her mind. That was the reason for not getting aong with her. I felt sorry for her as a person, because if I had known all the wrongdoings she had experienced I would have treated her differently. I am an honest and direct person, and because of that she was always bothered by everything I said to her face. On the other hand, the father-in-law and I had a lovely relationship, like a father and a daughter, maybe because I missed my father so I found a father in him. My mother-in-law and I talked until 2 a.m. when we went to bed.

September 16th 2010, Thursday

I woke up at 6, washed and made coffee. My mother-in-law woke up and soon Jadranka, a neighbour who takes care of her when she is alone, arrived. She will stay with her while my husband and I go to the cemetery. I am expecting a call from the hospital for the transplantation and don't know when will I be allowed to travel again. First we go to Jabučice cemetary, where my grandparents are burried. Every time I visit them I get a flashback to January 20th 1971 when my granpa died. I was in first grad of elementary school, but I remember him looking at me. Tears streamed down his face. He said: "When my Ana visits my grave, and granpa's grave is full of thorns and grass, she will pluck all the thorns and grass and plant flowers." There is no thorns or grass on his grave because my mom and I had paid a stonecutter to make a gravestone. I put some flowers on his gravestone, light some candles, pray to God for their souls, and while being there I feel like my grandpa can see me from the Heaven and that he is happy.

After Jabučice cemetary I go to my home, the village I was born in. Despite the fact that people moved away after Oluja (war) in Croatia, and everything is in ruins, land turned into woods because no one grows anything on it, I still like to visit the place I was born in. When I am there, all the childhood memories of the times when I was healthy and happy, and the people I loved were still alive come to me.

In the village I can see smoke coming from 3-4 chimnies, from people's houses who didn't leave the village. I remeber how the village had been full of life and happines before the war started. Eventhough people worked hard, they spent time together and helped each other. I didn't feel envy, anger and jelaousy as I do today. It was humane and wonderful.

We go to the second cemetary. so called Lužansko, where may father-in-law and my husband's relatives are burried. I also put flowers, light candles and say a prayer for them. I always feel sad standing next to my father-in-law's grave because he was a very fair and honest person and I feel sorry because he is no longer with us. I realized what a father's love was when I got married. Maybe that is the reason why I am so sad. After the cemetary we return to my mother-in-law's house. I make lunch, we all have lunch together and have coffee afterwards. It is time to head out to Prijedor because I still need to say my goodbyes to my cousin Ankica and her family.

I sit on my mother-in-law's bed and tell her about my bone marrow transplantation and how I am sure to survive. If not, if I die, she will not be able to go to my funeral because of her condition, and if she died while I was in hospital or six months after being discharged I wouldn't be able to attend her funeral. I tell her that I had forgiven her, and if she held anything against me, to forgive me. I kissed her and we said our goodbyes. Jadranka and my moyher-in-law cried and I saw tears in my husband's eye. I am a very sensitive person and often cry, at that moment I couldn't shed a tear, but a great burden fell of my chest. We drive to Prijedor. I can notice from the car how nature has never been so beautiful and how the Sun never shone so bright. Because of a busy lifestyle I didn't even notice such things and they were not important to me.

We arrive at Ankica's, we sit in the backyard and chat while having a coffee. Above the table we are coverd by a shade of ripe grapevines (Izabella), the entire backyard smells wonderful because of the grapevines. I ask for a plastic bag to pick some grapes and take it to Zagreb. We say our goodbyes and leave, and Ankica stands next to the fence and cries, she can't control her tears. I joke and tell her that she will cry out all her tears, so if I died there would be no more left. I tell her that I didn't have leukemia, that everything would be fine and that I would send her text messages form hospital to keep her informed. We travel through Kostanjica and Petrinja and arrive in Zagreb. I go to a shop near my building to buy bread. I meer Mr. Zuber. I stop him and ask him to listen to me for 5 minutes. He needs to hurry for a business meeting and gives me his mobile number. I say to him that I am going to have a transplantation and that I want to find my biological parents.

September 17th 2010, Friday

Today I work at Marion's and I ask her to let me call the Ana Rukavina Foundation

and administration of the cemetery, and she says to call the Foundation and everything I need, except for the

cemetery, because she believes that everything will be OK. I called the Foundation and told that I was expecting a call from the hospital regarding the transplantation, and that I would like to meet Mrs. Marija and that I would like to visit Ana's grave with her, light a candle and put some flowers on her grave as a sighn og gratitude. Mrs. Snježanam who was very polite, told me to leave my mobile phone number and that Mrs. Marija would contact me. I thank her.

I call cemetary administrations in Odra, Markovo polje, Miroševac and Mirogoj. I ask about the price and payment options. The prices range from 4 to 7 thousand kuna. I tell to Marion that I have faith that I will survive the transplant, ans if I die, my husband will buy a grave on Miroševac and save 7 000 kuna, which he will then use to cover the funeral costs. I picked Miroševac because Ana, Jasna and Anđela and my ex-neighbours are burried on Dubrava so when their family goes to visit them someone will visit me as well. She looks at me, her eyes filled with tears. She says that I am not normal. We laugh, and I say that all of that, that's life, today we exist, and tomorrow we don't.

At 1.15 p.m. my mobile rings and I see that the caller is from Rebro Hospital. I answer, and it is Dr. Mirta Mikulić, ICU, notifying me that everything is ready for my transplant and to take the doctor's referral and to come to the ICU department on Monday. Feeling so happy I tell her: "Great! Great! Thank Good!" The doctor asks me whether I am Ok, do I feel scared, and whether I am aware of the risk. I tell her that I am Ok and that I am not affraid at all. I explain that I was affraid during the search for the donor in the World register of stem cells and not knowing whether the donor will be found, whether he/she will be a match and whether he/she will agree to transplantation. Now, when everything is aranged, I feel extremely happy.

I tell to the doctor that the transplantation is already done in my mind and that it has been a year since the treatment and five since the healing. It is a routine procedure that needs to be done and that everything will work out in a week's time, faster than anyone before and that because of that I will become a medical phenomenon. We start laughing and Dr. Mikulić tells me that she is pleased to hear my positive way of thinking.

September 18th 2010, Saturday

I woke up early and said a prayer to the Virgin Mary. We were supposed to go to the cemetary in Vojnić, where my mother and aunt are burried, but it is raining heavilly and the wind is blowing. My husband tells me to stay at home so I wouldn't cathc a cold and because of it to be forced to postpone the transplantation and that he will go to the cemetary once he gets me to the hospital. I feel really sorry, but he is right.

I go to Konzum and buy everything needed for baking cakes, preparing lunch and we buy drinks because tomorrow I am organizing a "goodbye lunch" for my firends and neighbours. I bake the cakes at home. I double the ingredients for the cakes: walnut and coconut kiflice, bajadera, Londoner cake and figaro waffles. I coocked vegetables for French sallad, cooled it and cut it into cubes. I marrinated belly slices and the suckling, fried the chicked and put everything in the fridge. In the evening I roasted the meat, and when I was making the pumpkin pie it was already past 2 a.m. I said my prayers and fell asleep, not feeling tired, probably because of the excitment.

September 19th 2010, Sunday – a "goodbye lunch"

Although I slept only a few hours, I woke up at 6, prayed, made an espresso and started cooking. I put the meat for the soup cooking, rolled bread, made a mayonnaise for French sallad, sliced cheese, ham and eggs and mixed everything with the cooked vegetables. French sallad suits cold roasting perfectly. Bread dough rose so I put it in the owen. After baking the bread I put one pumpkin pie batch in the owen, and I will put another one in the owen as the guest start arriving. I will do the same with the chicken so it would be warm and tasty once the guests arrive. As the guests arrive I heat the soup. I set the table and placed the soup on it and am waiting all of my guests to arrive. I told each of my friends who are married to come at a different time so I could pay each and every one of them extra attention, thank them and have a conversation without other people interrupting us.

At 11Anđa and her son Ivan are the first to arrive. We have lunch and goof around. I tell to Anđa, if I die, I want her and my husband to start spendng some time together. They don't have to get married, but they can make their lives easier and better. We laugh about it. I pack some coakes for them to take home, we say our goodbyes and they whish me luck.

Jana and her husband arrive at 2 p.m. We have lunch, drink coffee, eat cakes and talk. Usually I am always cheerful, and today I am even more cheerful. I am happy because I was given another chance and because my loved ones are around me and are supporting me. I tell jokes and we laugh to tears. Jasna brought a pink silk for a dress and tells me to have it sewn after I get healthy.

At around 5 p.m. Ana and her husband arrive. Al of my girlfriends are great, but Ana and I have a special relationship. Ana was born in Zagorje, and I was born in Bosnia. Despite that, when we look at each other we understand eac other, when we talk it is the same. I will never forget all the things she has done for me and my mom. Ana is a health worker and I called her at all hours and asked for her advice, because her late father had a brain tumor (glioblastoma) and she knew everything about it.

I named my lunch a "goodbye lunch" because I am saying my goodbyes before leaving to the hospital and thanking them for their support, and I will return alive and healthy with a new bone marrow which will work as a *singer* machine.

After Ana's visit, my neighbour Žaklina and her sister Slađana arrive, and at around 9 p.m. my neighbour Magdalena with her girls Antea and Nika. We eat, toast and they whish me luch. Marion, Ankica and Zvjezdana couldn't be there, because they had prior engagements, but we said our goodbyes earlier. I put the rest of the food in the fridge, say a prayer to the Heavenly Father and go to sleep.

September 20th 2010, Monday

I woke up at six, made coffee, drank it with my husband, and slowly started packing for the hospital. I washed and ironed everything, all I need to do is to fold it into suitcases. I will take enough clothes for a week, it is beter to have more.

After breakfast we go to the notary so I can give power of attorney to my husband for my current account in the bank, postal packages and attorney. Regardless the outcome, I want everything to be in order and I don't want anyone paying my debts and obligations. As we crossed the Savski bridge, I stopped for the first time and had a moment looking at the river. During all this time, my busy life, I have never noticed the lovely green-blue colour, and the lovely green grass surrounding it. It's the start of autumn, the leaves are turning yellow, the birds are singing, an I thing to myslef: " Dear God, will I ever cross this bridge again?" We are not aware what beauty surrounds us. I made a promise to myself, after I get out of the hospital and will be crossing the bridge I will stop for a few minutes and have a good look around. And I will continue doing so every time I cross it.

We are returning home. I put the yesterday's leftovers into the fridge and the freezer. They don't have to cook for a few days. My husband and I have lunch, another espresso. I have a shower, pack books for reading, DVDs, prayer book and the rosary and set off for the

At around 2 p.m. we arrive and the first thing I do is to say hello to Dr. Labar. He tells me to go to the nurses in the ICU. I check in and my husband carries my things to the ICU.

I am greeted by two lovely and smiling nurses, Andrea and Dženana. They help me with my things, take me to my ICU room and tell me to make myself comfortable. Their smiles make me feel safe.

I put my things into the wardrobe, change clothes, and have a tour of my ICU room, because that will be my home for the next six weeks. I am in the redecorated 4 x 3.5 m ICU with an 2 x 1.20 m ensuite. The bathroom has a toilet and a shower, hanging rack for clean and dirty laundry and a sink with a mirror.

There are 3 coathangers for protective clothes for the doctoor, the nurse and the cleaning lady on the left side of the entrance to the ICU. The bed has wheels, the height and bedrest are regulated by a remote control. In front of the bed is a glass wall. There the nurses put the protective clothes and in that room there is a cabinet with the pressure messuring machine, gloves, gazes, desinfection agents and other things necessary for the each ICU room. In the room there is a single door wardrobe, TV mounted on the wall, wheeled cabinet with a glass pull-out-tray for food, a table, a chair IV stand and an overhead bell and a light for reading. There are two windows with double isolated glass which can't be opened so the unpurified air wouldn't get into the room. The airconditioner and air purifier serve as a heater.

My mobile is ringing and it's Mrs. marija Rukavina. She thanks me for praying for her and says that we wil visit Ana's grave when I get better. She lifts my spirits and says that my story will have a happy ending. I thank her. At 6.30 p.m. the nurse brings dinner: fried chicken, rice with peas and beatroot. I pray with a rosary to St. Anthony. I watch shows "Best years" and "Crazy, confused, normal". I feel sleepy.

September 21st 2010, Tuesday

It's 7 a.m. I woke up, had a shower and are saying my prayers to the Virgin Mary for health and I do two rosary rounds for the deceased. At 8 a.m. the head nurse Nurka comes to my room. We get to know each other. She has a form with her that I need to sign, in other words I need to give my consent with which I accept the recomended diagnostical procedure. Also that I on my own free will accept the donor. I sit on the bed and read through it.

It is stated that in this phase the bone marrow transplantation enables survival, and sometimes full recovery, after that the procedure of treatment is stated - chemotherapy. Chemotherapy lowers the natural defense system of your body so it would accept the donor's cells. The possibility of defending against all sorts infections is reduced, and that is the reason why in the first phase of the treatement, until the transplanted cells are not accepted, you have to stay in a sterile unit where air, bedclothing, food and other objects are sterile.

They explained the procedure to me. The donor is unconsious and a thick needle is used to gather the bone marrow along thogether with nutritious fluid from the pelvic bones into a plastic bag used for the blood transfusion. New cells should travel through blood to my bone marrow, settle there, and after aproximately three weeks should start regenerating my blood.

Those of you who have signed up to be a donor, don't be affraid, because the forms I am talking about are outdated because before the only option for donating bone marrow was under narcosis. Today the extraction is done through plazmapheresis procedure and it is painless and it is not harmful for the donor. The only painful part of it is the prick of the needle, the same sensation as when ones blood is being drawn. The only difference is that this procedure lasts 4 to 5 hours, during which you can watch a movie, read a book or surf the Internet.

During that period, and if necessary later, I should occasionally get blood cells transfusion, in order to prevent bleeding, infections and anemia. Chemotherapy can cause skin issues. It was pointed out to me that the transplanted cells may damage my skin, intestine or livers, because they are different from my cells. In such case I would recieve medication to prevent or eliviate damage. When it comes to sex life, my fertility can decrease. In the latter phase viral infections are possibe, including severe pneumonia. In order to determine whether the bone marrow transplantation was successful numerous labratory tests and frequent blood draws form a finger need to be done to see whether the white and red cell and palatel count is increasing or decreasing. Also the bone marrow should be cheched every two weeks in order to determine whether the cells are multiplying or not.

If my blood starts to display donor's characteristics (blod type, sex characterictics, ect.) that is the confirmation that the transplantation of the bone marrow was succesful and that the new cells are regenerating my blood. Tests for determining it are conducted on a weekly basis. If signs that the cells are damaging my tissue appear, a painless liver or intestine biopsy will be done.

If it turns out that unwanted late complications appeared, pneumonia with thickening of the lung tissue, a piece of lungs for microscopic examination under anesthesia is to be taken. The function of my immune system will be monitored by a regular white cells count, and occasionally their ability to react to foreign substances would be tested in an incubator. I realized that all the tests are here to insure my well being. No other cure except for bone marrow transplantation exists for treating myelofibrosis.

I sign that I have thought about it, decided to get a transplant, to voluntarily participate in treatment and to have made that decision alone, completely free. When you are dying and when there is nothing left but to take the risk, undergo the transplantation, there isn't really much to think about. The more I think about it, the worse I feel. I have my faith in God, the doctors and my eternal optimism.

The head nurse comes to draw my blood before breakfast. afterwards I go to a white building to get an EKG. I return with the results and buy 0.5 l water Jana and a small espresso on the soda machine in the hallway of the main building.

In my room breakfast is on the table, everything sterile: bread, butter, jelly and a cup of warm milk. The main nurse comes again and asks me to give her discharge letters from my spleen operation. She needs confirmations of preoperative tests I needed to do: dental, obstetric, ORL, ultrasound, that my thyroid hormones level are in order, a confirmation that I was vacinated after the spleen operation (against pneumococcal disease and hemophilia).

She tells me that I should go to the dentist with a fresh X-ray and the obstetrician because I had a polyp surgery so she made appointments. All tests have to be in order because the tinniest inflamation may cause an infection.

At about 11.30 p.m. Dr. Mirta Mikulić says that she will come to my room after luch so I could ask her everything I wanted to know about the surgery. She also says that it is a difficult procedure, full of risk, and that I have 50:50 chanches. In order for a transplantation to be successful, one needs a big number of doctors from different areas, including a psychiatrist, who can help a lot through conversation and advice. I thanked her and told her that for me the best therapy is talking to Ana, who works in a hospital in Zagreb on the Department of Psychiatry. I tell the doctor, that in case my operation won't be successful, and if I, such a happy and optimistic person died, to make everyone working on the ICU department to hang their coats and lock the sterile units because if I, a person brimming from faith and optimism doesn't survive, how will then those who gave up survive?! They all laughed, eventhough they looked at me a bit strangely. They have probably never had such a case.

I thank her and watch a show "The sea of love". At 1.15 p.m. lunch is served: soup, beat sallad, rice with peas and white chicked meat. Everything is sizzling and sterile. I eat everything and ask the nurse to allow me to get double portions or for my husband to bring me extra food from home. I eat a lot, work, talk and laugh so everything I eat burns off. The nurse says she will make a note, because once my chemotherapy starts everything must be sterile. At around 1.30 p.m. I start reading "Weaving of life", a book given to me by my friend Jasna on Sunday. I fell asleep while reading.

At 4.50 p.m. my mobile woke me. My son Igor called from Baška where he works as a waiter during the season. He is very worried, I tell him that he will help me by being responsible, by getting along with his father and twin brother. I tell him to talk with their dad, to listen to him and live unburdened by my disease, and that the treatment is my and my doctors' problem. At 5 p.m. I call the nurse and ask her whether I can go to the coffee vending machine. I put the protective cover over my Crocs and a mask over my mouth. I run into a young girl Dušanka, a Gypsy who is only 15 years old and has an acute leukemia.

As we talk, a young man listents to us and starts talking to us. He says that he has a one-year-old son who was diagnosed with leukimia at 2.5 months. He decided to give him his bone marrow eventhough he was risking his own life. Dušanka has two donors, a German and a Belgian, because her stem cells need to be transplanted from the bellyputton cord so one donnor isn't enough. My donor is American.

I console the young man and tell him that I listened carefully Dr. Mirando Mrsić when he was a guest in Aleksandar Stanković's TV show "Sunday at 2". There he said that a healthy man has enough bone marrow to live up to the age of 250 years, and by donating that life span decreases by 10 years, which means that he still has 240 years more of bone marrow left in him. If a man lives to be 80, he has enough bone marrow for 3 lives. He also said that medicine has progressed immensely in the last 20 years, and because of that the ratio of survivals and deaths is 50:50, and if a person is optimistic 60:80. When I heard that, I told to myself that I will survive because I am an eternal optimist.

I whish all the luck in the world to him and his son. I am happy because I had helped him through talking with him. I return to my room, watch TV, and the nurse brings me dinner: pasta in veel sauce, beat and 2 dcl of juice. I got a double portion and ate everything. I pray to the St. Anthony. I call my husband and joke about the sexual characteristics, which are not defined; that I will turn into a man and that we will live in the same sex community.

I watch a TV show "Passions of the Orient" on Nova TV. I go to sleep at 10.30 p.m.

September 22nd 2010, Wednesday

The nurse comes at 6 a.m. and asks me to give her a urine sample that is collected through the course of 24 hours, from 6 to 6, in order to see how the kidneys work. I pee into a cup and fall asleep again. At 7.50 the head nurse wakes me to draw my blood and measure mu temerature. T 36.5°C. I do a rosary prayer to the Virgin Mary and for the deceased. The nurse brings a double breakfast: 2 hot sandwiches and 2 cups of white coffee. The resident doctor comes into my room, she is very pleasnat and nice. We get to know each other and talk about the tests I need to do today.

Her name is Arta and she comes from Macedonia. She and her identical twin sister are on their residency intership at Rebro hospital. I wait for my husband to bring fresh clothes I previously sent home. I didn't know that I would go to the orthodontist in Gundulićeva because I visited him in March and did X-rays of all teeth roots at Perkovčeva polyclinic. As 6 months have passed since, and if a single root is inflamed, it can cause an infection after the transplantation which could be extremely dangerous. My husband picks me up and takes me to Petrova hospital to the obstetrician to have a check up. The test is in order, I tell a few jokes to the doctors and the nurses, we laugh and they all whish me luck.

We drive to the dentist at the Faculty of Stomatology in Gundulićeva street. The on-call professor examines the tooth X-ray and my teeth. I have a small cavity which she fixes and gives me a confirmation that everything is OK. I tell her 3 jokes and we laugh to tears. She whishes me luck and says that the world would be a much brighter place if all the people were optimistic and cheerful as I was.

We drive to Rebro hospital and stop to have coffee before I retur to the hospital. I take advantage of each and every opportunity I have to drink coffee before chemotherapy because after it starts I won't be allowed to leave the sterile unit. I can see fear in my husband's eyes, eventhough he is trying to hid it from me. So I tell him jokes and make him laugh to tears.

At about 12 p.m. I arrive at the hospital, change clothes, whash my hands and desinfect them, afterwards I watch "The sea of love". The head nurse tells me that I need to go to the white building to get a spirometry, and that they are waiting for me to come. After spirometry, the nurse tells me that my lungs are 100% functional, but that the doctors need to authorize the results. It's lunh time, but I have to get a hearth and lungs X-ray because I have an appointment. I return to my room, my lunch is cold, but is still tasty, and I am hungry.

September 23rd 2010, Thursday

At 6 a.m. the nurse wakes me up gently. She checks whether everything is OK. Most of patients that suffer from such a difficult disease can't sleep without sedatives, but I, thanks to God, have no problems sleeping 8 hours without interruption. I get up, wash up, pray to the Virgin Mary.

Breakfast is at 8: 2 hot dog saussages, butter, jelly, honey, bread and 2 cups of milk. I eat everything because I usuallu eat a lot. Before being hospitalized, I worked a lot and I talk a lot, so I burn off everything I eat, I am not overweight. All my friends say they would be 100 kg if they ate as much as I did.

It's doctor's round time and professor Labar is in charge. They don't enter the room, but we communicate through the speakerphone. Professor Labar says that on Friday I will be taken to the OR to extract some bone marrow for reserve if something goes wrong. They will also do a biopsy because usually it is a very uncomfortable and painful procedure and since I will be under anesthesia I won't feel a thing. He also said that on Monday we will start with targeted chemotherapy which will destroy blastom only, and will not destroy the healthy part of the bone marrow. Healthy donor's cells need to replace the cells where blastomas were, and they need to fight and multiply.

He says that he believes that I will handle the procedure well and that everything is going to be OK. The transplantation is scheduled for October 7th. The doctor and the nurse will go to the US on October 4th, on October 5th the donor's bone marrow will be extracted and on Ocotber 6th they will return to Zagreb.

In the mean time the American registry staff contacts the donor and sends him to hospital to have some tests done and to be prepared for the extraction.

Thank to our dear God that we have the Ana Rukavina Foundation, which was founded by Ana's mom Matija Rukavina, and because before she died, Ana wanted to found the Croatian registry. Because of the Foundation we became a part of the World registry of bone marrow donors. Because of that I found a donor who is a 10/10 match in the American registry.

After the doctor's round I watch "The sea of love", afterwards I go to the anestesiologist with all medical documentation to have a check up. He asks me what my weight is, whether I smoke and how many anesthesias I have had so far. He wants to see the newest blood test results and heart and lungs X-rays. On the way back to my room I stop at the coffee vending machine. I return to the sterile unit, remove my protective shoe covers, wash and desinfect my hands.

The nurs brings lunch: French beans stew and roasted pork. After lunch I fall asleep. I wake up at 4 p.m. I talk to my good friend Ana who is a shoulder to cry on during difficult situations. The nurse comes to tell me not to eat after dinner, and that I am allowed to drink liquids until midnight, because of anesthesia. I talk to mt husband,

and afterwards I watch "IN magazin". I pray to St. Anthony to help me go through this. The nurse brings dinner: rice with peas, fried chicken and beat sallad.

September 24th 2010, Friday

The nurse wakes me at 5.50 a.m. to draw my blood because the anestesiologist wants a fresh blood work. I fall asleep again and wake up at 7, wash up and pray to the Virgin Mary to help me. At 8 they take me to the OR, put me under narcosis and I don't remember anything. After as if dreaming, I hear the nurse calling out my name, but I can't wake up. They took me to the sterile unit and put me against the door on my side because I wasn't awake. At 12 I was conscious and felt something against my back.

I call the nurse, to discover that I started bleeding from the two puncture holes from which they extracted the bone marrow and did the biopsy. Everything is covered in blood: the nightgown, panties, the sheet and even the bed, but the matress is rubberized so it can be cleaned. The nurses clean me, change my clothes and the bedspread, they put some fresh bandages and a solid surface under my back in order to stop the bleeding. I feel uncomfortable and it hurts, but I don't say a thing.

They immediately gave me a blood clothing medicine to stop the bleeding and an injection painkiller Tramal. I also recieved 1 bag of platelets to thicken my blood because I lost a lot of blood. After 3 p.m. the nurse brought roseship tea, to see whether I will be able to keep the liquid in or whether I will throw it up. I fell nauseated but I don't throw up. Afterwards I fall asleep because the pain stopped after recieving an injection.

After dinner the nurse changed my bandages, and gave me an injection painkiller Tramal so I was able to fall asleep lying on my belly because my back hurt a lot.

September 25th 2010, Saturday

At 6.10 a.m. I woke up and washed up, aterwards I prayed to the Virgin Mary. I am in pain so they give me an injection of Tramal. I write a little bit, and later the nurse brings breakfast: a hot ham&cheese sandwich, butter, jelly, bread and a cup of milk. Afterwards the doctor's round comes and pri. Dr. Ivo Pulanić explains to me that in this phase of cellular fibrosis the bone marrow is functional, but without the transplantation it can transform into a more severe form, when the bone marrow doesn't produce enough cells so I could get dependent on transfusions. He also tells me that I am a young woman and that the transplantation is the only proper way to cure me.

I read "Weaving of life", afterwards I talk to Mrs marija Rukavina. She is a lovley woman, who is always ready to help, listen to you and give you advice, despite the pain in her heart. She tells me to call her when I feel bad. She raises my spirits and believes that I will succeed, because I don't have leukemina, so the process of chemo is not so difficult, it will not completely destroy my immune system. I am grateful for each and every word. The nurse brings lunch: French beans stew, veal steak and gluten-free bread.

Afterwards i talk to my husband about the things he will bring to me when he visits. I sleep for an hour, and watch Nova TV later: "Friendship betrayal", "Perifery City" and "Crazy, confused, normal". The nurse brings dinner: rice with peas, fried chicken, cooked cauliflower and gluten-free bread. i pray to St. Anthony, atterwards I watch "What is a man without a moustache" and go to sleep.

September 26th 2010, Sunday

It's 6 a.m. The nurse wakes me uo slowly, measures my temperature and tells me to take capsules for preventing nausea and vomitting in chemotherapy – Emend, 125 mg. She also gives me an injection against vomitting. I ask the nurse to heat the water. I have cranberry tea. I put 2 tea bags in a half a liter bottle. There is roseship and comomile tea in the sterile units but my husband always brings cranberry.

The night shift is over, so two new nurses arrive. The nurse gives me chemotherapy and IV, but she dosen't want to tell me which one is chemotherapy so I wouldn't think about it. The nurse brings breakfast: a hot sandwich, butter, jelly, bread and a cup of milk. I eat everything and continue lying and recieving fluids thinking that it is ahe remote, so that my n IV. I don't feel nauseated, but I am constantly sleepy. I adjust my bed using headboard is elevated and listen to a brodcast of Holy Mass from Rijeka and every now and then fall a sleep for a few minutes. I don't have a fever. Every time the nurse enters the room, she checks the IV and chemo drip, I wake up, talk to her, and when she leaves the room I fall asleep again. She brings lunch: rice with peas and roasted pork, beat sallad and bread. After lunch I get IV.

I ask the nurse about the chemo again, and she tells me that I had alredy finished the chemo for the day, but she doesn't tell in which order. I watch a recording of Tereza's concert, afterwards the nurse brings dinner: 2 hot sandwiches, musaka, cooked cauliflower. I only ate the cauliflower. The nurse heats the water again and I make tea. I talk to my husband. I always say something stupid to make him laugh because it's not easy for him.

I talk to the boys over the phone. Alen is in Zagreb, he works, and when I need something, he buys it, and Igor is still working in Baška. The boys are worried, but I tell them to be good, listen to their dad, and that I am in good hands. One shouldn't burden his/herown children with diseases. I watch "Perifery City", and I take my medicines: Ranital 2 x 1 tbl. 150 mg, Ciflox 2 x 1 tbl. 500 mg, Virolex 3 x 2 tbl. 200 mg, Phemiton 2 x 1 tbl. 200 mg, Sulotrim 2 x 1 tbl. 800/160 mg, Alopurinol 2 x 3 tbl. 100 mg, Provera 1 x 2 tbl. 10 mg.

As soon as I take the medicine, I go to sleep because the place where they extracted the bone marrow on my back hurts as I move.

September 27th 2010, Monday

The nurse wakes me at 6 a.m. because I need to get an IV, she needs to measure my temperature and draw some blood. They will replace the small chateter with a central venous chateter which will be used for getting the IV, transfusion, chemotherapy, stem cell transplant from the peripheral blood, drawing blood and everything else.

They draw my blood on a daily basis, and sometimes even more than once, so I have a vein problem.

I have breakfast, take my medication and watch "Magic". Afterwards I pray with my rosary to the Virgin Mary and later I talk to my friend Jasna, who keeps telling me that I am brave and optimistic, that I need to keep thinking about positive things and I need to hold on till everything is over. Doctor's round comes at 12.30. They give me a form for central venous catheter insertion procedure which I need to sign.

It is stated on the form that all different things may go wrong, but also that everything may go well. Without giving it much thought I sign it. If we percieved everything as being negative, we would never agree to get any treatment. I have faith in the doctors and the medical staff, and in medicines. I am aware that having this point of view is good for my recovery and that is it.

At 1 p.m. Dr. Ana Boban explains the procedure. First she gives me local anesthesia, 2 shots, waits a little bit for it to start working, makes an incision using a scalpel and inserts the chatheter in the vein. During the procedure I tell jokes. I fell a sharp pain, but I just clench my teeth and that's it. When the chateter entered the vien, she secured it with 2 stiches. Again I clench my teeth.

The head nurse thakes me to my sterile unit and tells me to have som elunch. I have an X-ray appointment at 2 p.m. so they could see whether the chatether was inserted properly and whether there was any damaged made durng the procedure. After the X-ray, the nurse takes me to my room. I am in a lot of Pain, so she gives me a Tramal injection. I lie in bed and at the same time I get the IV and chemo. Thanks to God, I haven't had a fever, felt nauseated or vomitted.

I watch a TV show on Nova TV "In the name of love", and everything hurts. My back hurts from the extraction and bipsy, the right shoulder from the chateter insertion because the pushed it all the way to the collarbone. I talk to my husband. I pull some jokes because laughter and jokes keep me alive. The nurse heats the water so I could make my cranberry tea. She brings chicken rissotto, cooked cauliflower and 2 slices of glute-free bread.

The head nurse explained that I am not allowed to eat anything that contains gluten, fresh fruits and vegetables, snacks, dried fruits, cakes, ect. She explains that by eating a gluten-free food my intestines keep healthy, and that is very important since I take a lot of medication, get chemotherapy and the transplantation. Afterwards I pray to St. Anthony, wash up and watch "The best years of our lives" and "Crazy, confused, normal". I laugh to tears and go to bed.

September 28th 2010, Tuesday

At 6 a.m. I take the third pill that should prevent nausea and vomitting. The nurse comes to measure my temperature and says that the X-ray showed everything was Ok and that they will start using the chateter, so I will start getting the IV and chemotherapy through it. I ask to have a shower before the IV and chemo. The head nurse comes and explains why they have put me on a gluten-free diet and what is the hygene procedure for an ICU patient.

Chemotherapy can damage your intestine, and also donor's stem cells, so the diet should be gluten-free, with no bread, rye, oat and wheat, snacks and cookies which contain this type of flour. I am not allowed to eat anything that contains additives , no fresh fruits and vegetables, only cooked or compotes, but not form tin cans because they have bacteria on the edges, but only from small glass jars.

Milk is allowed, but in 2dcl package becaues once it is opened I need to finish it in order to keep bacteria from spreading because of heat. The hygene in the sterile units needs to be kept at the highest level. She brought some dispossable cloths- a washing glove to use when showering. She told me not to use my shampoo and shower gel, but to use the medical soap Manisoft which was properly tested. I should also use it when washing my hands. She also brought Skinman soft N to desinfect hands after washing them.

You can have a shower in the morning because then the water is heated and I need to change my sleeping gown (it must be made from cotton) after showering. The towel I use can't dry in the bathroom because through the drying process the bacteria spread. It should be put in a plastic bag after using it and send it home and wash it. She also gave me Caphsol A and B 15 ml. You mix the two fluids and use it as a mouthwash after eating 4-5 times to desinfect and prevent canker sores to develop.

Breakfast: fried eggs, gluten-free bread and milk. I haven't vomitted or felt nauseated, but I feel dazed. I have a headache so I go to bed so I wouldn't pass out. I sleep for a while and watch "The sea of love" afterwards. The nurse brings luch: soup, rice with peas and roasted pork, boiled cauliflower and gluten-free bread. After lucnh I wash my teeth and rinse using Caohosol A and B. I feel sleepy again. I wake up at 4 and talk to my husband and friends. I still feel dazed but I watch the show "In the name of love" and "IN magazin". I pray to St. Anthony to help me and to give me strenght to go through everything and to for everything to end well.

The nurse brings dinner: gluten-free *pizza*, pasta with meatsauce and cooked cauliflower. I have dinner, watch "The best years of our lives" and fall asleep. I twist and turn throught the night because my back and my right shoulder hurt. I sleep as in a trance. The IV and chemo are plugged in during the day and night. Felling so sleepy is probably on of the sideffect of chemo, because I don't have a fever, I don't vomit or feel nauseated.

September 29th 2010, Wednesday

At 6 a.m. I get up and urinate in a potty in my sterile unit because I drink a lot of fluids, and I recieve a lot of fluids via IV, so they are checking my urine in order to see whether my kidneys are functioning ok. I fall asleep again and wake up at 8. I ask the nurse to unplug the chatether so I could have a shower and wash up, later she plugs it in again.

The nurse brings luch: 3 hot sandwiches made from gluten-free bread with ham and cheese and milk. I eat a sandwich and drink milk, but I can't finish the second one. I feel numbness in my entire body so I lie in my bed and nap.

At 12.30 doctor's round is on the sterile units' hallway. I tell Dr. Labar using the speakerphone the way I feel, and he says that it's normal due to the amount of drugs I am taking and that everything is going to be ok. After the doctor's round I watch "The sea of love". The nurse brings lunch: soup, salted potatoes in chichen fat, cooked and roasted chicken, cooked carrots and gluten-free bread. The bread is really tasty.

After lunch I watch TV and feel sleepy. Thanks to God that I don't have a fever, I am not nauseated and I don't vomit, but I am drowsy, sleepy and have a headache, partialy because I am not alowed to have coffee because of my gastric problems, and so far I have used coffee to regulate my headaches, blood pressure and stool. It is the third day since I've had stool. At 4 p.m. my husband comes to visit me and brings clean and ironed laundry: pyamas, towels, panties and socks. Everything is made from cotton, most of it is white, so the minimal washing temperature is 60 ºC, and for panties, socks and towels 90 ºC.

My husband rinses my clothes in the washingmachine twice and once it's dry, irons it twice on each side. When the clothes is brougt to the hospital, the nurse desinfects it using Incidin Foam spray. Everything needs to be sterile because bacteria spreds diseases and infections.

I am glad to have a chathether, eventhough the insertion was painful. They draw my blood, give me chemo and IV using it, and my transplant will also be done using it. That's the reason why I urinate so frequently, because kidneys need to filter and excrete all that fluid.

Since I can't have any physicl contanct with the visitors I told everybody not to come. We hear each other regulary via mobile. If everything ends well there will be enough time fot visitations later. Afterwards I watch a re-run of "1001 nights". I talk to my friend Ana, watch "IN magazin". Afterwards I pray to St. Anthony, and later have dinner: gluten-free bread, salted potatoes, cooked veal and cooked carrots. After dinner I watch "1001 nights" and "Crazy, confused, normal". I feel sleepy.

DOCTOR:

> *Stem cell transplantation is a procedure in which diseased cells are replaced by healthy bone marrow cells. In the event that the essential thrombocythemia transitions into myelofibrosis, or scarres the bone marrow, the arrival of new, healthy cells causes the dissolution of fibrin and disappearance of scar tissue. Bone marrow is the largest organ in the body, although it doen't have a form of an*

organ. In order to make new healthy cells to work, sick cells need to be destroyed by using cito-static drugs.

At this stage of treatment, before stem cell infusion, the patient is prepared for the procedure. Given that chemotherapy destroys the bone marrow cells, and new cells need time to start working, patients must be kept in isolated conditions in order to prevent severe infections. At the same time, if needed, the patients undergoes transfusions to compensate erythrocytes and platelets.

Transplant procedure is divided into four phases: pre-transplantation phase or preparation phase, the transplantation phase, early post-transplantation phase and late post-transplantation phase. In the first, pre-transplantation stage patients undergo a series of examinations that determine the condition of the body and stop possible sources of infection. In contrast to organ transplantation, where organ match is not essential, when transplanting stem cells, compatibility of genes is the basic postulate. Human leukocyte antigen, HLA is a defense system of the body, with its help the body is able to differ its own cells from other foreign cells, which enables the body to efficently destory bacteria, viruses and fungai because it labels them as foreign cells. There are bilions different combinations of this gene, it is inherited according the Mendel laws of inheritance, a half of the gene is inherited form the mother, and the other half from the father. If siblings inherit the same mother and father's halves, then they can donate their bone marrow to their siblings. If this is not the case, a donor is searched in some of the World Stem Cell Donors Registries.

The author of the book, Ankica Begić, was lucky enough to find a donor. After finding a donor a confirmation procedure which confirms a match is in order where the recipient's and the donor's blood samples are agian tested in order to confirm a match. After that the transplantation procedure may comence. Since the patient recieves IV during the whole procedure it is not practical to have a *standard needle cannula, a short tube in elbow area vein. This type of recieving an IV and medicined is timely limited because some drugs may change the blood flow and can damage the vein and cause thrombosis. Becuase of that central venous catheter is inserted. Central venous catheter is a 50 cm long tube which is, using a special technique and local anesthesia, inserted into a jugelar vein under the collarbone. Such catheter allowes the use of all drugs and IV, the patient arms are not restricted and has a normal range of movements.*

Since the catheter is opens a path way for getting an infection from the skin bacteria, it should be handled with care and it should be cleaned regularly so local or systematic infection could be prevented. Every human being has a specific skin and bowel bacterial flora. It is completely harmless for a healthy person, and is at he same time very dangerous for a sick people who have lost their natural defense system, such as stem cell patients. Because of that such patients are isolated in sterile units where hygenic measures of personal hygene are done on a daily basis alongthogether with recieving medicine for preventing infections.

While the blood type and HLA system are extremely important for organ transplantation, blood type isn't a problem for stem cell transplantation. For example, it is possible transplant stem cells of a donor who has blood type A to a patient whose blood type is B. Plasmapheresis is the procedure that makes this possible, because through it antibodies which attack for example blood type B cells are removed from the blood flow of a patient. However, each person whose blood type is B normally has antibodies that attack blood type A. If we remove the antibodies, the body will accept stem cells of a donor with a different blood type. The main part of the pre-transplantation phase is the application of high doses of cytostatics whose job is to destroy deffective stem cells. In most of the cases cytostatics are applied through IV and as it may cause many side effects, drugs which stop the side effects are prescribed. The most

> *common side effects are nausea and vomitting, which are today successfully controlled with new generation drugs.*
>
> *After completing the pretransplantation phase healthy stem cells are infused through CVC. The day when the mentioned procedure is done is called day 0. Stem cells are in the bone marrow, but they can also be found in peripheral blood. Before, when stem cell transplantation was a new procedure, stem cells were harvested from the pubic bone by drilling into it a few times.*
>
> *The research has shown that stem cells can also be found in peripheral blood by bone marrow stimulation which causes it to release them into the periphery. This can be achieved with a drug called G-CSF (granulocyte growth factor) which, after 3 days of usage, causes cell growth in the periphery.*
>
> *These cells can be separated and stored into a medium which keeps them alive until the transplantation through a siple procedure called leuchepheresis. The procedure is completely painless and it has become the main way of stem cell harvesting.*
>
> *If the cells need to be transported, they are beforehand frozen until they reach liquid nitrogen's temperature, -196 °C.*
>
> *Using the above emntioned procedure, American donor's stem cells were transported into Croatia.*

September 30th 2010, Thursday

It is eight o'clock. The head nurse comes and separates my CVC from the IV and chemo. She informs me that the heating will be down until 9 o'clock, and that I shouldn't shower because I could catch a cold. She says to wash my face only. She tells the same to the rest of the ICU. I tell her that I have my period and that I need to wash up. She brings to sterile buckets of water, one for now and one for later. I pour some warm water in the bowl and wash up. I wash my face and brush my teeth, and after I pray the rosary to the Virgin Mary. My faith makes me stronger and tougher, and I truly do believe. It has been proven that believers tend to deal with bad things in their life more easily. I am dealing with my disease quite good. I don't burden or blame anyone.

Everyone who knows me would say that I am bursting from health. I am happy and I love people. I like to talk, work and laugh. Each cross you bear has a purpose, and each trouble is a blessing in disguise. You need to fight. Every man has a choice: to fight or to give up. I have a saying, as long as I can move my little finger , I will fight. I love life and I want to live.

The nurse comes and changes the bed, and the other nurse brings breakfast: three weiners, two slices of gluten-free bread and a cup of milk. I have apetite despite the chemo. After the cleaning lady comes, cleans and desinfects everything. She does the same every morning. I feel a little bit dazed so I will lie down, because i am sitting at the tabe and writing. I lie down and fall asleep and wake up at 12.

Doctor's round is in front of my door. I tell prfessor Labar that I am a bit dazed, and he says tha it is a normal side effect for this type of chemo. The importan thing is that I don't have a fever and that I don't vomit.

The nurse brings lunch: soup, rice, boiled and roasted chicken, cooked carrot and gluten-free bread. After lunch I feel sleepy again. My friends Anđa and ex-boss Marion call me and we talk and laugh, because I laugh every day, despite all the hardship. I call my husband and tell him what to bring to the hospital.

After i read the "Weaving of life", and later pray the rosary to saint Ante. The nurse comes and I ask her to bring me some hot water so that i could wash up because I have my period, and hot water is available only in the morning.

After the nurse brings the dinner: rice and rosated pork, cooked cauliflower and gluten-free bread. I brush my teeth and gurgle the mouthwash, as I do every night. Ater I watch "1001 night" and "Desperate housewives". I cross myself and fall asleep.

October 1st 2010, Friday

It is eight o'clock. The head nurse comes to draw some blood. i go to the bathroom, have a shower and wash up. I return to my room. The nurse comes and changes the bedsheets. The doctor informs me tah tomorrow I have plasmapheresis, which means that I will be hooked on a machine in order to purify my blood from the antibodies, because I am blood type 0+, and my donor is A+. If they didn't do that, my antibodies could destory the donor's transplant.

I talk to the cleaning lady about winter recipes. I measure my temperature – 36.3 ºC, and the nurse brings lunch: oven-baked gluten-free pancaked with cheese, two slices of bread and a cup of milk. i am sleepy, and the nurses say that that is one of the side effects of Phemiton.

I pray two rounds of the rosary to the Virgin Mary for the deceased. Also every night I pray to the Lord for my donor and ask the Lord to keep him safe and happy. I do the same for his family, if he has one. Eventhough I know nothing about him, I know that he is a good man because he decided to become a donor.

I firmly believe that the transplantation wil be a success, and after two years pass, if he will want to, I would really like to meet him, because now he is my blood brother (or sister). I will try, once my bone marrow kicks in, send him (her) a thank you note through the Croatian register and Ana Rukavina Fundation. Also I want to send him a Christmas card; I don't even know which religion he belongs to if any at all, and whether he celebrates Christmas or not.

I talk to my husband and fall asleep. After the doctor's round comes and the doctor tells me that on Sunday they will do a procedure called plasmapheresis, and afterwards I would get a drug via IV so my bone marrow wouldn't reject the transplant. At 2 o'clock I wake up and have lunch: soup, salted potatoes, steamed hake, something similar to spagetti bolognese, but it smells as fish, bread and 2 dl of juice.

After lunch I talk with my husband, and later I watch TV. I ask the nurse to give me a stool softener and she gives me Portalak. I don't drink coffee because of the chemo and my stomach, so I have no stool. As Izet from the series "Crazy, confused, normal" says: it enters the mouth, but it doesn't leave the body. I have the same problem. I took Portalak, I walk around and wait.

At around 7 I go to the bathroom, finally I have stool and take half of it and put it in a stool container for lab testing. I get an SMS from my sister-in-law from France, and I text her back. Dinner is here: rice, boiled veal, beats sallad, chocolate milk and gluten-free bread. I pray to St. Anthony, and after I watch "1001 night" and "A tourist by accident". I lower my headrest and go to sleep.

October 2nd 2010, Saturday

At six o'clock the nurse wakes me, draws my blood and measures my temperature. I fall asleep and sleep until 8, when the nurse comes and asks me to get up so she could change my bedlinen.

She separates my catheter so that I could move freely. I go to the bathroom, have a shower and wash my face. I still haven't lost my hair from the chemo, but that is the slightest of my problems. If I lose it, I can use wigs and scarves, and soon it will grow back. I dealt with that issue a year ago when the search for a donor was started. professor Pejša, who has been treating me since January 1995, told me that I might not even lose my hair, because the chemo isn't as agressive as in leukemia.

At 4 o'clock my husband comes to visit me, he also always brings clean and freshly ironed clothes, and takes the dirty laundry home. He's got his hands full with my clothes. We talk over the interphone briefly because we talk every day over the phone, even several times a day. We agreed that he would come every third day, when he would bring clean and take dirty laundry, fresh water and teabags.

My husband leaves, I watch a re-run of "Periphery city" and "Crazy, confused, normal". I love to watch sitcoms, even more than once, and now I am in a phase that I watch them for some time, then doze off. At around 7 o'clock I ask the nurse to give me Portalak because I am still bloated. I take it and walk around the room. After 8 o'clock I relieve myslef twice. I write a little bit, and after I pray to St. Anthony. I read "Weaving of life" and feel sleepy.

October 3rd 2010, Sunday

At six the nurse comes and measures my temperature: 36.2º C. After washing up I pray for the deceased. Eventhough I know nothing about my donor I pray for him and his family every day, because he saved my life when he decided to donate his stem cells. I will be forever grateful to him.

At 12.30 the doctor's round comes and the doctor informs me that soon I will be hooked on a machine for blood purufucation (plasmapheresis). She says that after plasmapheresis I will be given a medicine which will stop the transplant to attack my tissue and destroy the remaining healthy tissue. She also tells me the drug's side effects: fever, chills, vomiting,... She says that because I am a strong person that I may not even experience the side effects. The nurse brings lunch: soup, chicken, salted potatoes, beats and bread. I eat everything, brush my teeth, take my medicine, write a bit and wait.

At 2.30 the technician brings the plasmapheresis machine. He sets everything and the filtration begins. I lie in bed and all the tubes are hooked to the chateter. My blood goes through those tubes and it is separated into two bags, one bag contains antibodies which are yellow. I feel normal. My hand is a bit cold. I tell jokes and we laugh. At 5.30 the technician unplugs the machine and the purification is done.

Tomorrow they will make some blood tests to see whether all antibodies were destroyed with the procedure. The nurse gives me chemo, speeds up the drip and gives me drugs which should stop the side effects.

At 6.30 I am nauseated and feel the chills going through my body. The nurse brings a sandwich, but I can hardly move. I shake, vomit, and my temperature rises. At one moment I was vomitting so hard that I peed myself. I felt embarrased and I apologized but the nurses said it was normal and that I had nothing to be ashamed of. When my temperatue rose to 39.7 º C the nurse gave me Panadol and after a while it started to drop. The shivers and nausea ened and I finally fall asleep. At 1 a.m. I wake up all sweaty and call the nurses to change me and my bed. I am helpless because the fever and vomitiing completely drained me.

October 4th 2010, Monday

At 8.30 the nurse comes to my room, separated mu chatater and I shower. I feel exhausted and I can barely stay upright, but I know I can't let go and give in. I shower but I feel dizzy and the nurse is near in case I faint.

The nurse brings breakfast: weiners, a cup of warm milk and bread. I don't feel like eating, but I know I must eat. After breakfast I pray. I lie doen, my head is throbbing so I ask the nurse for a painkiller. She gives me Tramal via IV and not long after I fall asleep. At 1.30 the nurse brings lunch: cauliflower, soup, rice, roasted chicken and bread. I eat everything but meat. I keep lying in bed as if I am in a trance. I am extremely exhausted and everything hurts.

I drink a lot of fluids and that is good. I had 3 cups of tea and 3 half a litre bottles of Jana. So all in all 3 litres of fluids plus the IV. The nurse brings dinner: polenta, veal stakes and beats. I force myslef to eat a little bit of polenta and beats. I take my medication, brush my teeth and gurgle mouthwash. I pray and measure my temperature: 38 º C.

My friend Ana phones and tells me to go back to sleep because I will need the energy for the transplantation. I sleep restlessly. My chest hurts when I breathe and move. The nurse calls the on call doctor, he does EKG, listens my breathing and gives me an antibiotic via IV. After the drug started working I felt better and fell asleep.

October 5th 2010, Tuesday

At 7.30 the nurse comes to draw my blood and meausers my temperature: 36.9 º C. My blood pressure is 110 / 70. She detaches the chateter and I go to the bathroom to wash up. I return to bed and the nurse brings breakfast: 2 eggs sunny side up, a cup of warm milk and bread. I ate everything, took my medicine and brushed my teeth. Soon after the shivers and nausea started. My temperature rose to 38.5 º C, and then to 39 º C. I'm exhausted.

The doctor's round comes and Dr Mikulić asks me where did ,y optimisim disappear. I tell her that optimisim is here but the strenght is gone. The nurse brings luch: soup, rice with beans, roasted pork, beats and bread. I eat the soup, a little bit of rice and beat. I have to eat so my immune system wouldn't drop. I fall asleep, sweat and after I wake up my fever is gone and everything clears up.

This morning I phoned my husband to bring Melem because my mouth is all dried up and crackled from the fever. I thought he would come at 6, during the visitation time, but he came around 10. The nurse tells me that I have a really good husband who I need to cherish and keep. I pray to St. Anthony to give me strenght so I would be ready for the transplantation and so that everything would end well.

The nurse brings dinner: spagetti bolognese, cauliflower sallad, bread and 2 dl of apple juice. I eat everything except for bread, and I flush my medicine with apple juice. I brush my teeth, gurgle some mouthwash and watch "1001 night" and "Kitchen nightmares". I feel sleepy and hope that this night will be peaceful and that I will not have a high temperature.

October 6th 2010, Wednesday

At 7.30 the nurse comes and detaches the chateter. In the bathroom I wash my hair but while doing it I have to sit on the toilet because of exhaustion, I shower and wash up. I get dressed, sit on the bed and pray. Doctor's round comes and Dr Mikulić asks me how I feel and I say "as a new woman". Everyone is happy that I am feeling better. The nurse brings lunch: 2 hot sandwiches, jelly, cheese spread, bread and 2 cups of warm milk.

The cleaning lady comes and we talk, after I write this diary in a notebook so I wouldn't loose the papers. I will type everyting once I feel better. As soon as i woke up this morning I called my husband to tell him that I didn't have a fever and that I didn't vomit. He says: "Thank you Good".

Today an American doctor should arrive with the transplant. Usually, our young doctors go to pick up the transplant to the state in which the donor is, but this time the doctor from the USA will bring the transplant since I am the first patient form Croatia to recieve a transplant from the American register. Doctor's round comes with Dr Labar in charge.

Professor Labar tells me that I had a normal reaction to the drug and that tomorrow the doctor from the USA will bring the transplant. The transplantation is tomorrow. Prof Labar says that I will be a new person in 3 weeks time.

I watch "Dnevnik" on HRT 1 and "The sea of love". The nurse brings lunch: soup, steamed fish, cooked Swiss chard and bread. I eat everything except for bread. I take my medication, brush my teeth and go to sleep. I wake up at 4, talk to my husband. My friends call me: Jasna, Anđa and Marion. We talk and laugh. In the mean time I recieved two bags of 0+ erythrocytes because the donor is A- blood type. After the transplantation, or in other words 3 months after (the time needed for losing my erythrocytes) I will lose my blood type and get the donor's blood type.

I need to have a good night sleep because tomorrow is an important day, but at around 10 p.m. the chills and the fever start. I have the chills until midnight. I ask the nurse to give me extra blankets because I am cold. I have a very bad fever - 39 º C. At around 1 a.m. the nurse phones a doctor on the ER because I am bloated and I have a stomachache. The doctor comes, checks my stomach and says that my abdomena is soft. He gives me Controloc and Panadon to lower my temperature via IV so I wouldn't vomit. I have stomachache and temperature until 3 a.m. and then I finaly fall asleep.

The transplantation

October 7th 2010, Thursday, the day of the transplantation

Today is a big day for me, I will receive blood-forming stem cells from my donor. At 7.30 the nurse comes to change linens, and my head is throbbing. I slept poorly and thinking about the plane in which the doctor will arrive.

I ask the nurse to detach the catheter and so I could take a shower, and she says to lie down because at 10 I need to get another drug via IV before transplantation. I ask whether the American doctor has arrived and brought the transplant. She says that she has arrived and that she is resting at the hotel adjacent to the hospital. At that moment, all my worries and problems disappeared.

The head nurse tells me to wash using the sterile basin. The cleaning lady tidies the bathroom, wipes the floor and waits with me for them to bring the transplantat. I'm very excited and the nurses and the cleaning lady say they are also excited.

At 10.30 they bring the first bag of plasma. The head nurse hooks it to stand, and the procedure is the same as in blood transfusion, but the drip must be faster. They often check my pressure and temperature. After receiving the first bag I feel chills. They give me an IV and wait a little. The temperatures rises to 37.7 º C, but the pressure is good. We continue with the second bag and it quickly runs out - the transplantation is done. One bag contained 341 ml, and the other one 245 ml. So all together 586 ml of these precious blood-forming stem cells that will, if God allows it, save my life.

At this point no one is happier than me. I won the lottery, not money, but something much more valuable, and that's life. I thank God, my donor, an unknown American, and Mrs. Marija Rukavina who established the foundation.

The nurse brings lunch: soup, stew with polenta, beets and bread. I eat soup, polenta and beets, but I can't eat the bread and meat. Thanks to God, I do not have a temperature. Doctor's round comes and the doctor asks me how I feel. I say I'm fine, I'm just bloated because I had had stool from Saturday. She says she would give me a laxative and that I got a good transplant, full of blood-forming stem cells from a young, healthy man, and that everything should end well.

I thank her, and take the laxative and soon go to the toilet. It wasn't much so I ask the nurse to give me more laxative. I lie down in bed and watch "Dona Barbara" and "In the Name of Love". I send text messages to my loved ones saying that the transplantation was a success. I brush my teeth and gurgle some moutwash, and then watch "1001 Night" and "Desperate Housewives". I'm getting sleepy. I pray to God that the night passes without fever.

October 8th 2010, Friday, the first anniversary of my mother's death

At 6.00 the nurse comes to draw my blood and meausers my temperature: 36.5 º C. I pray to the Virgin Mary for the deceased and for my donor. Around 8 the nurse comes to change the bed. She detaches the catheter and I take a shower, and I also need to clipp my nails and wax.

The nurse brings breakfast: baked gluten-free pancakes with cheese and a cup of warm milk. I eat everything, and then call my husband and ask him to light a candle at 8.20 because today is the first anniversary of my mother's death. It's very hard not to cry but I control myself because that could trigger the temperature.

I hold the rosary in my hand, looking out the window at the sky and I feel like she is her with me, keeping me safe, protecting me and keeping me from crying. I had my transplantation on the day she died. Not a day passes that I don't think of her. After breakfast, I fall asleep and the doctor's round wakes me up.

Today Dr. Kinda asked me how I was feeling. I tell her that I'm okay. She says that I the transplantation was OK and that everything will be fine. I wanted to thank her for everything she has done for me, but I fall asleep from Phemitona.

At 11.45 I the nurse wakes me to draw blood and to take a urine sample. My cellrings. Mrs. Marija Rukavina is calling me. Although when it comes to age, she can't be my mom, I still ooke at her as my mom. She tells me that not having a fever is a good sign, and that my disease is not malignant, and therefore the chemo was milder and targeted. She also says that if you get a fever, diarrhea, pneumonia, skin rashes and other side effects that it's all normal and will pass, and that I'm going to be fine.

I thank her and think how I could repay her if I survive. I had the idea of volunteering at the Ana Rukavina Foundation. Everything works so well because Mrs. Marija is the financial director of the Foundation and controls every dollar and cent, organizes and arranges meetings with donors, charity concerts and everything else. Of course, Dr. Mirando Mrsić is an important link in this chain. He is the medical director of the Foundation, controls the work of the Foundation in KBC rebro: umbilical chord blood bank, typisation center, the registry and everything connected with the Foundation in the hospital.I want to thank them on behalf of all the people who already had or will have a transplantation.

The nurse brings lunch: soup, boiled potatoes in gravy, cooked chicken, beetroot and bread. I eat everything except for meat and bread, take drugs and brush my teeth. As of yesterday, since the transplantation, they took me of some drugs. Now I take Peptoran 2 x 1 tablets, 2 x 200 Phemiton mg, Virolex 3 x 400 mg, syrup Noxofil 4 x 5 ml and a new drug Medazol 3 x 1 tablet, and the rest I take via IV. I lie in bed and as usual and Phemintona makes me sleepy. I drink plenty of water and tea and receiving IV so I urinate often. I watch "Dona Barbara" for a while and then sleep for a while.

October 9th 2010, Saturday

Thank God, another night passed peacefully and without fever. At 6.00 the nurse comes to draw my blood and meausers my temperature: 36.2 º C, and I still feel sleepy. Around nine the nurse form the day shift comes and changes the bed, removes my catheter and I take a shower in the bathroom. I pray to the Virgin Mary for the deceased.

The nurse brings breakfast: two hot sandwiches and a cup of warm milk. I ask an extra cup of milk. I do not know the ingredients of gluten-free flour, but it is much more satiating than other types of bread. After breakfast, I pray for the dead, for thmyeir donor and for all the sick in sterile units. I constantly feel sleepy.

The nurse brings lunch: a tasty stew with vegetables (without noodles), cooked veal and bread. I eat soup and bread, but I can't eat meat. I lie in bed and I'd like to type the diary in Word on my computer, but I ask the doctor if I am alowed to strain. I'll wait until Monday because of the long weekend and the only doctor in hospital is the attending physician. At 4 my husband comes to visit me, he brings clean and takes the dirty laundry.

About 6 I feel nausea and I vomit, and my head is throbbing. The nurse gives me some painkillers via IV. I turn off the TV and put the cover over my head, to be in the dark. under the cover I pray to St Anthony. The nurse says that this is a side effect of the drug which helps my bone marrow to accept the transplant. At around 9.30 I feel something warm on the pillow, blood from my left nostril. I call the nurse, and she brings me cotton tampons. I put them in the nostril, changing them four or five times until at about 11 the bleeding finally stops. My head stopped hurting and I turn the TV on and I watch the movie "Nomad". At 1 a.m. I turn the TV off and go to sleep.

October 10th 2010, Sunday

At 6.00 the nurse comes to draw my blood. Around 9.00 the nurse from the day shift comes to change the bed and detach the catheter so I could take a shower. Breakfast: baked pancakes with cheese and tea. I eat everything, but I crave for something sweet and I find some honey in the cupboard and put it on bread and eat it with tea. I take drugs, and then pray the rosary to the Mother of God. After I watch TV and sleep.

The doctor's round comes and asks me how I am. I say I'm fine, except for the morning sickness. He says that this is normal. Again I fall asleep. The nurse wakes me up because she brought lunch: soup, boiled potatoes in gravy, roast chicken, beetroot and bread. I eat soup, potatoes and beets.

I watch "Dream team" on RTL and go back to sleep. At 6.20the nurse wakes me up because she brought dinner: two hot sandwiches with ham and cheese and 2 dl of Vindija juice. I remove the top slice form each sandwich because it is very satiating, and eat the rest. I watch "Periphery City" and "The best dad" and then I fall asleep. I wake up at 3 a.m. and can't fall asleep until 4 a.m. because I slept during the day.

I have no fear and I believe that my bone marrow will start working within the first week of the procedure, that I will get better and that I will volunteer in the Ana Rukavina Foundation and will help anyone who needs my help.

October 11th 2010, Monday

At 6.00 the nurse comes to draw my blood from the catheter. She measures my temperature: 36.2 º C. I go back to sleep until 8.30. The nurse comes to change the bed. She detaches the catheter so I could shower, wash my hair, clipped and wax my armpits and legs. I am still not losing my hair. I talk with my husband, say something stupid so he would laugh and not worry whether my bone marrow will accept the transplant.

Breakfast: four hot dogs, milk and bread. The doctor's round comes and asks me how I am. I say I'm fine, except for the morning sickness. I ask Dr. Marta when the first leukocytes will appear, and she looks at the results and says that I already have 2.0 leukocytes and that it's too early and impossible. She goes to check if they made a mistake in the laboratory.

I lowatch "Sea of Love". The nurse brings lunch: soup, polenta, boiled chicken, cauliflower and carrots salad and bread. I eat soup, polenta and salad, but leave the meat. I take drugs, brush my teeth, I watch "Dona Barbara" and fall asleep. I sleep all afternoon until 6.30. The nurse wakes me up and measures my temperature. The temperature is the same, 36.2 º C. Another nurse brought dinner: risotto with chicken, beetroot and bread.

I talk with my husband to cheer him up a bit, and then I watch "1001 Night", "Crazy, confused, normal" and the movie "To death and back." I fall asleep after midnight.

<u>October 12th 2010, Tuesday</u>

At 6.00 the nurse comes to draw my blood and to clean the catheter.. I measure my temperature: 36.2 º C. Then I go back to sleep until 8.30. The nurse from the day shift again draws blood my blood. She detaches my catheter. I take a shower and then pray the Rosary to the Mother of God to grant me health, for my bone marrow to accept the transplant. I also pray for everyone in sterile units to help them and ease their pain. God's power the the most powerful thing in the world. I believe, and I have experienced wonders twice. The first time was when my spleen burst and the doctor told me that I had 10% chances to survive. The second time was when the first donor from the American Registry got removed, and then they found another one.

The nurse brings breakfast: fried eggs, milk and gluten-free bread. I like it and I eat everything, and then watch "Magic". I get a call from Marion. She is a wealthy woman, but still simple, standing with both feet firmly on the ground, she understands everything and works a lot. She's brave and strong and never gives up. If man has an idea of failure in his mind, he will never succeed.

I watch "Decorating with Debbie Travis" on HTV1. Doctor's round comes and they ask me whether my gallbladder was taken out last year when they took my spleen out. I tell them that I don't know, if they did, nobody told me about it. They found in my medical history that they took it out because it was filled with stones.

I ask the doctor for the WBC (white blood cells), and she says that yesterday they were at 2.0 and that now they are at 1.1 and that they are in the stage of decline, to zero, and then the phase of growth will come. I can feel that something good is happening inside my body. I remember when I had gene mutation that my good friend Zvjezdana sent my medical documentation to profesor Ivan Đikić and asked him for advice. Among other things, professor Đikić said that listening to your body is very important, because it is the best controller. If you feel pain when you do something, stop immediately, because it is a warning that you need to change your diet, not to strain.

The nurse brings lunch: soup, risk peas, roast pork, beetroot and bread. I eat soup, rice with peas and beetroot, but I can't eat meat and bread. I take my drugs, brush my teeth and watch "Sea of Love". Then I talk to my husband and ask him to buy me chocolate "Animal Kingdom" because I want to eat something sweet. The head nurse said that only those chocolates are gluten-free and that the 15 g will satisfies my cravings for sweets. I receive a lot of glucose via IV, so I need to be careful about my sugar levels.

I am a disciplined patient, I listen and do what they say. I came to hospital to treat myself, and not to fool around. My treatment costs a lot of money, effort and sacrifice. Everybody is giving 100%, from professor Labar to the cleaning ladies. It'd be rude and irresponsible if I did not listen.

At 1:45 I got a call from Robert Zuber, a journalist on HRT, regarding the search for my biological family. i tell him that I am on KMC Rebro and give him information about myself and my mom and what she told me about my father.

October 13th 2010, Wednesday

I get up at 6.20 and at 7.30 I sit at the table, turn on the computer and type all the notes for the first time after the transplantation.

At 8.20 the doctor comes and says that she has arranged an ultrassound of the liver and abdomen for tomorrow. The nurse brings breakfast: two hot sandwiches and two cups of warm milk, 2 dl.

The cleaning lady comes, and I go to bed so she could mop the floor and disinfect it. We talk, I tell some

jokes and we laugh to tears. Around 11.30 I feel slight fatigue and go to lie down. I fall asleep, and the nurse wakes me up at 1.30 because she brought lunch: soup, a bag of gluten-free corn flakes, rice, meat, bread and beetroot. I ate only two bowls of soups in which I put a lot of cereal and beetroot. It has been a week since I ate meat. I can eat hot dogs, salami sandwich and spaghetti bolognese, but I can't eat a normal piece of meat. Maybe because minced meat has a lot of spices, so it looses the smell.

After dinner I watch "1001 Night" and "Crazy, confused, normal". I laugh to tears. My husband brought all DVDs: "Crazy, confused, normal", "Mr. Bean", "Audition" and "Good night Croatia". When I feel bad I watch some of it, laugh and instantly feel better. I wanted to watch "Periphery City", but I am sleepy, so I will watch a rerun tomorrow.

October 14th 2010, Thursday

I sit at the table and transcre the notebook into my computer. The nurse brings breakfast: two cups of milk, two sausages and bread. I eat the sausages, and put gluten-free corn flakes from yesterday into the milk. I watch "Magic" and after fall asleep. The room is cold. The handymen turned off the heating because they are connecting it to the new building. The head nurse is going from room to room and telling us to stay in bed so that we would not catch a cold. I lie in bed all day long and watch TV shows. At 6.00 I turn the TV off and pray to St Anthony.

The nurse brings dinner: a tasty stew of potatoes, carrots and cauliflower with chopped chicken and bread. I eat vegetables and soup, and leave the meat.

I watch "Dinner for 5", "1001 Night" and "Desperate Housewives." The nurse comes and asks if I'm cold, because the handymen didn't manage to complete the work on the heating system. I tell her that my head is cold so she gives me a green cap, the one surgeons wear. I put it on my head and it warms me up. At 11 p.m. go to sleep.

October 15th 2010, Friday

At 6.00 the nurse comes to clean the chateter so wecould continue with therapy. Measure of temperature: 36.2 º C. I raise the head reast and get under the quilt, because I am cold and pray for the deceased. One doesn't pray to God while lying down, unless someone is very sick like me like the day when I had a 39.7 º C temperature and vomited, I was so exhausted that I couldn't sit.

The head nurse comes and says that no one is to take a shower and go out of bed. I watch "Good morning, Croatia", and then nurse brings breakfast: two sticks of butter, two packets of jam, four slices of bread and two cups of milk. I use one butter and one jam on two slices of bread and put aside the rest for later. I drink milk, then drugs, brush my teeth and watch "Magic".

I feel that it is warmer in the room. The head nurse calls and says they connected the heating, but not hot water. I wash my face, get back into bed and watch "Oprah" and fall asleep. I wake up at 12.30. The nurse brings lunch: soup and cooked hake. I eat everything except the bread, because I can eat fish. I take the drugs, brush my teeth and I write in my notebook.

My firend Jasna calls, she worries when she doesn't hear from me. I tell her I am ok and not to worry because bad news travel fast.

At 4.00 my husband comes and brings me clean underwear and chocolates "Animal Kingdom". We talk and laugh, and I, as always, try to make him and anyone who calls me laugh.

The nurse brings dinner: gluten-free spaghetti Bolognese, carrot and cauliflower salad and bread. I eat a little. The doctor says it's normal because after transplantation and drugs your taste can change and so does the need for some food.

Nurse Diana is alone in the night shift and tells me not to be angry if she doesn't come until tomorrow at 5:30 to switch my therapy and take a blood sample. I tell her that she may come whenever she wants to. At night the nurses are busy because the temperature rises during the night. There are severely ill nine people in nine sterile units. Usually tere are two nurses per shift but the other one couldn't come today. As soon as I fell asleep, the bell wakes me and it continues like this throught the night. Every half an hour a doctor from the ER comes and examines patients, and nurse Diana takes them do lungs X-ray. Those who have had transplants are in the greatest danger to catch pneumonia and sepsis. This night nurse Diana earned her monthly sallary.

October 16th 2010, Saturday

The nurse from the day shift wakes me, she came to change the bedding. She detaches the catheter and I go into the bathroom to take a shower and do facial hygiene. The nurse brings breakfast: three hot sandwiches with ham and cheese and two cups of warm milk. I drink milk drink and a remove the top slice from the sandwich because it's too much. I still get double portions eventhough I told them to cancel it until my nausea stops. Still I eat everything, except for meat and bread. I joke, and I say that I am not pregnant, but I have pregnancy symptoms.

Severe nausea and the nurse gives my anti-nausea medication via IV. I watch television, I don't feel like transcribing my notes in the computer.

October 17th 2010, Sunday

IAt 6.00 the nurse from the night shift comes to draw my blood because during the wwekend the blood is drawn at 6.00, and during the week at 7.30. I wake up and I think I'll go back to sleep, but I can't. I get up and pray for the dead, for my children's and husband's health, who has his hands full. He washes and irons my clother separately, and in adidtion to this, he cooks, washes and irons the boys' clother, eventhough I taugh them to do it on their own before I got sick. They are all over the place, but they still have to tidy their rooms.

The nurse brings breakfast: baked gluten-free pancakes with cheese and hot milk. I eat as twice as much and I do not have nausea until lunch. Meatless meal suits me.

The cleaning lady comes, we talkm and I read "The weaving of Life". At 4.15 my husband and my son Igor come, who arrived today from Baska, where he works during the season. I was very happy because I have not seen him since August 10th, when my husband and I were with him at sea. Alen is very sensitive, but he keeps it to himself. When my spleen ruptured, he almost fainted during the visitation time. Every day we talk on the phone. He asks me how I am and what I need, and gives money to my husband to buy things for me.

The nurse brings dinner: moussaka, salad, cauliflower, chocolate milk and bread. I eat cauliflower and potatoes, but not the meat.

I take my drugs, brush my teeth, use mouthwash, and then watch "Periphery City" and the psychological thriller "Buick Riviera". I"Periphery City" made me laugh, the film made me sad.

The movie takes place in America, and the main actors are Leon Lučev who plays Vuk, a Serb from Doboj and Slavko Stimac, who plays Hasan a Muslim from Sarajevo. Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo and Vojvodina are, unfortunately, full of such sad storiesa lot. The point of the whole movie in the saying of a Bosnian writer Mesa Selimovic, who said: "Who gets eneveloped in hate, it destroys them."

Many who are reading this, will be pose a question about my right to bring this up. I have a family of mixed marriages. They have suffered all sorts of things, and our wedding and children's godfather was killed in Manjača. My family fled, but I can not hate, nor do they hate.

If a man is unable to bear this burden on his soul, he should seek a professional help, so that things wouldn't get out of control and that he would take justice in his hands. Revenge may seem as a good sollution to the problem at a heated moment, but if you want to be happy, revenge is not the answer.

No one is to blame, and as long as one searches for a person to blame, they will remain unhappy. It is in human nature to make errors, and it is in the God's nature to forgive.

I'm going to sleep.

October 18th 2010, Monday

At 6.00 the nurse comes to measure my temperature: 36.2 ° C. She asks me to turn on my back so she could clean the catheter. I ask her to detach the catheter and go to the bathroom. Ever since I was in the hospital, I wash my hair, clip my nails and wax armpits and legs on Mondays. Afterwards I pray.

At 7.30 the head nurse comes to draw my blood and asks me how I am. I tell her that I'm good, the only thing is that I feel nauseated when eating meat. I ask her to leave meat out of my menu and to change it with soy. She says that she will immediately do it and that there is no need for me to suffer because of food. I am very grateful.

I am writing in my notebook, and then the nurse comes and brings breakfast gluten-free bread, two cups of milk and Dukat dairy spread. I eat with delight because there is no meat. The head nurse comes with a scale, for me to weigh. I weigh 65 kg, which means that I regained 1kg.

At 10.30 comes Dr Labar comes with the doctors' round. I am very happy to see him, and he tells me the good news. He shows me the thumb up sign and says that the WBC began to rise, which means that the core has accepted the transplant and it is slowly producing blood-forming stem cells. If the situation doesn't change for worse I will be released home on Friday. I was the happiest person alive, I felt like I was reborn!

I watch "Magic" and read "The Weaving of Life" and think about my future. Up to the transplantation I did a lot of physical hard work, and now that is not an option because I will listen to the doctors, and avoid hard work for at least a year, I will be disciplined for my own good. I will have to avoid people contact because of the flu and other viruses and infections, and during the flu season I will not be able to have visitors. I hope my family and friends will understand. A lot of effort and money was put in this transplant, so it would be foolish not to act responsibly.

I'll send my husband to the foreign languages school "Sputnik" in Krajiška 27, to buy books for the fifth and sixth level of Russian. I will teach myself. I finished the first and the second level in this language school, and then when the donor seeking process started i learned it on my own and finished the the third and fourth level. If everything ends well I hope that knowing Russian will help me in the future.

Learning helps me not to think about the disease because keeping busy is the best cure for any disease. The worst thing is to give up, lie down, feel sorry for yourself and think that doctors will fight for you.

October 19th 2010, Tuesday

Since professor Labar told me the good news about my WBC yesterday I had problems with sleeping because of the excitement. I fell asleep at 11 p.m. and woke up at 2 a.m., when the nurse came into the room. The nurses monitor the patients at night, control the therapy and watch us. I wonder how everything is, and she asks me if I want to take any sleeping pills becasue it is 2 a.m. I tell her that I don't want anything and that I have never taken a sleeping pill.

I turn my phone on and see that it's 3 o'clock in the morning, and I still can't sleep. I turn the TV on and watch "Married With Children" and "Our little clinic." About 5 a.m. I fall asleep and wake up at 6, when the nurse enters the room. She measures my temperature: 36.2 º C. At 7.00 I ring the bell so she would detach the chateter so I could shower. After I pray for the deceased, all the people in the sterile units and my donor, because now the nurses are changing shifts and I need peace and quiet when praying.

Around 8 the nurse comes to change the bed. I write a bit, and then I watch "Magic". The nurse brings breakfast: four eggs sunny side up, two cups of milk and four slices of bread. Dr. Mikulic and the doctors' round come and she says that the leukocytes are slowly growing and soon I can go home if they continue to grow like this. Because of the news I am the happiest person alive. I lie and watch "Sea of Love" and I think of falling asleep because I slept only four hours, but because of the excitement I can't sleep.

The nurse brings lunch: soup, risk peas, boiled beef, beetroot and bread. I wrap meat in foil and put it away, and I eat the rest. I watch "The Best Years" and "Dona Barbara". At 4 my husband comes and brings what I ordered, and takes the dirty laundry. We talk, and I joke and tell him that the "substitute" wives are out of the picture and that if he has any plans with them he needs to do it before I get home.

I tell him that they told me that this week I will start losing my hair and that I will chose a blond wig. All the girls he dated before me were blond and brunette and he married a black haired woman, so I will remind him of his young days with a blond wig. He laughs and says that he is never bored around me, not even in hospital. He leaves. I send 30 text messages to relatives and dear ones to tell them the good news, and I call Ana, Jasna, Ankica and Anđa. They are all very happy and proud of me.

There is an old proverb: "Gold is tested by fire, a friend by misfortune" and it's the truth.

October 20th 2010, Wednesday

The nurse comes at 6.00 and measures my temperature. I wake up and pray the rosary to the Mother of God, and 7.30 the nurse comes to draw my blood. She detaches the catheter and I take a shower. I notice a lot of hair on the pillow. I pick up and throw it in the toilet so it wouldn't get scattered around the room. If it keeps falling during the day and night I will ask the nurse to shave my head.

I am kidding with husband that now I can be blonde, brown or black haird. Today is the 25th day since my first chemotherapy and a month since I have been in hospital. The time passed quickly. I wouldn't change a thing, not even the three nights I had a fever, chills and nausea.

People do not know, when they are healthy, to appreciate life and be happy. They chase money, don't have time for each other, are angry and bitter at each other. The proverb says: "A healthy person has a thousand wishes, and a sick only one. " This desire is health, and I'm glad God gave me a second chance for life. If the transplant is successful, I will completely change my life style and set priorities, because so far I have always put myself on the last place.

About 11.00 the doctors' round comes and the doctor says the leukocytes have decreased slightly, and that it may be so for two reasons. One reason is the usual fluctuations, and the other is a possible error in the laboratory considering I feel good and, except nausea, I have no other side effects.

Shealso tells me that I'm being prepared for my visit home and that I will take the drug cyclosporine, which I got via the IV orally. It is a drug that is given so that the body would accepts the transplant. I'm not discouraged because I feel fine. During the day I can't sleep, and while I had no leukocytes, or while they were in decline, I just slept.

At 4.05 my friend Ana comes and brings water, tea, chocolate, paper hand towels and toilet paper. The sterile unite has everything, but since I wash my hands very often I need extra paper towels. Ana and I keep no secrets from each other. In difficult moments she is was always a shoulder to cry on, and talking to her is always reassuring. Ana and I have known each other since 1994. because our kids went together in class.

For an hour she stood in front of sterile unit and we talked and laughed. She tells me I look good, I tell her I am not exhausted, and I feel good.

After the visit I pray to St. Anthony, and then write. The nurse brings dinner: meat, polenta with sauce, cauliflower salad, vanilla pudding and bread. I eat only pudding and cauliflower. I'm hungry and I remember that I have butter and jam in the cupboard. I spread butter and jam over two slices of bread and eat them with delight.

October 21th 2010, Thursday

I woke up at 6. The nurse comes to change my therapy, and measures my temperature: 36.2 º C. Thanks to God, I haven't had a fever or any other side effects since the transplantation. I pray for the deceased and later I write in my notebook. At 7.30 the nurse comes to draw my blood and removes the catheter and I go to take a shower. After showering I return to the room and write.

I watch "Magic". The nurse brings breakfast: four hot dogs, two cups of warm milk and bread. I eat everything with pleasure.

I call the nurse to boil sterile water for tea and tell her that my husband will come to pick up the dirty laundry, after the visitation time. I'll prepare everything and when he rings the bell, all she needs to do is give the laundry to him. It is difficult to dry clothes because the weather is bad and my clothes are washed separately and twice. So he comes every second day.

Today has been 15 days since transplantation, and slowly my core is starting to work, for the fifth day already. No one is happier than me. Dear God has given me a second chance to live.

I read "Weaving of Life" and think how Mirjana Krizmanic wrote this book well. Everyone should work on themselves and change positively. When you make the pro-positive changes and take a certain attitude, then others see us differently.

I watch "Sea of Love", and at 1.30 the nurse comes to pick me up and take me to abdominal ultrasound. Thanks to God, the liver, gallbladder, bile ducts, pancreas and the right kidney are within the limits of normal, and the left kidney has moved somewhere and they haven't found it, but I believe it is also OK. All my organs moved a bit since my spleen was taken out.

At 2.15 I returned to the sterile unit. Lunch is waiting for me. I wash my hands, take off the mask and eat. Lunch: soup, rice, boiled beef, beetroot and bread.

I ask the nurse to call the doctor so I could ask her about the state of leukocytes, because the doctors' rounds was here when I had my ultrasound done. The doctor explained to me that leukocyte number is increasing and decreasing and that is normal. She tells me that today their count is 1.1. I'm very happy and excited because it means that these blood-forming stem cells are fighting and producing something.

I call my husband, Jasna, Ana, Ankica, Marion and other people who call me regularly and sen me text messages. Anđa calles me and I tell her I will get better because I don't want her to marry my husband. She laughs and I add if she had any plans with him she needs to use him while I(m still in hospital.

<u>October 22nd 2010, Friday</u>

I woke up at 3.30 a.m. and couldn't fall asleep. I turn on the TV and watch a film about car races, and after the movie I watch "8th floor ", with Daniela. They are talking about women suffering from breast cancer. The good thing is the guests were celebrities and they talked so openly about their experience.

It is also good to speak publicly about this disease and to know that there are associations which can give you advice and help you. The disease can be discovered on time by self-examination, mammography and ultrasound. If it is discovered in its early stage it can be cured. Psychological support is important in such malignant diseases. My friend Ana is my best psychiatrist, and support my family and friends give me provides me with the strength to fight and heal.

At 7.30 the nurse comes to draw my blood, she removes the catheter and I take a shower. It is quite cold in the sterile unit, but there is hot water and hygiene is extremely important. The nurse brings breakfast: baked pancakes with cheese and tea. Two small pancakes aren't enough for me, so I think I'm going to eat a lot for lunch.

The nurse comes to inspect the catheter and attach it, and later the doctor comes with the doctors' round. She tells me that leukocytes are now at 0.8. The nuber is falling and rising but that is normal after the transplantation. I'm not worried because I feel good. I tell to the doctor that I would like to stay in hospital until November 2nd because that is when they should do the first sterile punction, 25 days after the transplantation.

I write, and then I watch "Sea of Love". The nurse brings lunch: soup, salted potatoes with a little bit of oil and parsley, two hamburger steaks, beetroot and bread. I watch "Checked" and the controversial Italian doctor who cures cancer with soda. I can not believe such nonsense come to someones mind.

Three years ago when my spleen began to grow, and platelet decline, I sought the help of a herbalist. I went to Prijedor in Bosnia and Herzegovina to one herbalist to get some herbal medicines. She helped my mom and I heard she heald many, butshe didn't have a cure for my disease. She gave me medicine in bottles, said to keep them in the fridge, drink everything and then do blood tests. I did not feel better, spleen grew, and platelets kept falling. It was a waste of money and time.

One day at MC Dubrava I had a consultation wit prof Kušec instead of with prof Pejša. We had a long talk. I showed him the pills Megamin. He told me patients paid from 500 to 1000 euros under the counter, they overdosed and died. When medicine and scientists in collaboration with the pharmacy have still not managed to make a drug for the treatment of fibrosis, neither can a layman. From then on I listen to doctors and drink only those drugs that they prescribe.

October 23rd 2010, Saturday

At 6.00 the nurse draws my blood, she detaches the catheter and tells me that she will not immediately connect it because they have reduced the infusion. Yesterday I had two liters, and today one. As I am recovering quickly and soon I'm going home, they want to reduce venous therapy, and increase tablet treatment. This one liter infusion is given to maintain the catheter because they use it to draw blood. They also told me to pee in the bathrom, using the toilet and not wetting pan, because they made sure that I drank plenty of fluids, 2.5 l per day (2 liters of tea and ″ l of water), and thus purify the liver and kidneys.

First I pray to the Mother of God and then I shower. After I write and wait for breakfast. Yesterday I ate well, but got hungry. The nausea stopped because now I get food without meat. The nurse changed the bed. I tell her how my hair is falling and is everywhere. She says that are waiting for a barber to come. I ask whether my husband can bring an electrical cutter so I could shave my head myself in the bathroom.

She says that it is ok and that she will shave me. I call my husband, and he says he will take it apart, clean it with alcohol and bring it during the visiting hours. Last night I had a headache, it was so bad I couldn't move. Everything hurt even my hair, and hair can't hurt. Probably the root was dying out. In the morning my pillow was covered with hair.

I watch "Accidental Tourist". The nurse brings lunch: soup, two hamburger stakes, mashed potatoes, cauliflower salad and bread. I don't eat the soup and bread, eat and the restwith pleasure. Hamburger stakes are grilled and are very delicious. After lunch the nurse measures my temperature:37.3 º C. Doctor comes and tells me that the WBC is 1.3, which means 1300 L, and that they will remove the catheter as it is possible that it is causing the temperature rises. They introduced it 27 days ago, and I no longer need it. At 2.15 my husband comes and gives the nurse the shaving machine and takes the dirty laundry. He is in the corridor outside the sterile unit because visiting hours are over.

The nurse comes and removes the catheter and presses the gauze to stop the bleeding. She says that it is good because I have a great platelets and that there shouldn't be any bleeding. She tells me to lie down and keep it pressed for half an hour, and that she will go to the hospital pharmacy to get the drugs and when she returns she will cut my hair.

Nurse Marina is back and she put a sheet on the bed, on which she shook the hair from the pillow. In the middle of the sheet I put a chair and she began to cut. Although a lot of hair has fallen off, it is still thick and jamming the machine, and the length is up to the shoulder. First she shortened my hair and then started shaving it. Now I look like a prisoner. No, I'm not sorry. It is important that I didn't have any severe side effects, besides nausea. They say that after transplantation you grow different hair. Someone said that your grow your donor's hair. Hair is the least of my problems. It is important that the transplantation doesn't fails and that you can live normally. If necessary, I can wear a scarf and a wig for the rest of my life.

The nurse cut my hair and tells me to take a shower. I remind her that in the afternoons there isn't any hot water. She heats some water in the microwave, washes my head in a sterile basin, passes another sterile basin full of water and pours it over my head. I shampoo, and the nurse brings two basin of water and to rinse the shampoo. I wash it off and put some baby milk on my head, and some melem on my hands and feet.

I turn the TV on and watch a rerun of two episodes of "Crazy, confused, normal." I laugh to tears. The nurse gets in the room and says that she knew that it was me laughing when she heard laughter, because I am the only one who is capable to laugh despite the pain and misery. I apologize, but she says that it doesn't matter, but that in the sterile unit nobody ever laughed so much. I am sorry to hear about others who have had a transplant, but if I think only about the disease, I will go mad. I pray to God for all of them.

The nurse brings dinner: spaghetti Bolognese, a cauliflower salad and bread. I eat everything except for the bread, brush my teeth, use mouthwash, drink drugs and suddenly feel chills and shivering. I lie down in bed, cover up and I pray the rosary to St. Anthony. I feel colder and colder and I start to shake even more. I ring for the nurse and I ask her to cover me with two quilts. She measure my temperature: 38 º C, and a half an hour later it is 38.5 º C. The nurse calls an emergency room doctor to come and see me and draws my blood. I feel severe pain in the lower abdomen. They measure the temperature again: 39 º C.

The doctor comes, examines me and sends me to have my lungs X-rayed. I wear a robe, put a mask on my mouth and green protection on the body. The nurse takes me to the X-ray in HS, and Dr. Babel returns to the ER. On the way to HS, I tell them two jokes and we laugh to tears. I have a feeling that I am better. After the X-ray they tell that everything is ok and that I don't have pneumonia. I am happy and thankful to God. We return to the sterile unit, I wash and disinfect hands, drink Panadon for lowering thetemperature and an antibiotic. The nurse puts the needle cannula in my vein and gives me IV and antibiotic. I threw up dinner and the chills, shivering and pain ceased. It is 11 p.m. now and I feel better and I go to sleep.

October 24th 2010, Sunday

At 6 o'clock the nurse draws my blood. Measures my temperature: 37.7 º C which is good because it is getting lower. I slept well and I feel better. I get up and pray the Rosary for the dead, and then have a shower. The nurse brings breakfast: two butter sticks, two packets of jam, two slices of bread and tea. I eat everything, because I miss the sweets, and I can only eat one candy bar "Animal kingdom" a day.

I call my husband and tell him I'm better. I watch "Malcolm in the middle" and fall asleep.

The nurse brings lunch: soup, rice, three small patties, cauliflower and bread. I eat burgers and cauliflower, and leave the rest. The nurse jokes and that before the tansplantation I didn't eat meat, and since the transplantation I have been eating meat only.

Dinner: moussaka, beetroot and bread. I eat moussaka and beetroot, and leave the bread. I am writing in my notebook so that I can transcribe it using the computer when I'll feel better. Temperature: 36.7 º C. Last night, Dr. Babel took nose and throat swabs, took a urine sample for culture and drew my blood, so when they get the results, they will know the cause. It is important that the temperature dropped. Today I slept, I guess the body temperature exhausted me. I watch "Periphery City" and I fall asleep at 10 p.m.

October 25th 2010, Monday

I woke up at 5:20, at 5:30 the nurse enters the room give me antibiotics. She tells me to measure my temperature: 36.5 º C. I slept long enough last night so I pray the rosary for the deceased, and then have a shower. Today is Monday and toilet takes a little longer because I clip my nails and wax.

The head nurse comes to draw my blood. She changes the tape around the cannula, which is soaked from showering. She can't draw any blood from the cannula so she sraws it from the vein in my left wrist.

The nurse brings breakfast: two hot dogs, a cup of warm milk and two slices of bread. I eat a slice of bread with frankfurters.

I watch "Magic" and wait for the nurse to give me medicine cyclosporine and I want to ask her to give me the IV now so I could type my notes into the computer, and since the cannula is in the right wrist, and when I recieve the IV I can't move my hand because it gets swollen. For that reason I lie or stand still while receiving the IV.

At 1:13 my cell phone rings – it's Robert Zuber who is trying to find my biological family. He tells me that they called prof. Labar to ask if they could do some shooting for TV in the sterile units. He said no because of many risks of infection.

They will come on October 27th to my house and have a chat with my husband, record and take some photos, and I will join the conversation in the live show via telephone. He asks me if I have anyone who knows me well and all the hardship I have been through. I tell him that my friend Ana knows everything about me. I promised to ask her to be in the show but I am not sure whether she will accept because it is a big pressure because of the live show and the audience.

The nurse brings lunch: soup, mashed potatoes, two patties, beetroot and bread. I eat everything except for the bread, drink medicines, brush my teeth, and after that I watch "Forever in love" and "Broken heart".

At 4 my husband comes to visit and brings more scarves, water, tea and chocolates. He is my rock because he takes care of everything. That's why I'm calm because he takes cares about the children at home, and I don't habe to worry about anything and can focus on myslef and my treatment. I ask him if he would mind being in the show on TV because finding my biological family is extemely imprtant to me.

The nurse brings dinner: gluten-free pizza and milk. I brush my teeth and watch "1001 Night" and "Crazy, confused, normal." I fall asleep at 10 p.m.

October 26th 2010, Tuesday

It's already 7:30, and I just woke up because I slept badly, probably from excitement. I fell asleep at 10 p.m. and woke up in the middle of the night. I watched TV until 3, and then I fell asleep again. So far, I haven't slept for eight hours straight. The head nurse comes to me to draw blood, and I'm going to take a shower, but there is no hot water. I feel it is cooler in the room, there is no heating. Workers are again connecting the heating for the new green buildings.

I crawl under the duvet and watch "Magic". The nurse brings breakfast: two fried eggs, a cup of warm milk and two slices of bread.

I read the book The Mayo Clinic on healthy aging and improving the quality of life.

Here in sterile units I have time for myself and to do a lot of thinking. I got to know the thin line between life and death and therefore I pray for mercy and healing.

Doctor's round comes and they tell me that I my bladders is inflamated and that's why I had severe pain in the lower abdomen, fever and vomited. I ask how high the leukocytes and platelets are. She says L 2.2, which means 2200 L, and platelets 330 This is great and I am very happy.

I continue reading the book, then I watch "Sea of Love". At 12:49 the phone's ringing.

The nurse brings lunch: soup, risk peas, beets, two patties and bread. First I eat burgers and beets, then soup and risk peas. It's cold, so I return to bed.

I turned off the TV and pray the rosary to St. AnAnthonyti. The nurse brings dinner: moussaka, cauliflower salad and bread. I eat everything except the bread. I watch some TV and go to sleep.

November 1st 2010, Monday

I woke up at 5 because I fell asleep at 8:30. I sat on the bed and pray to the Mother of God for the dead. Today is a big church and state holiday, All Saints' Day. I'm sad because I am in the hospital and can not go to my mom's and my grandparents' graves in Bosnia. I pray for their souls, for the soul of Ana Rukavina, the souls of all dear ones who are not among the living and for the souls of the departed. My husband will now ignite lanterns, and when I leave the hospital I will visit their graves.

At 6 the nurse comes to draw my blood and tells me that she saw an announcement for the "Mass" in the hospital. I tell her that it is not safe due to the fact that my pressure can go up because of the excitement. I'm going to the bathroom to take a shower. I go back to my room and read.

The nurse comes and takes out the needle cannula because today, thank to God, is the last day I will spend in sterile units. Tomorrow they will do the sternal puncture and release me home. I read the book The Mayo Clinic on Healthy Aging, and at 4 p.m. my friend Anđa and her husband come to visit me, but only one of them can enter. I tell her that she and my husband have today to do something because if they think about doing it tomorrow, they should keep in mind that I'm coming home. I give her the laptop, DVDs and dirty clothes, so that tomorrow we have less to move tomorrow. I tell the nurse that she is the "replacement wife", which I recommend to my husband if I die, and we laugh.

I call my husband and tell him to bring clothes to the hospital.

I pray the Rosary to the Mother of God, for my donor and for all the sick in sterile units. The nurse brings dinner: polenta with milk and I eat it with pleasure. I ask the nurse to bring a sterile basin and heated water so I could wash. I take medicines, wash and watch "1001 Nights". After that I write until 11:30 p.m. and go to sleep.

November 2nd 2010, Tuesday

I woke up at 5. I amm excited about getting out of the hospital and can not sleep any longer. The nurse brews coffee, and I again ask for a sip. The nurse brings some coffee in a plastic cup. I write a little and then the nurse draws my blood.

The nurse brings breakfast: four slices of bread, two of butter stick, two packets of jam and two cups of warm milk. I'm watching a rerun of "Forever and always in love." The head nurse comes with a scale - I weigh 64.7 kgs, which means that I only lost 1.3 kg. That's great, because usually people lose a lot of weight because of all the side effects. Sometimes they lose up to 20 kilos. Thank to God I haven't lost much, I ate even more than recommended and I only vomited for a few times. That is nothing compared to others.

Zuber calls and asks about the sternal punction. I say as I was told it will be around 12, he tells me to wait for them in the sterile unit because they will come around 3 p.m. At 12 Dr. Koraljka Đadro and a nurse come to do the puncture. While she does the punction I tell a joke, and the punction is over.

Every time I pray that she is the one who will do th punction because she is gentle, it doesn't hurt a lot and she does it quickly and efficiently.

The nurse brings lunch: soup, potatoes, beets, two patties and bread. I eat lunch, brush my teeth and wait for my husband to bring clothes.cI dress. Dr. Durakovic and

a nurse come with medication that I need to take home with me.

Dr. Durakovic says that on Wednesday, when I come with reference to a check up to Dr. Mikulic, to stop by the department to take the discharge letter. I say goodbye to the doctor and the nurses and thank them for everything.

Zuber and my husband wait for me in front of the sterile unit. At 14:45 I am released. I look back and cross myself and wish that all patients who enter through this door to get treatment in the sterile units, come out healed as I did. God did a miracle for the second time, the first time when my spleen punctured and the second time with the transplant. Every day I say my thanks.

A cameraman is waiting for me in the cafe across the street from the hospital reception. They record me as I get released from the hospital, and then I wait for my husband to get the car and drive me home (they record everything).

I aranged with Zuber to come tomorrow at my house to conduct an interview with me and tell me the news of my family. Of course, Zuber asked prof. Labar for permission.

My husband desinfected the entire house, removed the carpets and curtains because they tend to be full of dust. I'm happy and excited for rapid recovery and coming home so soon. coming

My boys come home after work and are very happy. I explain to them that they have to have clean hands constantly and disinfect them because transplantation was successful but now is the flu season and I am still in danger. My husband maked Espresso, because I haven't had a coffee since September 26th when I recieved the first round of chemo. We talk, we eat dinner, pray the Rosary to St. Anthony, then I watch "1001 Nights" and a culinary show. I take drugs, shower and go to sleep.

At home

November 3rd 2010, Wednesday

At 6 I woke up and I prayed to Our Lady of the Rosary, and then made espresso. My husband and I drank the coffee and I gave him a list of gluten-free items that should be purchased in Gea in Domjanićeva street. One kilo of flour gluten-free bread costs 45 kuna and a bag of gluten-free dough costs 35 kn. The food is expensive, and I must eat it for some time because it protects the liver and intestines. I go to the bathroom, make gris with milk for breakfast and take the drugs, put the laundry in the washer and hang the washed one to dry.

At about 12 Mr. Zuber, Rahaela Stefanovic and cameraman come to do the shooting. I make coffee and soon after the filming starts. Rahaela asks me if I want to hear what they have found out about my family. I tell her, of course, I do. That's why I contacted Mr. Zuber. She tells me that she was in Bogojn, in the village of Gracanica where my father comes from and that ther she gathered the necessary information about my family so she traveled to Germany. In Germany she found my sister Marija, who was very happy learning that I exist and wanted to meet me. She also found out that my father died 10 years ago and was buried at Mirogoj.

Marija was born in 1952, has two sons and a daughter and a grandmother. Rahaela told me that my sister would have tried to find me if she had known that I had existed. She became worried when they told her about the transplant. They scanned her picture and gave it to me.

My heart wanted to burst from happiness. As soon as Dr. Labar estimates that I am healthy enough to endure such an emotional shock, we will schedule a meeting. Our father left her as well when she was 10 years old. After that he was with for a year and then left us and moved to the USA and got married.

Apparently he made a fortune through purchasing, adaptation, construction and selling houses, but left everything to his last wife, Marija got nothing.

I feel sorry for her because she had a hard life, but she is also a fighter and a person who doesn't give up so easily. I can not wait to meet her, and until then I will find out her address and phone number so we could talk and exchange letters. On Friday, November 5th we will see each other for the first time via video link.

Rahaela, Robert and the camerman leave and I can't fall asleep because of all the excitement. I'm happy that Marija accepted me as one of her own without meeting me in person. I sit in bed and pray to the dear Lord and thank him and all the saints for this miracle.

When it comes to meeting Marija, my cards are on the table, I have nothing to hide. My husband understands me, but says I need to be careful because they are strangers and that I should distance myself from them initially, until I see how the relationship will further develop. I can't go against my feelings, I can't act, I am honest and sensible, regardless the outcome.

November 5th 2010, Friday

I woke up at 6 and prayed while they are asleep, because, when they wake up, peace and quiet will disappear. I am excited because now, for the first time ever I will see and hear my sister Marija via video link in the "Mission together" at 8:45 p.m.

I prepare breakfast and brew 2 liters of tea. I drink it throughout the day. I take the drugs, and then prepare lunch. When I came out of the sterile unit, I asked if I could cook and write. They told me that I could, but that I shouldn't get tired and that I should lead a peaceful life. Also I am not allowed to work in the garden or to do anything that is connected with soil because I could get an infection more easily. Besides that I shouldn't dust, mop the floors or clean the bathroom.

After lunch, I take the drugs and Normabel 5 mg so I could go to sleep because my pressure has gone up to 150/100 from all the excitement. I wake up at 5 p.m. and I can't wait for the show to begin. I talk to my husband. He can't believe that I have so many feelings for someone I've never met. I tell him that blood is thicker than water and that Marija has always been in my heart eventhough we haven't met.

I have dinner, take my medications, make coffee and wait for the broadcast to begin. Finally, at 8:45 p.m. it starts. The show starts witha story about one man who has a seriously ill daughter, who is currently in a spa on rehabilitation. He is asking the nation to help him find accomodation ner her and for financial assistance. Then the show follows a story of a single mother of two seriously ill children with cerebral paralysis who asks for help with transportation because they are both in wheelchairs.

I can't stop crying because if your heart is not made of stone there is no way a oerson could surpress tears when hearing about such situations. Only when we see and hear about such hardship do we realize how lucky and happy we actually are.

After these to stories, Marija and I are on. I have two stories: one is about my bone marrow transplant and the other is about locating my sister and biological family.

Mr. Zuber told the story according to how everything actually happened. The story starts with an accidental encounter in front of my building, it continues with me going to get a transplant stem cells and after it covers my release from hospital and me returning home, where a reporter, Rahaela, told me that she found Marija, my sister, in Germany and brought me her photo.

My cell phone rings. Petra Nižetić tells me to lower the volume on my TV because of the live brodcast. Marija is in the German studio and I can see and hear her, but she can only hear me. She is overwhelmed because of everything and can't speak and on the other side I can't stop speaking from all the excitement. The audience laughs and claps. I tell her how happy I am because they found her, and that God loves me and that he has a lot of tasks in store for me to do in this world, that he will help me to heal, and that we will use each and every moment we have for spending time with each other.

I also say that when God closes a door, he leaves a window opened and that there is always a way out of every situation, all you have to do is to believe it is possible. My friend Ana is is the studio. She is always very helpful, especially during the last 2 years. She would do anything to help me. I appreciate it and I will never forget it.

Mr. Zuber asks Ana how I endured it all. Ana says that sometimes I needed crutches and that she was there to give me a hand and that I am a strong woman and that nothing can clow me down. She says that I am honest and that it is not hard to be my friend, all you need is to get to know me.

When Ana got home, she called me. I told her that no one has ever said so many good things about me. She says that she told the truth. We laugh. I can not sleep because of the excitement and all I do is think about my sister Marija. It's after midnight. I pray with the Holy Rosary to St. Anthony and fall asleep.

November 10th 2010, Wednesday

I wake up at 6 and I pray to Our Lady of the Rosary, and then I do my bathroom ritual. I dress and at 7 I go to the hospital. Today is my first check up since leaving the sterile unit. My husband drives me and waits until I am done. I expect my results to be the same or even better than they were when I was in hospital. However, on Sunday night I had a very bad stomachache. My stool was black and soft. And the same happened on Monday and Tuesday. I didn't cal the hematology department because I thought it was a chemo side effect.

I tell Dr. Mikulić about it. She examines me and says it was melena, stool which is an indication of internal bleeding in the intestines. The nurse draws my blood. She sends it to an express analysis. We will get the results in the afternoon. The KKS results are: E 3.63, HCT 0338, HB 108, 2.4 L, trb. 247. So all the results are borderline or normal, except for the leukocytes, which are below normal values. When I was released from hospital thet were 3500, but Dr. Mikulić says everything is OK since it is normal for leukocytes to rise and fall. Despite the fact that I had an internal bleeding and that it has only been one week since I was released from hospital, I don't allow myself to be discouraged. Besides the drugs I take: Virolex 3 x 400, Diflucan 300 mg, cyclosporine 100 mg +75, Cell Cept 2 x 1000 mg, Silapen 2 x 1500 mg, SINERSUL f 2 x 2 x 1 week and Ciprinol 2 x 500 recommended Contoloc, the doctor recommends me to take Contoloc 2 x 40 mg for 7 days, and after than at 1 x 40 mg. She reduces the Cell Cept dose for 500 mg, 2 x 750 mg.

The nurse schedules my next chek up for November 15th. Biochemistry and concentration of cyclosporine results will be in at about 1 or 2 p.m. If the results are bad, they will notify me by phone. It is 9 o'clock, and my check up is already done because hematology patients who have had transplants are first to be examined by doctors.

My husband drives me home. PleaI ask him to stop on Kvatrić so I could buy some things I need, including a rectangular baking tray. My husband parks the car and waits for me. First I go to the ATM, and then to a healthy food store - Geua. I buy gluten-free and corn flour, which are quite expensive, unlike the ordinary wheat flour. One kilo of gluten-free flour is 45, and corn 15 kuna. There are all kinds snacks, but with my disability pension I can not afford them, and is not necessary because I eat all kinds of meat and fish, thermically processed, or boiled and baked at high temperature.

After Gea I go to Nama and buy an Austrian rectangular porcelain baking tray for 150 kuna. At the cash register I talk with three saleswomen. They recognized me from the TV show "Mission together" because I was dressed the same as on the day they filmed the story wearing a pink scarf on my head. They tell me that they were very touched by my story with my sister and transplantation, and that thay wish me a speedy recovery.

After Nama I the street market to my friend Ankica, who sells fruits and vegetables at a stand. We are very happy to see each other. I want to buy apples, but she doesn't want to accept any money and gives me a bag filled with apples, pears and tangerines for free. She says that she will never charge me for the apples because she grows them. Because of work she couldn't visit me while I was in hospital but we talked on the phone often. She tells me that she saw "Mission Together" and cried, and that my sister is great. I can see that almost all saleswomen from the stands are looking at me and Ankica says that she told all of them to watch the show.

33 days have passed since I have recieved the transplant. I found out in the pharmacy that I'm entitled to 10 kg of gluten-free flour per month over a prescription.

November 15ht 2010, Monday

I wake up at 6 and I pray to Our Lady of the Rosary. I go to the bathroom and my husband drives me to the hospital. The nurse draws my blood and sends it to the laboratory to do a rapid analysis. In the hallway I talk to other patient because for me the best for of psychotherapy is talking to others. If you you pull yourself in and close you can't defeat this illness.

About 10 I see a couple I met in the hallway outside the sterile, when I came to have the transplant. I wave to them and the lady approaches. Her name is Sanja and her husband's name is Zoran. They are from Zadar. Zoran had a transplant, and his donor was from the German registry. Sanja is constantly with him, and she has been a great support. Because of Zoran's stay in isolation and frequent controls they were forced to rent an apartment in Zagreb. We talked more, but prof. Labar called my name. While the nurse searched for my medical history, they enter the office, and entered after them.

Today's KKS results are somewhat better: L 3100, E 3580, Hb 109, the trb. 252, the therapy remains the same. I ask prof. Labar to write a prescription for gluten-free flour and a long wig, because you get more money for the long one which in reality isn't enough to cover the cost of the short one. The price of the wig made of artificial hair is from 650 to 2500 kuna, and from real hair from 2500 to 10 000. The doctor writes the prescriptions and says that all results are within normal limits and that small irregularities are permitted because blood forming cells are doing their job, i.e. firming thier roots in my bone marrow and producing new blood cells. It is a long process. Biochem results will be done during the day and, if something should go wrong, they will notify me by phone. In case of fever, diarrhea and temperature I must immediately report to the Hematology clinic or HS.

My husband drives me home and on the way we stop at the streetmarket on Kvatrić, to get some apples, because I can only eat apples and pears, boiled or roasted. Again Ankica doesn't want to accept any money and says to send my husband for more and that she would give me apples for free as long as she had them. I thank her and we go home. I will repay her by knitting someting for her grandchildren.

At home I eat, take drugs, do housework and every now and then glance at the clock. Thank to God it is 3 p.m. and no one has phoned me, which means my results are OK. The next check up is scheduled for November 22nd. I believe that everything will be fine and that I will not have to go to the hospital. Today the doctor lowered my cyclosporine dose from 175 to 100 mg. It is a drug that helps the tissue to accept the transplanted marrow.

November 22nd 2010, Monday

I woke up at 6 and I prayed to Our Lady of the Rosary, and then do the morning hygiene (it is understood that each person does the morning hygiene, but those of us who have had transplants do it in greater detail). I prepare breakfast, take and drugs because today I don't have to go to the hospital on an empty stomach, since the nurse drew my blood on Friday.

On Friday my neighbour Žaklina took me to the hospital, before her work at 6.30 a.m.. Marion came and took me home. She told me to call her at any time because in her family they have 3 cars so someone can always take me to hospital if necessary. I thanked her and told her that I would only call her when it would be urgent, because I do not like to bother people.

My husband always drives me, but last week he was in Bosnia, with his mother, and returned yesterday. This is the second time he went to Bosnia since I came out of the sterile unit, because, when he goes, he stays 7-10 days. It is difficult for him because both my mother-in-law and me are sick. I tell him to go because I have good friends and there is always someone here to help me, and our health, our medical staff and our hospitals are superbly equipped, unlike hospitals in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Often I watch a charity show "Strike Hard", on Pink TV which is hosted by an actor Almir Čehajić aka Batko. Batko is asking people of goodwill to donate money for assistance during treatment, and transplantations in children. People donate as much as they can. Money is donated regardless of the nationality.

I was particularly impressed by the life story of a young girl Sabine Čehić who is being treated for leukemia. She came into the studio with a long black wig to ask for help in collecting 55,000 KM for a bone marrow transplant. After the show Sabina had a successful bone marrow transplant in Belgrade. Good people donated money and still are donating money and by doing so are saving many lives. Eventhough politicians started a war and caused hate among different nationalities, at such times, all is forgotten and forgiven and help is provided.

On Saturday, November 20th, when my cell phone rang, I couldn't not even imagine that the person on the other end of the line would be my sister Mary. She says that she can not wait for December 3rd when they will come to Croatia and be guests in "Mission together" TV show. We talk for 15 minutes, ask each other about work, kids and life in general. I am really looking forward to our first meeting. Journalist Rahaela and cameraman Matko found my sister who accepted me.

Today has been 45 days since I had a transplant, and 20 days since I came out of the sterile unit. I talk with Zoran and Sanja in the waiting room. We talk about the transplant. I tell to Zoran that Sanja and my husband should get an Oscar for loyalty and dedication. We laugh, and Sanja says it was very difficult for her to be alone in a rented apartment while Zoran was the sterile unit. Every day she went to the Stone Gate to pray for the health of her husband, washed and ironed clothes, came to visit him both with trepidation and hope. My husband and my family went through all of these things as well, so did all other families in the sterile units. Sanja tells me that the people who are in the sterile units are not aware of the situation outside of them. Four young people died on the ward while we were in the sterile units.

Doctors say that two patients of the same age with the same diagnosis and the same treatment, will not react the same because the one who is optimistic and has faith in himself and his treatement will react in a better way. Unfortunately, sometimes even the optimistic ones do not beat the disease, but it is easier for them to come with it. The best example is our deceased Ana Rukavina, who was was a great fighter and who with Dr. Mrsić about the extending the Croatian registry until the very last breath she took.

Prof. Labar calls out three patients to enter. My results were within normal limits: L 3100, E 3290, expense. 262 The following check is on November 30th. I thank God.

November 27th 2010, Saturday

Today is my sons' birthday. At the same time I am excited and happy. This is the first time you will not give them a gift because I can not go shopping, but they have already gotten the greatest possible gift form God, and that's me, because I was given a second chance. This is the first time I didn't bake a birthday cake. Igor is having some friends from Rijeka and I invited them for lunch. If they don't have a cold, then I don't have to be affraid of catching a virus.

I prepare lunch: beef and chicken soup with polenta dumplings, meatloaf and potatoes, fried chicken and cucumber and paprika salad. Instead of cake I made kremšnita because I know young people love it, and I find it easy and quick to make. Alen has the second shift and won't be at lunch, but he will come later andthey will calebrate together. Igor calls to let me know that he will arrive at 5.30 p.m. I am very happy to be alive.

Last year whike I was baking them a cake for birthday, I cried so much that my face was wet from tears. At that time I thought that was their last birthday with me and the last cake I baked for them. At that time we couldn't find a donor, and I was very sick and sad because of my mother's death. I also thought whether I would be able to survive all of that, but we are stronger than we realize.

Thank the good Lord on for giving me a secon chance, Mrs. Marija Rukavina, the American who agreed to give his blood-forming stem cells, doctors and the medical staff, who have done everything in their power, and my husband, who is my pillar and my biggest support.

November 28th 2010, Sunday

Igor's friends spent the night with us. My husband and I would feel bad if we had left them outside to freeze. I wake them on Sunday at 1.30 p.m.. We have lunch, drink coffee, and then go to Alen, in the cafe where he works for a drink. In the afternoon Igor accompanies them to the bus station, for the 7.30 bus.

Mr. Zuber calls me to tell that Marija will come on December 2nd by bus at 6 a.m. When she arrives HRT will take her to a hotel "Fala" to rest, and at 12 she will come to my apartment for the shooting. I can not go to HRT, because there is a lot of people there. He also tells to cook lunch so they could film the reunion for the show.

I'm excited, my mind wanders, and I can't stop thinking about the first time we will meet, her reaction and whether we will "click". I have already accepted her and I love her the same as I have known her my entire life. I get overwhelmed by the feeling of happiness, but also fear. I am willing to risk it because I wanted and asked for this. It is important that I found a part of myself that I was missing my whole life. I know many examples where the brothers and sisters of the same parents, who grew up together, do not talk.

November 30th 2010, Tuesday

I woke up and I prayed, but all I can think about is Marija, God forgive me. My husband takes me to the hospital for a check-up. They drew a blood sample yesterday morning. I meet Sanju and Zoran in the waiting room, and Sanja tells me how she made an apple pie from gluten-free flour, but the dough was very sticky. We talk about children, how young people are selfish and only think about themselves. I tell Sanja that I have to fight for myself, but at the same time for my husband too. The boys will soon get married and that would leave my husband all alone.

In my family, I am the one that is always positive and cheerful, the one who cries and laughs and the one who is pushing them forward. Sanja says that in her family she is the pillar and support and that she needs to stay strong because of her husband, because if something would have happened, he would not have the strength to struggle with the disease, and the daughter will get married one day and leave him all alone. We cry and laugh at the same time. At 11 professor Labar calls us. Today the results are the following: L 6100, expense. 276, E 3.28, hb. 107. The therapy stays the same.

I tell the professor that I had a headache and painful sinuses, and a runny nose. Everything is fine, he says, and the results were fine as well. I tell him that my sister is coming on Thursday, and on Friday we will be on television in a show called "Mission together". He's happy for me.

My husband drives me home and parks it in the marketplace at Kvatrić. I go to Ankica because she knows a lady who sells homemade chicken without giblets in a kiosk at 20 kuna per kg, but if you want that price you must buy 3 chickens. I took three big chickens, because when Marija comes there will be more mouth to feed. Ankica has already filled a bag with apples and is carrying it to the car to my husband. I want to pay the apples, both me and my husband give her money, but she doesn't want to accept any.

At home we eat luch. I take my medication, then begin preparing for Marija's arrival. I chopped one chicken into pieces, separated white meat and put it to marinate. I took the succling out of the freezer to thaw, then I marinated it too. I make a list and send my husband to the store to buy everything I need for cakes, French salad, coffee and beverages.

While I cooked and cleaned everything it was already past midnight, and I need to get up early because I have a lot of things to do, and I am no longer fast nor healthy as I used to be. I pray to St. Anthony and go to sleep.

December 1st, 2010, Wednesday

I begin preparing everything for Marija's arrival. First, I ask my husband to I grind some almonds for the cake. Then, in the kitchen I prepare everything while he is dusting, cleaning the bathroom and floors because I am not allowed to dust because I might get an infection from it. I fry the chicken, cook vegetables for salad and bake the cake. This cake is completely without flour and instead of it you put almonds, 18 eggs, chocolate, sugar and butter.

Vegetables are cool. I got tired so I sit at the table and chop the vegetables while sitting. Tomorrow I'm going to slice cheese and ham and make mayonnaise, so it would be fresh. I am finishing the cake and I want to write on it: "Welcome Marija", but I'm so tired and I can't.

I put the cake in the fridge and go to sleep, but I'm excited and can not sleep. I go on teletext and check the weather in Europe. It is snowing and the temperature is below zero in Croatia. I am very worried because the trip is long and Marija is travelling by bus. I'm worried that something might happen and I think how we should have postponed this meeting due to bad weather. I barely get some sleep.

December 2nd, 2010, Thursday

I woke up at 3, fell asleep again at 4 and woke up at 6. First I pray, then cook coffee. My husband and I drink coffee. I continue preparing lunch and my husband washes the floors with izosan and water (we avoid using chemicals because of my health).

Out of excitement I'm all torn, my head is spinning. I measure my blood pressure and again it is 170/130, just as it was the night when I found out Rahaela and Matko went to Bugojno to look for my biological family. I drink Normabel of 2 mg, to calm and bring the pressure to normal. I lie down and after half an hour the pressure is 130 / 90 so I continue with work.

I am almost done with preparing the lunch and do some finishing touches with the chicken and the suckling. I lay the dishes on the table.

My phone rings – it's Rahaela and Robert calling me to say they'll arrive between 2 and 2:30 p.m. They ask me to answer the intercom when I hear the bell because Marija will ring the bell, and they will record it for the show.

In the meantime, my husband and the boys showered and dressed, and now I'm going to do the same because I smell of cooking. I dressed and put on a wig (I do not like to wear it). At 1:30 I put the chicken in hot oil to fry. I made homemade chutney and sour peppers that I pickeled before going to the hospital. Everything is prepared and we wait for them.

At 2:15 the door bell rings. I take off my apron and open it. Rahaela and Marija's son Maik are in front of the door and Marija and the cameraman are still on the ground floor. Maik says to me: "Auntie, you're much prettier in person than on pictures." He holds out his hand but I can't hug him or shake his hand until he desinfects. In the meantime, Marija comes in carrying flowers. I tell her that I can not hug until she puts galoshes on her shoes and until she washes and disinfects her hands. I ask Rahaelu and cameramen to do the same. So we firmly hugged and kissed (I with a mask, like the Chinese, when they had the bird flu) I had the feeling that my heart would jump out of excitement. When Maik called me aunt, I was very happy and proud to have someone of my own. They enter the room and I introduce them to the family members.

It's already 2:30 and we have lunch. Rahaela and cameraman recorded the meeting and want to go to the studio, but I insist they stay for lunch. I put the tablecloth, and Marija and Maik help me. It is visible that they are my blood because I offer to help wherever I go. From all the food I can only eat the soup, fried and cooked meat from the soup because I am on a gluten-free diet. I sit next to Marija, watch her and talk with her.

Before lunch I poured *maksuzija* (brandy) for everyone. *Maksuz* is a Turkish word and it means: something particular, very good, just for you. In this case it reffers to a particularly good schnaps, offered only to special guests, it contains 60 percent of alcohol. After lunch, I serve the cake and espresso. Marija and I sit in the room, and I light the first candle on the Advent wreath. We eat the cake, drink coffee and talk. I want to know everything and I ask Marija about our father, about her and her family, our relatives from my father's side in Bugojno.

I look at her and search for similarity between us. We have a strong and thick hair, but her is colored in blond, and my hair thinned from the chemotherapy. Our eyes and forehead are the same. My mouth and nose are like our father's, and Marija resembles her mother. I think about how physically similar we are, and we only share a father. My boys, twins coming from the same father and mother, don't resemble each other at all. There is some truth in the saying that children who grow up without one parent resemble him.

Rahaela and cameraman leave, moved to tears, and Marija and Maik stay. Igor takes Maik to Alen in the cafe, to meet with friends. I clean up the table and put the dishes in the dishwasher, make coffee, and my husband does the rest of the cleaning. I am very happy and I think I'm dreaming.

All of my friends call me and ask if Marija had arrived. Maik returns with Igor and I took off the wig and put on a scarf. His father was Italian and he was born in Germany. He speaks Croatian, but puts everything in masculine gender. He tells me: "Auntie, you look like a Turkish man!" We all laugh, and I serve dinner.

About 11 p.m. my husband drives them to the hotel. The hotel has everything, but I want them to have lunch with us. We agreed that tmyhe husband will come to pick them up in the morning at 10 because they will be guests at the "Mission together" so they will have to leave at 6 p.m.

I barely fell asleep after midnight.

<u>December 3rd, 2010, Friday</u>

At 8:40 p.m. I cook coffee, make the bed and can not wait to start watching "Mission together ". I see my Marija, Stipe and Maik sitting together in the studio. We are in the middle of the show, and although the show was sad, our story is interesting and

cheerful. Sanja and Robert first announced the story, then showed the meeting with me, and then showed Marija and Maik. Robert calles Maik Stipe, which he doesn't like so he just nods. Marija is kidding and says that maybe next year we will find out that we have a brother and that she was glad to have met me. He says that I, even though I had the transplant, I walk faster than she does and she is healthy, and that I am a wonder woman and that she is impressed.

I watch and listen, and my husband and I cry from happiness. I can not believe it's true, I have a sister and nephews.

December 6th, 2010, Monday

I woke up at 6 am, although the last few nights I slept poorly. I pray to the Virgin Mary that Marija arrives home happily. After doing the hygiene I cook coffee and talk with my husband about her Marija, her and her fate. Wonderful are the ways of the Lord, because I never dreamed that journalists would find my sister.

At 8:30 my phone's ringing and Marija tells they had arrived happily. I am happy and I thank God for having sent me such a gift. I believe that meeting with Marija will serve as an incentive in my fight for being healthy. I'm not alone, I have a sister who has accepted me with love. It's a wonderful feeling like I'm floating.

I feel tired and fall asleep sitting and watching TV. I slept for 11-15 hours. I'm going to weigh. I step on the scale and see that I am 3 kilos lighter. I weighed 66, and now I weigh 63 kg. I am not concerned by my weigh loss and fatigue, because I attribute it to stress and work during Marija's stay.

December 8th, 2010, Wednesday

I woke up at 8, quite tired. I asked my husband to take me to Rebro, daily hematology clinic ifor a check up. I'm a little worried because the only time I felt this sleepy and tired was while I was in the sterile unit, when all my antibodies were destroyed after the transplantation while the marrow still didn't work and began to produce leukocytes. In the 42 days in sterile I lost only 1 kg. My husband drove me to hospital and Dr. Durakovic saw me.

The results were the following: L 5500, ANC 2.0, E 3340, hb. 103, htc. 0.321, expense. 400 The doctor says that is good and that I was burdened physically and mentally, but that I had no reason to worry. The therapy remains the same, and if it needs to change, she will call. If I have diarrhea, fever, rash, I need to go to hospital immediately. Regular check is scheduled for December 15th.

At home after dinner and therapy I sleep again. I wake up at 12:30 and watch "the Sea of Love" and wait for a call from the hospital. It is already 3 p.m., and no one has called, which means that the results are good. Thank God.

December 15th, 2010, Wednesday

After breakfast drink therapy in head towards 9:15 Rebro.

I'm going prof. Labar in the office with the findings that I picked up in the living hematology clinic. The findings are as follows: SE 34, E 3.15, hb. 104, 3.8 L, (eo 8, baso 1, neseg 6, segments 60, 26 ly, mono 9) expense. 310, AP 153, AST / ALT 28/40, GGT 167, LD 178, Bill 12, urine - bo, the concentration of CSP 31st therapy remains the same, and control 10 January 2011. ROOM fever, diarrhea or rash, control immediately.

My husband drives me home, lunch and packing his clothes for the trip because the mother in law is very ill and needs to visit. Ever since I came out of the sterile, constantly in Bosnia. There comes a day or two to supply me and went back five to ten days. Mother in law is old, weak and powerless, and it is very difficult because we are at the same time both seriously ill.

I am happy that I can walk, eat and sleep. Slowly I can cook and clean, and the guys working in shifts and is always someone nearby.

se who are being treated for hematopoietic malignancies.

December 16th 2010, Thursday

I wake up at 7, look out the window, and there is the first orchid flower smiling at me. I'm happy as a little child, because little things make life prettier. Today, my friend Anđa will call Dr. Miličić and ask her to send the prescription for gluten-free flour to the *Pablo* pharmacy in Šarengradska street, and she will pick it up after work and bring it to me. I'll knead the dough for apple pie, to treat Anđa and give her some to take home for her son.

I made lunch for the boys and myself and baked gluten-free bread, and when it cooled off, I cut it into slices and froze in threes (one for every meal). When you knead the dough, it is very sticky, and that is why I bake bread in a mold out of 1 kilo of flour and it lasts me a few days. The recipe for the bread and raisin cake is written on the flour bag.

Given that the gluten free pasta is expensive at *Gea*, I tried kneading the dough for gravy and soup noodles and did it. I also learned how to make croquettes, cheese rolls, tea cookies, cookies on the machine and pulled dough for pie (strudel). If you try and think, we can make the same products ourselves, it's cheaper, tastier and homemade. As I kneaded, I employed my brain and body and didn't think about my test results and other difficulties.

There is a restored old mill in Dragočaj in Bosnia, where they grind and sell all kinds of flour. That's where my husband bought 10 kilos of corn flour, made from small domestic corn. It's cheaper than at *Gea* and 100 percent natural.

Anđa and Dijana arrive at 6pm. We drink coffee, I tell jokes and we have fun. I put on my wig, change scarves and fool around. God gave me the gift to turn everything into a joke. I tried on 15 different wigs, but only the one I bought fit with my face nicely. It is dark brown and very thick, and the hairstyle is modern.

When prof. Labar saw me with a wig for the first time, he looked at me in surprise and said he had never seen such a thick wig and that the color is very similar to my hair and looks good on me. I thanked him and said that I don't like wearing it and take it off as soon as I get home until the next check up. If it wasn't winter and very cold, I would just ware a scarf or be bald. I'm not sorry about my hair at all. Hair is an insignificant trifle compared to life and health.

December 18th 2010, Saturday

I decided on which cookies I'm going to bake for Christmas. Vanilla and coconut crescent cookies, *Raffaello*, coconut salami, *bajadera*, *Londoners* and Figaro wafer. It is enough, even too much for my state of health. And on Christmas Eve, if God gives me health, I'll bake walnut and poppy cakes. I compare my health status from a year ago and now. I'm lucky to be alive, if only to eat bread and drink water.

I start feeling nauseous and vomit. I go back to bed, but vomit again and my head hurts. I make chamomile tea and drink it spoon by spoon, not to dehydrated, but vomit again. I call the emergency medical service to ask for advice, and the doctor says that, given the transplantation, the safest thing is to go to Rebro, to the daily hematology clinic. I call an ambulance and take a quick shower, brush my teeth and take my medical history records.

At the daily hematology clinic the test results are within normal limits: E 3.36, hb. 101, L 5.3, trb. 332. Prof. Labar comes and tells them to find me a bed, give me an infusion and draw blood again for the following tests: CSP concentration, electrolytes, AST / ALT, GGT, and to come back for a checkup with those test results . I'm lying down, receiving infusion and vomiting, and between two vomiting I tell a joke or two. While I vomit, people who are receiving therapy laugh. A gentleman who's also receiving chemotherapy at the hematology clinic says that he has never met someone so cheerful and optimistic and fighting for her life with such determination.

At 2:15pm the last infusion bottle leaks out and I ask Dr. Mikulić if I can go. He says that everything is fine from the hematological standpoint and that they don't know what is causing the vomiting. I tell her those are probably delayed side effects that affected all who have had a transplant, and that it wouldn't be fair to them that I'd be all right.

We laugh, and I ask the cleaning lady for several smaller bags, if I throw up in the car. Just as she gave them to me I threw up, half in the bag, half on the hallway floor.

Anđa's waiting in the car behind the hospital building. During the drive I keep vomiting.

I come home, the boys are working and I'm alone. I wash my hands, disinfect them, put on pajamas and go to sleep. My head is still throbbing from pain although I got a shot of *Tramal* in the infusion.

I fell asleep and slept till 6pm. I woke up, cooked dinner for the boys and gluten-free oats and milk for myself. I think about how it is good that I've baked small cookies for weekend, which can last, because I don't know how I'll feel for Christmas or where I will be. God forbid, If I do not stop vomiting, I may stay in the hospital. I vomited dinner and all the medications, and I mind throwing up cyclosporine and Cell Cept because they allow the body to accept the transplant. I pray the rosary to st. Ante and go to sleep. Thank God, at least I have no problems with sleeping.

December 21st 2010, Tuesday

I prepare breakfast because I need to take medication. I cook hot dogs and milk, eat, drink my medication and vomit everything after a few minutes. My headaches stopped, but the vomiting isn't. The cell phone rings. It's my husband calling. He's worried and says he'd like to come over. I tell him to stay with his mother because she needs him more. Not even the doctors can stop the vomiting, so he can't help either.

I get dressed and go to *Savski* bridge to an ATM at 10:15, and there is a taxi there so I'll head to the hospital. I'm embarrassed to call Anđa. However Anđa calls me and tells me not to take a taxi. She comes in 15 minutes and drives me to the hospital. She tells me that she drove a car full of humanitarian aid collected by children from her son's class for the children in Bistra.

I vomit again at the hospital. Prof. Labar admits me and says the test results are within normal limits: AP 152, AST / A l30/44, GST 166, LD 177, bil. 14, CSP 26. Therapy continues: CSP 50 mg / day, Cell CEPT 2 x 750 mg, Virolex 3 x 400 mg, 300 mg Diflucan, Silapen 2 x 1500 mg, Sinersul Forte 2 x 1, 2 times per week and gluten-free diet. January 10th check up with the following findings: KKS, sedimentation, trb., RTC, bil., AP, AST / ALT, GGT, creatinine, urine, LD, conc. CSP, sternal puncture, immunophenotyping and chimerism. In case of fever, diarrhea, or rash, check up needed immediately.

Anđa waits for me in the car and drives me home. I invite her for coffee and I want to pay her or she could give the money to her son Ivan, but she doesn't want it. My neighbor, Žaklina, went to my doctor for prescriptions and medicines because the holidays are coming, and I mustn't be without medication.

December 24th 2010, Friday

Today is Christmas Eve. I wake up at 6 as usual and pray, my tears flow and I can't stop them. The biggest hole in my heart was left by mother who deceased on the 8th of October 2009.

My husband calls me from Prijedor, asks how I'm doing and says he is thinking about heading to Zagreb. I tell him I'm fine and not to come because his brothers and sister are there. After a long time, they are all together for Christmas, and this may be the last Christmas for his mother.

I have breakfast, take medication, get dressed, go to the garage for the shopping cart and walk to *Billa*. I came for the fish because it's lent today, but only Californian fish is sold, which I will not buy. I bought some knick knacks for cakes, wheat, poinsettia, Cola, red wine, cheese, ham, cucumbers, peas and corn for the French salad. People look at me like I'm an alien because I have a mask to protect myself from viruses.

I come home, wash and disinfect my hands, sort groceries, re-wash my hands and knead the dough for the pie (burek). We'll be eating potato pie for Christmas Eve for the first time, but it's natural, home-made and lean, better than Californian fish.

I tidy up the flat, iron the tablecloths, make a green pine branch arrangement with a candle in the middle, and walnuts, hazelnuts and apples around it. I slowly washed the windows and completely cleaned the bathroom from Wednesday to today, and the rest is all clean.

I mix the dough for the pastry, walnut and poppy cake and bread. I salted the turkey last night, smeared it with pork fat and put butter under the skin to make it juicy and to soften the meat.

I prepare everything by myself because it's delicious, homemade, and cheaper. I have the will and time, and I enjoy cooking. This is my first Christmas in my new life and I'm going to decorate the Christmas tree the way I want. The boys have gone to work, and I'm going to the garage for the Christmas tree and the decorations. First, I'll sleep a bit because I got up early and I'm a little tired because I'm doing something all the time.

I've rested and continue on. I've put the walnut and poppy cake in the oven and, in the meantime, I spread the dough for the pastry. I will bake the bread in the end. I'm happy, and a smile doesn't leave my face. A healthy person appreciates nothing, only runs, works, piles up and doesn't notice the beauty of life and the little things that mean life.

They sing me Christmas carols all day. I remember how Christmas was celebrated when I was a child. Snow was always over a meter high, but no one was cold. You could hear carols from all sides, holsters being shot and at 11pm we were are all in the churchyard. All of our diaspora traveled in. People took vacation days to spend Christmas with their parents. The bell rings and everyone enters the church. I am particularly happy because I read the epistle. My mom and aunt were proud of me, and so was my grandfather while he was alive. The church is big, but there is a lot of the people so they can't all fit in. Sacred songs are sung. When the Midnight Mass finishes around 1:30, everybody wishes all the best to each other for Christmas.

Everybody plays, sings, and has fun until 3 in the morning. Reverend Vinko Puljić, the Archbishop of Vrhbosanski today, who was a priest in our parish for 15 years, prepared gifts for altar boys, and especially for me. He knew I love to read so I always got a book, a doll and sweets for Christmas. Those were good times. People who publicly attended church during communism were true believers, sincere, honest and willing to help others.

I pray, sing softly and decorate the tree. I've put a lot of silver and red balls and red lights that play Christmas songs on it. I finished at 2, turned out the light, thanked

God and my donor for the gift of life and watched tree until I fell asleep.

DOCTOR:

> *In the late post transplant phase the greatest risk is posed by opportunistic infections by viruses and fungi. Therefore the patients are advised strict isolation after discharge and the implementation of measures to prevent the occurrence of infections. For example, going to the basement or attic full of dust and fungal spores is harmless to a healthy person, while in transplant patients the dust can cause severe and even fatal infections. Fungal spores are present everywhere, so it is forbidden, for example, eating prunes and figs, nuts, etc.*
>
> *In addition to fungal infections, the greatest danger is the possibility of viral encephalitis, or viral brain inflammation, which may manifest as persistent nausea and vomiting. Therefore, those infections should primarily be excluded by very aggressive methods, such as lumbar puncture and taking fluid for analysis. Constant medical control is needed during this period due to a possible overdose by drugs that dissolve in fats, such as, for example, cyclosporin. Excessive concentration of cyclosporine can also cause persistent nausea and vomiting. Gluten-free diet is still needed.*
>
> *The immune system recovers over more than a year after the transplantation and extreme caution is required even in cases where everything goes according to plan with any major problems.*
>
> *Transplantation is a therapy of choice today and a routine method applied in the treatment of many malignant hematological diseases. In addition to the registers of voluntary stem cells donors, the development of cord blood banks is also in bloom. Cord blood is the only transplant that had been destroyed for years. According to present knowledge, the blood from the umbilical cord is rich in stem cells and a valuable source of stem cells used in transplantation. The*

> *future of stem cell transplantation probably lies in cord blood stem cells.*

December 25th 2010, Saturday

I woke up at 9 and prayed. Today is Christmas, I call my husband to ask how is the mother-in-law and wish them a merry Christmas. He says she's bad. I turned off the lights on the Christmas tree which were on all night. I put the turkey in the oven and cook soup. I eat breakfast, so I can take medication. Messages arrive on the cell phone and Marija calls from Germany.

Lunch is on the table at 1pm. The boys have woken up and we have lunch together. We light a candle and say a prayer to God, before and after the meal. Messages and calls are coming in all day. All my friends would like to visit today, but prof. Labar said to avoid visitation or at least to have only one person at a time.

I call Mrs. Marija Rukavina and wish her a merry Christmas. I have a long talk with her. I feel great debt towards this woman and something special, nice and clean, as with my mom. I also heard from Mrs. Snježana and the others from the Foundation. They are all happy that I survived. I pray the rosary to St. Ante and thank God, because Man proposes and God disposes.

December 27th 2010, Monday

I wake up at 6, pray, and then cook coffee for my husband and myself. He returned last night from Bosnia to spend some time with me, and then he'll go again, meanwhile the other son is with the mother-in-law. We drink coffee and talk about how we spent Christmas, I feel sickness in my stomach and immediately throw up.

I am not afraid of vomiting, but I throw up drugs that are important for the transplant to work normally. I drinking chamomile tea spoon by spoon, but immediately vomit. I don't have a fever or diarrhea. My husband says he is taking me to the hospital, but I don't feel like going. I continue vomiting and call the emergency medical service to ask for advice because I have a severe headache.

The emergency room physician says I should be brought to Rebro because a fresh transplant is not to play around with. I shower and brush my teeth, and I've prepared clothes for the hospital in case I stay. Dr. Pavle Rončević admits me and the nurse does a fast satellite blood test. They called Dr. Kinda, who is on duty in the emergency room today.

I lie in an emergency room and receive an infusion. Blood, urine and stool tests are clean. Dr. Kinda send me to a brain CT. She suspects sinus thrombosis and admits me to the ward. She says it's better to do all the tests since I've been vomiting every seven days, 24 hours continuously. It's late already, 9pm, and my husband has been sitting and waiting the whole time. I tell him to go home and come in the morning and bring me clothes, a hygiene kit and medication. Tonight I'll sleep in endocrinology, where they don't have the medication I am taking, but they borrowed them from hematology. I pray and go to sleep.

December 28th 2010, Tuesday

I woke up at six. The nurses are changing the bed and I am alone in the room. I tell them I'm on the gluten free diet and eat eggs and sausages without bread and drink tea. My husband comes and brings all I need. Dr. Kinda calls and tells the nurse there is a vacant room in the department and to bring me in a wheelchair. I come into the room, choose a bed next to the door, put my things in the wardrobe and into a small cabinet on wheels and begin studying Russian, fifth level.

Dr. Kinda comes and tells me she'll be doing a lumbar punction today, if she'll have time, and send the sample of cerebrospinal fluid (the fluid in the brain, which stretches along the spine) to neurology, cytology and infectious to see why the CT scan showed thickening of the vessel in the brain and why I'm vomiting. In the meanwhile I receive injections in the stomach to prevent thrombosis.

My husband calls me. His brother told him that my mother-in-law is very ill. Dr. Kinda orders me gluten-free food from the hospital kitchen. I'm alone in the room, which suits me because I study out loud and don't bother anyone.

December 29th 2010, Wednesday

I woke up at 6, conducted hygiene, and the nurse is changing the bed. The head nurse tells me that today, after lunch, Dr. Kinda will perform a lumbar puncture on me. I thank her and tell her I'm ready. I'm not afraid no because I am aware that this is just another in a series of test necessary for my recovery. Besides that, I have boundless trust for Dr. Kinda. She was awarded the prize for humanity, commitment and dedication to patients in 2009.

I eat breakfast and study while I wait to be called up. Head nurse comes to get me and take me to a small doctor's office with medical instruments. The nurse tells me to straddle the chair and lean my beard against the rest. Dr. Kinda comes and further adjusts me in the chair. She gives me a local anesthetic, and begins the puncture after a few minutes. First, she feels with her fingers searching for an appropriate place to stab between the fourth and fifth vertebrae, and then thrusts the needle and the fluid drips into small tubes.

I tell jokes in order to shake of fear. We all laugh, and the doctor asks if it hurts. I tell her I feel the pain, but it's not so strong that I can't take it, because I'm used to pain, like a donkey's used on getting beaten. Again laughter and it's over. It lasted five minutes maybe. The nurse takes me away and tells me to lie on my back for at least two hours. The doctor tells me my spine and head will hurt very much when the anesthesia let's down because they took a lot of fluid so it could be sent to three laboratories. I lie down in bed and fall asleep.

They bring lunch, and at around 3pm Dr. Kinda and prof. Labar enter the room. They ask me how I am. I tell them I am fine and that the pain is bearable. Dr. Kinda says it is good if it is so. Given the amount of the removed fluid she expected the pain to be unbearable. We will know the results tomorrow, and in the meanwhile I am still receiving my therapy and injections in the stomach against thrombosis.

Today I got a roommate. It bothers her when my cell phone rings and when I light the lamp above my bed to read at night so I turn it off, pray the rosary to st. Ante and go to sleep. If nothing else, I'll get rest and have a good night's sleep.

December 30th 2010, Thursday

I woke up at 6 and did my hygiene, so the lady could use the bathroom when she wakes up, as she is older, less mobile and it all takes longer.

My husband calls me after breakfast and says his brother called from Prijedor. He was at the hospital visiting his mother-in-law. Doctors told him that she had lost pressure and to come in the afternoon. I tell my husband to prepare black clothes for the funeral and a week's worth of my clothes for the hospital. I don't know what the test results will be, but whether I stay or go home depends on them. Doctors Kinda and Serventi come at about 2pm and tell me the lumbar puncture results from cytology, neurology and infectious are in order. They couldn't find the cause of vomiting.

They assume that these are perhaps migraines that I inherited from the donor with the transplant. Dr. Kinda tells me she has ordered me for an MRI at 8am. If the results are fine, I'm going home. I thank her.

My husband tells me my mother-in-law has died. He is waiting for his brother and sister-in-law from Slovenia and then they'll go to Bosnia. He will come over with my clothes before that. I'm glad I said goodbye to her before the transplantation because I can't and mustn't be exposed to great risk now. He brings me clothes for the next few days and leaves for his mother's funeral to Bosnia. His brother and sister-in-law drive him. I express my condolences once more, we say goodbye and I wish them a safe journey.

December 31st 2010, Friday

At 7:40 the nurse comes and takes me to MRI. I go into the drum, once with the mask, the second time without it, because they say it gives off radiation while imaging.

I'm done and they call the nurse to come and get me. I know the way back myself, but they don't allow it. They'll contact Dr. Kinda about the results. Breakfast is waiting in my room, and the nurse has changed the bed. I'm learning Russian, looking up unfamiliar words in the dictionary, translating them and transcribing into a notebook. Dr. Kind comes at around 11 and tells me the magnetic resonance results are in order and that they do not know what is causing the vomiting and the headaches. He tells me to go home.

My beautifully decorated Christmas tree awaits me at home. The boys are working. I wash my hands, unpack my things and go cook. Due to my mother-in-law's death we won't celebrate, but we will wait for the New Year. We'll watch movies. When my father- in-law, my mom and aunt died, we didn't listen to music for a year, as we won't now. I put the pork in the oven and cooked the vegetables for the French salad. The apartment is neat, just a little more ornaments and scented candles. Despite everything, I'm happy and pleased that I survived all of this and the test results are good.

The boys came, showered and got dressed. I cleaned myself up and set the table for the three of us. Friends call them and Alen goes away, but Igor stays with me. The midnight is coming. We've opened the champagne and watch the fireworks from the Ban Josip Jelacic Square. We congratulated each other. I tell Igor to join his friends, and I'll watch a movie. It doesn't matter that I'm alone, it's important that I'm alive and I'm not in pain.

Marija calls me from Germany. She says she is glad to have a sister. Maik says they should because I'm vomiting. I tell her not to come, because even the doctors can't find the cause of vomiting, and when there's a lot of us, I can't get any rest or time for myself.

January 10th 2011, Monday

I have a check up with Professor Labar today. I did the tests on the 3rd of January because you have to wait for the results of chimerism, sternal puncture and imunofenotipization for a week or more. I vomit before entering the doctor's office.

I tell prof. Labar I think the drugs make me vomit. I lost 4 kilos in three weeks. The results are within normal limits: E 2.97, hb. 103, L 4.6, trb. 153. Urine BO, AP 197, AST / ALT 108/127, GGT 207, LD 228, bil. 15, CSP 30. Sternal puncture: dominated by the white line mostly represented by granulocytes and lymphocytes. Erythropoiesis is up to 5 percent of the cells. Smaller clusters of platelets.

He says the results of the sternal puncture are within normal limits because 93 days have passed since the transplantation and it's all still fresh. He discontinued Virolex, CSP 50 mg / every other day, reduced Cell Cept from 2 x 750 to 2 x 500 mg, and Diflucan from 300 to 100 mg. The results of the January 24th tests: KKS, SE, trb., RTC, bil., AP, AST / ALT, GGT, creatinine, urine, LD and conc. CSP.

I don't vomit at home anymore. It seems that it was from a large amount of drugs after all.

January 24th 2011, Monday

I have a check up today. Thank God I haven't vomited. I got up early to pray in peace, then I'll do hygiene, eat breakfast and go to Rebro. The tests are done, I just need to pick up the results. The check ups are more frequent initially, and after six months approximately every two weeks. Not throwing up these two weeks, I gained 2 kilograms. Prof. Labar calls me up, asks me how I feel and says the results are good.

He has reduced my treatment, namely: SCP 50 mg / 2 times a week, then terminate after two weeks, Cell Cept 2 x 500 mg and Difuclan 100 mg. I'm still on a gluten-free diet, and the check up on the 7th of February shows the same findings. I'm happy and I'm not worried because the marrow is slowly working and producing, and deviations are within limits.

Every day of my life is on borrowed time and should enjoy it as much as possible. We go home because today my Ana will come after work. My husband will pick her up at her home because somewhere she bought apples that are tart and juicy, larger for 3 kunas and slightly smaller for 2.50 kn.

Apples and "Animal Kingdom" chocolates are my only dessert. In order to repay Ana, and shorten my time, I'm knitting dresses for Ana's girls, just like last year. My husband went to pick up Ana and I'm going to hurry to finish at least one dress for Ana to take. I'm really looking forward that she's coming and we'll have an open conversation about everything.

I made wine stew because Anna will get the apples from home right after work and immediately come here. It's an ordinary dish prepared for all of us because I can eat it too. I am tired of cooking one meal for them and another for myself and also baking two kinds of bread. I spend most of my time in the kitchen. I cannot wait to stop the gluten-free diet. I am eager for fresh fruit and vegetables, but, considering what I've been through, it is important that all is well, even if I have to eat gluten-free for life. It is very healthy for digestion and the whole organism.

November 14th 2011, Monday

Today I am going to prof. Labar for a checkup. It's been 13 months since my transplant and I feel great. My husband and I have coffee and breakfast, and then he drives me to Rebro. I did my tests on Friday so I don't have to have an empty stomach. I come to the hospital, and the waiting room is full of people with sad faces. I tell a few jokes in order to cheer them up a little bit. I carry needles and thread with me and knit while I'm waiting. After two hours prof. Labar calls me up and tells me the test results are good, but the liver is slightly enlarged so I have to repeat the tests in a month.

Today the results are: SE 2, E 5.17, hb. 138, trb. 442, L 10.1, AST / ALT 32/52, GGT 131. Condition stable, still without treatment. The next check up on 19th of December with the following findings: KKs, SE, trb., rtc., LD creatinine and liver. I'm not worried about the liver because it works a lot, considering I have no spleen, so it's great. Nothing hurts, and the test results are fine.

After the check up I visit my father and Ana Rukavina at the cemetery. They are both at the same cemetery, so when I visit one, I visit the other. I light up lanterns for my mom and aunt on my father's grave. I think about him and Marija and what would have happened if we had met. Perhaps he would have accepted and loved me, or maybe he would have rejected me.

Every time I feel pain and sadness at Ana's grave because I know that this young woman was taken by God so others would live, including myself. Although she is an angel and watches us from heaven, ever since I found out I was going to have a transplant I pray „Our Father“ for her soul every day. Given the fact that God left me to live for some reason, I promised Ana at the grave that I would help the Foundation and the sick people who need it, as much as I'll be able to.

Mrs. Marija told me that Ana was writing a book while she was lying in hospital, but much of the data was deleted. She was a journalist and it was her profession. I am an amateur and have no experience in writing, but I am trying to convey my life experiences onto paper and thus help the Foundation and people suffering from hematologic diseases.

September 24th 2012, Monday

Today I'm having my last control check with prof. Labar since he is retiring. I'm very sorry because he is the best expert and not only in Croatia. He is recognized in Europe and throughout the world. I had the honor to meet him and the fortune to have him as my doctor.

For this control check I had to do all the tests related to the revision of my illness, including bone biopsy. Given that my blood type hasn't changed, bone biopsy will show how the bone marrow is working and what to do next. Prof. Labar had me come to his office since the clinic is crowded and we have to discuss the future course of my treatment. I found him sitting alone at his desk drinking coffee. A few days ago he emptied his desk and took away his belongings. The scene was so sad to me that tears welled my eyes. Regardless of the legal requirements for retirement, the man is capable, healthy and a great expert and could still work for another 5-10 years.

I showed him my test results and he says they are great. Bone beams are normal, while the marrow is 80 percent cellular and represented by all three blood vines. After transplant, the marrow works four years with permissible minor deviations until everything comes to normal. Therefore, my test results are excellent. It is not that important anymore that my blood type hasn't changed. He told me to come to the clinic because he hasn't got a computer in the office anymore.

I'm now a patient of Dr. Serventi, and prof. Labar recommended that in the case of an unstable blood count and a need for treatment, a stem cell support should be considered. I believe it won't come to that and that it's all behind me.

I say goodbye to prof. Labar and thank him for everything he has done. I tell him I look upon him as a father, and Mrs. Marija as another mother. I thank him once again and we say goodbye. The hematology department is sad to see him go.

November 27th 2012, Tuesday, Open hearts day at the Ana Rukavina Foundation

Mrs. Marija and the Foundation's executive committee decided to open the doors of the Foundation to all people of good will. On the day of the big concert at the Ban Josip Jelačić Square, founds are being raised at the City Cafe through telephone calls from citizens.

I'm happy to be alive and of service any way I can. Mrs. Snježana, who up until now worked at the Foundation, went into retirement, and today she will officially say goodbye, although she will continue to volunteer.

I promised I'd bake her a cake and I baked cheese biscuits for the people at the Foundation, nurses who draw blood, doctors and everyone else donating blood. I wore my favorite shirt that says "I want life" and my husband and I came to the Foundation at 11. I greet everyone, and Mrs. Marija introduces me to Jasenka Požega-Sremac, a dentist from Neum, who wrote a book about Ana titled "I want life". These are beautiful and touching songs. Mrs. Snježana is excited and happy about the cake.

Nova TV and HRT journalists are asking me to make a statement for the News which I did not expect because there was a journalist from Nova TV's show „Verified“ here on Friday and they filmed us for three hours. Everything will be explained on Thursday on „Verified“, from registering to donating. They asked me to give a statement so that people could see there is life after transplantation and that the blood donations are not in vain. I was also asked for a statement by the Student Television.

I don't enjoy having my pictures taken, but if my public appearances can help the Foundation and severely ill people who are fighting for their lives, I always say yes. When someone who is lying in a sterile room at the transplant ward sees me on TV all cheerful and optimistic, I believe they gain strength to fight, hoping for a cure.

Dr. Mrsić also came as he is the medical director of the Foundation. I greeted him. I tell him he shouldn't have gone into politics as he is a fine expert and a good man. All of his patients are sorry that he is gone, and the hematology department is at a loss. He says he loves challenges. I respect his choice.

At one point he approached me and asked me what my test results were like. He had heard that I had written a book. He told me that his friend is the director of the „Profil“ publishing house and he will ask him to help me. I am very happy and I thank him. I think he offered his help because he believes that people who are seriously ill or are going to transplant will fight like lions when they read my book.

Three hundred and seventy-eight samples were collected today, and among the donators was *Verified* 's journalist Ana Blažević, who has shown how to support the work of the Foundation by example.

Whoever wants to donate blood can do so at the KBC „Rebro“ on the ground floor of the green building every Monday through Friday from 9am to 1pm.

November 28th 2012, Wednesday

While waiting for the this morning's test results, I'm going to Ms. Nataša, at the Registry , so I could ask her if we could send a letter to my donor at the U.S. registry. The World registry, which our Ana Rukavina Foundation belongs to, has a rule about when you can meet your donor, if both parties so desire, and that is two years after the transplant.

I wrote the following:

"Good unknown man, it's been over two years since you saved my life, i.e. donated your stem cells. I am very grateful and I am in your debt for the rest of my life. My name is Ankica Begić and I am 48 years old. I would like to meet you, however, if you do not wish to do so, I will respect that. You are my blood brother. Whether you are a believer or an atheist, for me you are the kindest man in the world and the first to God. I pray for you every day to my God, and God is one, only the people are divided so they gave Him different names: God, Allah, Buddha, Krishna etc. In my desire to meet you I have enrolled an English course so we could communicate when the moment arrives.

In English I only wrote: "Thank you very much. See you. "

Below I wrote my home address, e-mail address and mobile phone number. If he decides to answer, it will be to me personally. If not, he will give his reasons to the U.S. registry and they will relay them to us.

Miss Natasha will translate it to English and mail it, with return address, along with my manuscript, to the U.S. registry and they will forward it to his home address. His identity is still protected by code and I won't know who he is until he responds. As I am an eternal optimist, I believe he will get back at me.

I met a young man called Davor from Komiža on the island of Vis today, who has acute leukemia and will soon have a transplant. The one fortunate thing for him is having a brother and a sister who are a match 10/10. This speeds up the transplant procedure because they can provide the marrow when doctors deem necessary. In some leukemia cases it is very important to this on time. The graft is more likely to take and there are fewer side effects because donors are children of the same father and mother. Davor is married, with three daughters, so he has something to fight for, and has a lot of support from family and friends. He recognized me last night on Nova

TV's News when I gave a statement at the Foundation that my marrow is working like a Swiss clock. I gave him my mobile phone number and told him that he can call me at any time he feels the need to talk or has questions.

Today's test results are within normal limits. For the next check up, which is on 23rd of January 2013, Dr. Serventi told me to bring test results showing JAK-2 to be negative. I joke that everything in school and life that is positive is good, except in medicine, including my JAK-2 mutation gene. Since this gene is positive, my disease had mutated from thrombocythemia to thrombocytopenia until the transplant, i.e. it went from a high count of platelets (850 ?) to a low count (12 ?) while I was dependent on platelet transfusions. After that it mutated to myelofibrosis, which was the reason for my transplant.

I am a big optimist and I believe that the JAK-2 has mutated enough and it will continue to do so no longer as it has also tired. The test results are good and everything will remain fine. We laugh together and the doctor says she hopes that the JAK-2 gene will be negative. It's a little strange that with all I've been through the doctors had been more worried than I had.

There were difficult moments when I cried until my eyes dried up, but the next day I was as good as new. I believed a donor would be found as soon as the register spun, and so it was.. I believed my bone marrow would kick in the first week, and it did. Although the blood type did not change, I believed the biopsy would show my bone marrow working like a Swiss clock, and it did. Nothing is ever 100 percent certain, and so isn't my up until now successful transplant, but I believe that's THAT.

November 29th 2012, Thursday, TV show "Verified"

Nova TV's „Verified“ show were doing a report on the Ana Rukavina Foundation and they called the Foundation looking for someone that has had the transplant and is cheerful, happy and optimistic. Mrs. Marija recommended me and the journalist Ana Blažević and her cameraman filmed us for three hours on Friday. Of course, it is going to be a report on everything, and only a few sentences about me.

I really liked the report on the Foundation. Journalist Ana decided to be donor and explained the whole procedure to the citizens. The specimen center, the cord blood bank, the blood donation room, the Foundation premises where the citizens where giving blood samples on Tuesday were shown, along with my story. Dr. Mikulić, who was a doctor in the sterile units, and who now works at the Registry, told a story of a young man from our registry who could have become a donor to a one-year-old child but reconsidered, although he was healthy. It's ugly and sad. No one is forcing anyone to enroll in the registry because it is voluntary. If you have signed up, don't give up, because I can tell you how it feels when a donor bails out on you. Your whole world crashes down on you in an instant and you think it's the end.

Donor can give bone marrow from the pelvic bone under anesthesia or blood-forming stem cells from the blood by leukapheresis. This is similar to dialysis. The blood from the vein of one arm passes through an apparatus that separates the stem cells and the rest of the blood is returned through another vein to the body. Injections that stimulate the bone marrow to produce stem cells and introduce them into peripheral blood are given four days before. It is virtually a painless procedure, except for the needle prick for blood sampling. You can read or watch a movie.

I told how I felt when the first donor was deleted from the registry. Despite all that has happened, today I am a happy and "healthy" woman. I study languages, volunteer and work a bit. My wish is to start volunteering at the pediatric hematology in Klaićeva. I saw that in Rijeka they have story-tellers, however besides good-night stories I would like to help with homework and teach girls how to knit and crochet, but not with wool as it leaves fiber and is not allowed in sterile units.

I'm sensitive to human suffering and pain, especially in children. While I was laying in sterile units in *Rebro*, I saw mothers with children suffering from leukemia at the hematology department on the ground floor and it was extremely difficult for me. I thought about life and said to myself, if I live, I'll help them as much as I can. Of course, due to my isolation and security a lot of time had to pass to get the approval of professor Labar. I thought: even if I don't survive, I've lived for 46 years, and these kids haven't lived at all and already they organism is poisoned with chemotherapy. It is hard and sad to see.

A recording of this show entitled "The decision that saves lives" is available on the Foundation's and Nova TV's website:

http://novatv. dnevnik.hr/clanak//provjereno/kada-potpuni-stranac-pokloni-neko-me-zivot.html

December 16th 2012, Friday

Today is an important day for the Foundation and for all of us in Croatia, since blood will be donated in a tent on the Square. I spent half of last night throwing up and having terrible headaches. A doctor from HMS gave me injections against pain and vomiting and told me to take medicinal charcoal. I threw up at 10 today and my headache is gone. I feel better and I am going to make some crescent rolls out of 3 kilograms of flour. While the dough is rising, I am going to make cheese with egg whites for the filling and egg yolk with salt for the icing.

The oven is multifunctional, so the warm air bakes all three ingredients at once. I've coated a large cardboard box with white parchment paper and have stacked the cooled pastry in the box. I quickly showered, put on my favorite "I want life" shirt and headed to the Square at 12:30 by tram. The Square was full of people, mostly young people who are patiently waiting in line for the nurses to draw their blood. Our people are unpredictable and when they are made aware of charities they show up in large numbers. Nova TV is the sponsor and all of their journalists, presenters and cameramen are here and are selling the Foundations advertising material along with the volunteers.

Mrs. Marija sent me a book by Jose Carreras "Singing from the soul". Mr. Jose is a famous opera singer who suffered from leukemia in 1987. He helped our maestro Šutej by performing a concert in *Cibona* and giving him a part of the money for his treatment in the United States. He holds concerts around the world and helps those suffering from leukemia and lymphoma, and he established a foundation that provides assistance to those suffering.

I'm glad I baked cookies because I will offer them to the people from the Foundation, Nova TV employees , and also to people donating and nurses taking blood samples. Sisters Dijana and Dženana are drawing blood samples and sending them to the type-ward at *Rebro*. The wife of maestro Šutej, Ivana, is also volunteering while her children are at kindergarten and school. She is giving out coffee and explaining further procedures related to transplants to the people waiting in line.

Given my personal experience and my comprehensive knowledge about it, I joined in after she left at about 3pm. Before giving blood people fill out a questionnaire in which they should answer whether they will give consent should they be a match and called upon. They tell me that it confuses them because if they didn't want to help, they wouldn't be giving blood for typing in the first place. I explain that they can pull out even if they are a match if they change their minds. So I met a lot of people and the young boy, Ivan, who came with his sister to give blood, has helped with the transcript of this journal and has given me divine cards that he makes by himself.

Given that nurses do not have time to eat or drink coffee, I each put eight cookies in a bag, so they could eat when they stop drawing blood. I have to say that nurse Dijana has drawn about twenty thousand samples all together and has been given the nickname „fastest needle" as she takes about 20 seconds per sample.

The event should have ended at 4 o'clock, but the nurses prolonged it for another 40 minutes. People are compassionate and they turned out in big numbers. Whoever passes through the Square stops and stands in line.

Looking at them, I feel we'd have work until midnight. Unfortunately, the sisters were unable to draw all the blood because they were limited by time. We had to free up the Square and prepare everything for tonight's concert. The tent has to be dismantled and taken to Foundation facilities along with the advertising material. All volunteers should come to the City Cafe by 7pm.

I went back home to get some rest because the vomiting and the headache left me really tired, and I didn't get much sleep. My husband and I got invitations from the Foundation and Nova TV to come to the City Cafe. We dressed up and got going at 7.30 as there will be a lot of people and we do not know whether there will be room for parking.

At the entrance to the City Cafe a gentleman from Nova TV, who regulates the time and the list of people at the call center told me to be in front of the stairwell at 10:30 where a volunteer will pick me up because I will be answering the phones also. I am thankful and very happy that I am alive and honored that I will contribute to the Foundation in this way.

Marija Rukavina, Dr. Mrsić and Ana's sister Gordana are the hosts. They greet everyone and thank them for coming. I look at Mrs. Marija and chills run through my whole body because we're friends, and I know how much she is suffering and how difficult it is for her. These events open old wounds and make you relive everything that has happened. I know that she entered into all of this to continue what Anna wanted. I believe that the good Lord gives her strength because her work saves lives of strangers.

I go outside and watch. The square is full of people, mostly young people who came for the concert. The City Cafe is full of people from political and public life. Since elections were held this month, almost all representatives of the newly elected government are here, except the Prime Minister, everybody from Nova TV and virtually all actors from "Lara's choice", representatives of the city government and many musicians.

President Josipović comes with his wife, welcomes all present and goes to the call center with Mrs. Rukavina. In my opinion, he is the fairest and simplest politician in Croatia to this day and that is why people love to hear him and ask solutions to their problems. Nobody has a magic wand, but when your president hears you out and gives you a moment of attention, you feel better because you know someone feels for you. I trust him, and if he lets me down, I will never trust another politician.

In last night's weather forecast Mr. Sijerković announced that it would snow and rain, and that it will get very cold. Mrs. Marija tells me that she and Mr. Mrsić looked up at the sky and that Mr. Mrsić, who is an atheist, said: "Ana, you are close to God, so please talk to him and ask him to look at these many people who came to the concert. Please guard us and help us with good weather. "

However, I knew there wouldn't be precipitation because I always have chest pains, where I had punctions, before the weather changes, and also in my pelvic bone, where

I had biopsies. I have had 17 punctions and six biopsies so far. I use to joke that they could hire me for the TV forecast as I know if it would rain or not.

Believe it or not, a miracle happened, I do believe. While the blood samples were being taken, the temperature reached up to 16 ° C, and in the evening it dropped to zero, but it was dry, without precipitation. My husband and I were sitting at the journalists' table, and I took the opportunity to talk with some of those present. I mostly spoke with Sanja Doležal while we were waiting for our turn at the call center. She wanted to know all about my transplant. I regret not taking photos with the cast of "Lara's choice", but I was embarrassed to ask, and Dinko (Filip Jurčić) confused me. Regardless of his *bad guy* role, he was born to be an actor, like Mustafa Nadarević.

When my turn came at the call center I took 20 calls. Mostly from pensioners and the unemployed. These are people who have little money and a big heart. When they call I introduce myself and tell them I'm not a public figure, but just an ordinary person as they are and that I had a successful transplant thanks to the Foundation and am a living witness why it should be supported.

People are satisfied and tell me they are pleased that a politician didn't answer their call as they promise everything until they come to power but fulfill nothing and just stuff their own pockets. Every one of them would talk to me and ask me about the Foundation and transplantation, but the goal of each of us is to receive as many calls possible and collect as many *kuna*.

To all who called tonight and helped I thank in the name of the Foundation and my own. We raised 1.6 million kuna from tonight's calls. Unfortunately, VAT plus other expenses had to be paid.

When we were leaving for home, Mrs. Marija thanked everyone by shaking hands and gave me a firm hug telling everybody I was her best living advertisement. Everyone was given a book by Jose Carreras "Singing from the soul" at the exit.

Exactly five minutes before midnight we exited the City Café and first drops of rain began falling. I looked up at the sky and said: "God, thank you! Ana, thank you! I promise you that I will too help the work of the Foundation as much as I can.” I do not mean financial aid, but volunteering.

I feel great gratitude towards Mrs. Marija, but also a responsibility with which I lie and wake up every day.

December 17th 2012, Tuesday, "Studio 45"

Marija Rukavina, Dr. Mrsić and I have been invited to "Studio 45" on RTL2 tonight. Mrs. Marija will talk about the Foundation, Dr. Mrsić about transplantation and the method of taking blood-forming stem cells, and I'll talk about my experience. The recording was live, and the show airs the same day at 11:15pm. The replay will air tomorrow morning at seven. I regret it's so late because this time Dr. Mrsić explained everything in detail, from entering the registry to the donating procedure.

Mrs. Marija said they visited all the cities in Croatia that invited them, including the islands. Osijek is the record holder in donations as 1093 potential donors were entered in the first day, and 976 in the second. There hadn't been so many donors in any other city .I watched as she spoke and saw that her eyes were full of tears, she deeply sighed and refrained from crying.

When this all started, she said, no one expected that in six years we would have a large register, open and equipped public cord blood bank, an institute for standardization equipped with all the latest technology and that these samples would be processed. A lot of good got involved wanted to help. There have been more than 200 blood donation events in all parts of Croatia and 24 lives from our register saved to this date.

Mrs. Marija said that I am an OPTIMIST CLASS because I believed in the Foundation and the world registry, that a donor for me will be found, and that I give hope to all who now lie in hematology or at home waiting for a donor. At first, people were afraid and peered into the tent where blood was taken, thinking that the bones were being sawed and that it was very painful. Thanks to the media and Dr. Mrsić people more or less understand the procedure today.

Dr. Mrsić explained the whole process in detail, and I'll retell it in my own words.

The registry can be entered by every adult between the age of 18 and 40 because transplant centers accept donors up to 55 years of age. It's a limit set with respect to health and all those illnesses that come afterward. It is preferable that the donor is in the registry for at least 15 years and that he gives a chance to someone sick.

Anyone who wants to first becomes familiar with what it means to be a donor, they are explained the procedure of taking blood and what happens after. If you agree, you sign consent to have your blood sample taken and you enter the registry. Seven milliliters of blood is taken, which is less than is needed for usual blood tests.

At the typization center, certain techniques are used to determine genes and to do an HLA typization (the so called registry plate) by which we are set apart from others and which cannot be copied. It is a computerized database of all donors: full name, date of birth, gender, address, phone, e-mail address. This is the basic data, which is protected.

The transplant center does the same for its patient and checks the database to make sure the data matches. If it's a match, the transplant center informs the registry that they have found a potential donor in their database. Then the registry calls the donor and asks if they are still willing to be a donor. The donor can cancel at any time and is not asked to explain or being persuaded to reconsider.

If the donor agrees, their data is re-checked at the registry to make sure it matches with the patient. Typization and retypization is done at the genetic level so they would match each other.

The transplant center is informed that the donor matches and consents and a transplant date is requested. They deliver the data and ask the donor if that date suits them. If it doesn't, the donor is asked when it would suit him and the registry coordinates with the center.

The donor comes in for a general examination to check whether there are some serious health issues (a blood sample is taken) and the donation process is agreed upon.

The donation can take two forms.

The first way is by taking bone marrow with a sterile needle from the pelvic bone, under anesthesia, fifty percent of the marrow from both sides. Fifteen milliliters of bone marrow is taken per kilogram. The next day you go home. A man weighing 90 kg can donate more than a liter of bone marrow. Bone marrow is one of the largest organs in the body and is everywhere.

Another way of donating is the peripheral stem cells which, besides in blood, are also in the periphery. Every organ in the body has got stem cells, including bones, and they continuously circulate. They are mostly found in the bone marrow and, if it is stimulated to work faster, the bone marrow throws the cells into the periphery, where it is collected.

The method is similar to dialysis. Blood from one arm goes into the machine, where it is centrifuged. The stem cells are separated into a bag, and the blood is returned to the body through the other arm. It's painless, except the needle prick, but lasts four to five hours. It is advisable to take something to read or a solid film, because the blood is taken by a nun???. The next day you go home. Two hundred milliliters of stem cells is taken.

Both methods are acceptable and equally reliable. There have been more than half a million donors worldwide. Studies have shown that none of them had health issues. Dr Mrsić said that research has shown that we were created to live much longer than usual. We use 10 percent of our brain supplies, and we have bone marrow supplies worth 250 years of living. A single donation shortens our life by 10 years, which means we have another 240 years left.

I regret that this show was so late, at 11:15pm, and the rerun is at seven in the morning. So, if you want, you can watch it on the Internet if you type in: http://www.studio45.rtl2.hr/zelim-zivot.

April 19th 2013, Friday, my first contact with the donor

The World register allows contact with the donor two years after the transplantation. That's the period of survival and recovery. All member countries of the World registry must abide by that, and so does Croatia. Nataša Bjelić and I sent a request to meet the donor in early December 2012. However, there was no response from the American registry for three months.

If the donor does not want to get in touch with me, the rule is that he will tell that to his register, and they will contact us, whether the response is positive or negative. Given that there was no response, I asked Nataša to resend the e-mail to the U.S. Register enquiring whether the donor wants to get in contact with me.

I am stubborn and persistent. They probably noticed that at the register and sent the official papers in English, and our registry translated into Croatian and sent them to my house. After reading I'm supposed to fill in personal information and sign that I agree with all stated above. These papers state the good and bad sides of meeting.

Disadvantages are: 1. there is a possibility that the donor does not want contact with me, 2. by signing the papers my information becomes known to the registry and the donor, 3. media exposure, 4. in case of, God forbid, a need for new transplantation and his stem cells, the registry is no longer able to mediate with him, and it becomes an agreement between the donor and me, 5. there is the possibility of extortion, solicitation, phone calls, visits by him, his family and relatives. The positive side is that a wonderful and lasting friendship can be born.

When I read all of this, I spoke with my husband and friends. My husband said it was my decision alone because that man saved my life, to think it through and do what I think is best. Deep in my heart I felt that I wanted to meet this good man, no matter who and what he is and regardless of the consequences. What wrong could a man that saved my life do to me? Part of his blood-forming stem cells is still stored at the blood bank at KBC Rebro. I signed the papers and took them to our registry, and Nataša sent them to the U.S. registry again.

I didn't wait for the answer for too long and on 19th of April 2013 an envelope arrived with my donor's information to my home address. I was so happy and excited that I screamed from the top of my lungs. I immediately sat in front of the computer and wrote a short e-mail of gratitude and a few sentences about myself. Soon I received an answer thanking me that I contacted him. He wrote his name is Gaylon, from Oklahoma, a native, Comanche Indian, an art painter, 42 years old, happily married with three children, etc. All happy and excited I sent him an e-mail again expressing my desire to get to know him better, asked him whether he uses Skype so we could see each other and invited them to come to Croatia.

As I already wrote: mysterious are the ways of the Lord, and when the good Lord shuts a door, he always leaves a window ajar, you just needs to look hard. That happened with me.

All this time, from the transplant to the first contact with him, every night when I was going to sleep, I imagined a different donor. All races, religions and nations that exist in the world can be found in America. So one night I imagined him as a black person, then a white person, then Chinese, Japanese, mulatto, Arab, Native American, Russian, Turkish, French, English, German, Serbian, Slovenian ... all the people who live in the former Yugoslavia area... I do not know why, but I never imagined him being American Indian. Although I like them. When I was a child I loved western movies with Native Americans. I always cheered for the Native Americans because something told me they are just and honest and they fight for their land. At school plays I played a Native American girl. I had thick, long, black braided hair, and the teacher would paint me.

His wife, Melissa, contacted me right away and welcomed me to the family. She wrote that they knew that after two years there was a possibility I would contact them. They waited impatiently, and when my e-mail arrived, are also jumped with joy and excitement and wept.

She told me that Gaylon is a very good man, husband and father, and wants to help everyone, and that he puts his family and friends before himself. I see a great resemblance to myself, as I am like that. Melissa is a nurse and works at the emergency department at a hospital in Oklahoma City. She gave him abdomen injection to collect stem cells. For five days you are given two injections in the stomach in the morning and evening, and the stem cells gather to one place. After that, the donor is attached to a machine that separates stem cells into a bag, spins them, and the rest of the blood is returned to the body through the other arm. Such separation of stem cells, plasmapheresis, has no consequences to the health of the donor. So, it is just a matter of the invidual's good will, whether he is willing to save someone's life and spend four to five hours lying and watching a movie or reading a book while plasmapheresis is taking place.

Gaylon wrote that he entered the registry in Oklahoma City more than 17 years ago, while his wife was carrying their first child. He had been registered for nearly 15 years when he was asked to donate. They told him there was a young person in a hospital in Europe whose life literally depends on his blood-forming stem cells and that her first donor, who was also an identical match, had to be removed from the registry due to illness. He says he did not hesitate for a second, but immediately agreed to save me. When the plane with his blood took off, he and his wife were waving and crying, and he said: "Please, God, save that person. I gave a part of myself, and now it's your turn. Please, God, let this person contact me, and let it be a good person. " He knew nothing about me. He wrote he was a Protestant, and his wife Catholic, that old Native American beliefs do not allow donation of blood, nails and hair because Native Americans believe they can only go to heaven if they are whole. He says he believes he will go to heaven before all of them because he gave me life. He told me that he only did what his conscience told him to do and that I owe him nothing. It is my obligation to fight and live, because I have Comanche blood in me, and they are great fighters, they fear nothing and no one and they keep moving forward.

At first, they asked me to write every day. They sent me photos of the entire family. I sent them our photos and video links in which I gave statements to the Ana Rukavina Foundation. I sent them everything about the Foundation in English and Ana's letter. I believe that they know more about our Foundation than some of our people do. After a few days I sent them our Skype number and we saw each other. The time difference is seven hours. It was midnight here and 5pm there the day he called me via Skype. That Skype call cannot be described with words. When I saw the man who saved my life on that small screen, I just cried. He waved his hand and said: "Hello, sister!" My husband and the boys also had eyes full of tears, and I just looked at that good man dumbfounded. I cannot describe how I felt at that moment. There are no such words in English or in Croatian dictionary. If I had had wings, I would have flied.

Little by little, we got to know each other very well via messaging and Skype. Our children are friends on Facebook, and so are we. After several Skype conversations my son Igor also entered the register of volunteer donors. I did not want to force it, even though I always told them it was a shame that no one in our house is registered, although that registry saved my life. When he saw that nothing happened to Gaylon and that created a great friendship was born, he decided it by himself.

I told him not to enter if he doesn't intend to go through with it because I know best what it is like when the donor backs out. My Igor says he would not have even entered if he didn't take it seriously. When his blood is typified and entered into the registry, I believe he'll be asked to save someone from the U.S. registry. In my opinion that would be a just and fair exchange. I expect Alen to register too after Gaylon's visit.

My husband cannot be a marrow donor due to his age, but he is a blood donor. The day my Igor gave blood at the Foundation premises, an Al Jazeera TV reporter was doing a story on the Foundation and asked me for a statement. If you want, you can see it at TV Al Jazeera, Increase of awareness about donating stem cells.

When I got their photos, I immediately sent them to the Foundation, the register sterile units, all of my doctors, etc. Dr. Serventi-Seiwerth told me that a 100 percent Native American cannot be a match to me because only a race can save a race: white can save white, black can save black, yellow can save yellow, and Native Americans are a red race, named after their land. We are not even aware of how much we in Croatia and the former Yugoslavia are a match to each others. But we don't even think about that, only about how we are going to spite each other. Who knows where the end of us would be if we were good to each other instead of being envious. Nothing bad could happen to us, and even the crisis couldn't touch us. Today's man is a wolf to man, and not a man. I believe that the world has more good than bad people, but they do not stand out, and they can't from all the bad that are always in the foreground.

I told Dr. Serventi a story that Gaylon told me. His great-grandfather has German roots of the Fisher family. Around 1800s he moved to America, New York, married and had a son. When the son was 12 years old, they headed with a group of people to San Francisco over the Gulf of Mexico by boat. The captain of the ship disembarked them at the Gulf of Mexico and went on. They bought a carriage and continued their journey to San Francisco. The Comanche ambushed them and a fight broke out. There were dead on both sides. Comanche took the child, the great-grandfather, with them into the woods. He learned to live with them in peace. They taught him to hunt and everything else. His parents survived and demanded the U.S. Government to return the child. They negotiated and the Comanche gave him back, but he didn't want to live with his parents and he ran back to the Comanche. When he became of age, he married a Comanche woman and started a family. Comanche gave him a piece of land, and his great-grandfather is the founder of the city and the state of Texas. The Germans researched. The story is verified and true. Gaylon says: "My great-grandfather was 100 percent German and became a 100 percent Comanche." His mother is also of mixed race and so he picked up Caucasian genes and rescued me.

I am very happy that it was he who gave me life as we are very similar and congruent in character. We live similar lives, have a similar biological past, we think alike, we love and appreciate the same things, we are very cheerful and have a sense of humor, we love life and people, etc. At the same time I was looking for my biological family, he saw his father on deathbed and forgave him everything. God created my counterpart and brother in America. I love him and his family as I love my Igor and Alen. Deep in my soul I feel that I have a brother by blood, a brother that saved my life and to whom I can confide and share good and bad. He says the same for me. He will come here with his wife in early September. The children will stay at home, and their grandparents on their mother's side, who live opposite them, will take care of them. I wonder how much goodness this man has when he is coming at his own expense from that far away just to meet and share happy moments with me. I count the days to their arrival and I can't wait to hug, kiss and thank them personally.

May 24th 2013, World organ donation day

I get a call from Mrs. Marija Rukavina asking if I could come to the Ministry of health to give a statement for HRT's show "Croatia Live". The Ministry of health will hold a press conference about organ donation. I told her I would do anything for the Foundation because it saved my life.

My eyes welled listening to the presentation of the Deputy Minister on how many people in our country have been saved so far thanks to the fact that Croatia is a member of Eurotransplant. It is a very difficult and brave decision, when you lose a family member, and while he is still on life support, to donate his organs that are still functioning. It can be done only by good and God chosen people.

More than 80 percent of the population in Croatia identify themselves as believers, and Pope John Paul II said it is a sin to take all that can save a human life to the grave. When we are gone, the body rots, worms and ants eat it and only the bones remain. The soul goes where it deserves. I think it is better that the heart, lungs, liver or kidneys continue to live in someone. With these organs our loved ones survive. I gave a statement for "Croatia Live“, which can be viewed on the Internet when typing in: show on demand, „Croatia Live“ 24th of May 2013. On the right are all this year's shows.

May 25th 2013, Saturday, Jubilee, 30 years of first allogeneic transplantation at KBC Rebro

It is a great honor to be alive and receive an invitation to this year’s conference and celebration of this jubilee at the Westin hotel. The hotel's Crystal hall was full of doctors and nurses, reporters and patients that have had a successful transplant. The conference started with the anthem "Lijepa Naša" and ended with lunch for everybody. Mr. Vojo Šiljak was the host and Prof. Damir Nemet and doc. dr. Serventi-Seiwerth were chairmen.

Professor Labar, although retired, was the main speaker because he was the first doctor at KBC Rebro to successfully perform the first allogeneic transplantation (transplant from an unrelated donor, as was mine) with his expert team 30 years ago. All our doctors are expert and capable, but no one will ever be able to replace professor Labar. In addition to so many transplants performed and his expertise, he is a great man with a great heart and soul, respected and known throughout the world. I would even dare to say that he is more respected in the world than here. All the doctor guests were his guests and respected physicians in Canada, France and Austria. It's all vividly shown on the display and well explained.

Our doctors from KBC Rebro alternated, with short breaks, with their presentations. Every one of them for a specific type of leukemia and other hematological diseases. I was particularly cheered when professor Nemet said all who of those who have had a transplant this year survived. In order for the patient to survive, he has to be in the treatment phase while the disease hasn't progressed too much yet and targeted chemotherapy is applied, as in my case, so it doesn't destroy the immune system and the body can fight for itself. Strong chemotherapy destroys the healthy and the sick, and the immune system drops to zero.

I was also cheered by Dr. Mrsić's lecture who promised to come back to the hospital and continue his medical work. Dr. Mrsić gave a lecture about the Ana Rukavina Foundation. He said that the number of 40,000 samples in the Croatian register is equal to the number of 3 million samples in the American registry considering the population.

We have young and capable hematologists who are our power and future. We have a blood bank, a register and our Ana Rukavina Foundation and the most advanced medical equipment in the world. No one needs to go abroad for a transplant. Everything that exists in Europe and the world we have here. Lets keep the money we have paid for our medical insurance in our country because transplantations are cheapest here. In the end, we all had a nice time at lunch. I talked with everyone and exchanged experiences with others who have had a transplant. I gave a statement about stepping into contact with my donor for Nova TV's News. You can watch it on the Internet: *Ana Begić meets her bone marrow donor*.

Mrs. Marija Rukavina left before the end of the lecture because it was too hard and painful to listen about leukemia, which Anna had, which is more easily treated today because medicine has advanced and new medication is available. Ana's picture was often on the display. It was very difficult for me to look at her. All the while she sighed and bit her lip not to cry. Given that we are friends, I know how much she is suffering and how difficult it is for her. One day I was at her home. Her cell phone keeps ringing and messages arriving, and the e-mails coming in on the computer. People call from all over Croatia, Slovenia and Bosnia, which, unfortunately, still does not have a national registry. People call seeking help and advice. Mrs. Marija answers every one in tears. She tells me they are all somebody's children and that each time she relives her tragedy. I cry along with her, and pray to God to give her health and strength to endure it all. That's why I said at the beginning that for me she is the living Mother Theresa, and deserves the Nobel Prize for humanitarian work. She works for free at the Foundation and outside it.

I believe that this story of mine will help someone tackle and fight his illness and beat it. I also believe that, when my donor Gaylon comes to Croatia for the promotion of my book and people see us together and see that he is alive and well, others will send requests to meet their donors to the Register . I was the first in Croatia to do that after transplantation. Please follow my example, but if you don't want to or are afraid, contact our register and send a letter of thanks to your donor. It's the least you can do, and it's for free.

PREPARING TO MEET THE DONOR

When I made contact with my blood brother and his wife and asked them to come to Croatia, namely to my home and the promotion of my book, they just looked at each other and said OK. However, they told me they had obligations they had to fulfil and they would come over in September and I delayed the promotion of my book in Zagreb. The wife of my donor, Melissa, was attending medical nurse school and they couldn’t come over sooner due to her classes. Of course, there are also three more children; two adolescents at ages of 16 and 17 and Little Gabe who is six. Luckily, Melissa's parents live in the neighbourhood so they will take care of the children. In the beginning it all looked unreal and distant, but when they bought plane tickets and showed them to me over Skype and I could see with my own eyes it said Oklahoma City-Washington-Munich-Zagreb I became aware it was true. They would depart in the morning on July 13th from Oklahoma City and arrive to Zagreb somewhere around 11 pm on July 14th.

Considering Gaylon didn't want me participating in their arrival and stay financially I barely managed to convince him to meet me half way. I told him they could pay for their accommodations in Zagreb themselves and I would cook for them so they could at least eat at our place. I also told him that when you invite someone over, it's tradition here to care of them from start to finish. He laughed at that statement and told me the old Native American customs are like that as well, but that that is not good, and also joked that someone could get used to customs like that and stay for a long while.

I asked him if I could write to TV networks and ask them to pay for his accommodations and expenses while in Croatia in exchange for an exclusive interview. He said it would be all right for TV to do it, but didn't want me participating even 1$. So I wrote to all the TV networks in Croatia but only HRT offered 1000 $ with a deal to film a documentary included, however authorship rights were not discussed as there is no amount of money I would sell my story for. You can't put a price on the pain of Mrs. Marija Rukavina, Gaylon's kindness and my painful therapies and tests.

They wanted their suite close to us since they came for me. As we live in Kajzerica, we rented a suite in Lanište so they could be at our place in a few minutes. I sent pictures of several suites to Melissa's e-mail. She picked one and I made reservations. I started preparing a week before their arrival. They'll come in on Saturday evening and I made pastry, soup and goulash noodles and five kinds of cake this Sunday.

The dentist took out an inflamed tooth on Friday in Perkovceva Street although I drank antibiotics for only two days and told him I was a high risk patient, which was also written on my doctor's note. He told me there was no swelling and that everything was going to be ok. However, it hurt and tightened my whole face and I bled from Monday to Friday and went back for a check up. I wasn't bleeding while I was at Perkovceva Street but I was bleeding at home. I woke up on Friday at 5 am and my mouth was full of blood and I was all covered in blood. It even went through the mattress, so I put on sterile gauze and had to wait as the dentist worked in the afternoon. That day he drained the blood and put in a surgical sponge and I finally felt better. I don't know why he didn't do it right away to spare me the pain and daily trips.

After that, my husband drove me to the Ana Rukavina foundation as the foundation will host the promotion of my book on September 18th 2013, which I have named My blood brother – Native American who saved my life, in honour of Gaylon. The foundation has one great hall where all the meetings are held and so will the promotion. Everything is clean and neat, but I want to fresh everything up and clean the windows. I want to do it for Gaylon and Melissa and all my doctors from KBC Rebro, friends, guests, reports, etc. My husband helped and we did it together and it was all filmed by HRT for the documentary. The filming had started the day before (Thursday), i.e. the day before their departure from Oklahoma. We spoke via Skype then although my English still isn't very good, but we understand each other very well and if I can't remember a word I Google translate it. I set up an interview with journalist Iva Rebac from "24 hours" newspaper today at the Foundation at 2 pm, but unfortunately I can't talk so I had to reschedule it for tomorrow. It was very difficult to deal with the pain and daily bleeding of the tooth and at the same time prepare for their arrival and the book promotion. I went to buy presents for Melissa, Gaylon and their family, food for the book promotion and groceries for home with my husband. I bought part of the presents four months ago when I invited them to Croatia.

The flat is clean and well kept, but where there is daily cooking and living there is always something to clean. Every one of us probably has separate dishes, tablecloths and other utilities for daily use and for guests. Considering the one for guests is seldom used, it needs to be washed again. I managed to make three types of cakes and cookies over the week. Although Gaylon told me the only cake he likes is the one with cheese and sour cherries, I made all these cakes so I could offer them more treats, but to reporters and journalists as well. The interest of media is big and I don't know how I'll get through it.

IK Profil is the book's sponsor and I signed a contract for printing 1000 free books. The contract stipulates that I will not publish the book in Croatian at another publisher for the next 5 years and they will not sell the book. Of course, a favour demands a counter-favour, so I am obligated to accept any interview their marketing sets up. On the other hand, it's good for the Foundation and our Croatian register as more people will hear about it and enter the register.

My sons, on seasonal work in Malinska, have gotten me fish and Alen brought it in a fridge. I was planning fish for dinner because it is light. The boys got octopus, scampi, squid, salmon filet and tuna from a fisherman acquaintance of theirs.

I bought domestic meat from a farm: chicken, pork, veal and I ordered young beef. I ordered oranges from my friend Ankica who sells fruit and vegetables.

Croatia is a tourist country and we are a hospitable nation and great gourmets. Although, it would be easier for me to take them out for lunch, I would be to ashamed not to cook for them personally and welcome them to my home.

MEETING THE DONOR (September 14th 2013, Saturday)

Finally, the day of arrival and meeting with my donor came. I woke up at 5 and started the preparations. I have a lot of obligations today because I have to be in Gračani at 7.30 where Mr Vlado from Zagorje will deliver the beef and the lady with cheeses and home grown eggs will also come. I ordered lean meat (15 kg) and 5kg of minced meat for the soup from Mr Vlado. The meat is not just for them but also for us and I order every two months. The lady from Vrbovec brought the cheeses and eggs. Since my husband is not home today, I asked my friend's husband to take me to Gračani, and afterwards, to the market to get oranges from Ankica. Although the wholesale price of oranges is 12 kuna per kilogram at the green market and Ankica sells them for 15 kuna, she didn't want to charge me and gave me the whole box (17 kg) for free. She says it's her contribution and she wants to help. That is why I am going to nit a sweater and mittens with 5 open fingers for her so her hands would keep warm when working in the cold because she works hard for every kuna she makes. I also bought flowers, vegetables for the soup, cucumbers and tomatoes and Milan drove me home. While I was taking the meat out of the bag I saw an extra bag (5 kg) of meat. As we were transferring it from the van into the car someone put in an extra by mistake, but I immediately texted Vlado, apologised and told him I would pay for it.

I didn't have the time to prepare all the meat for the freezer so I put it in the fridge and deal with it later today or tomorrow as it is still fresh. I went to Konzum and bought everything else I needed (fresh cheese, sour cream, ham and cheese, etc.) On the way back I bought different kinds of sausages at Cerovski butcher's shop.

I had an appointment at the hairdresser's at 12.30 and the journalist, Iva Rebac, came there and talked to me while I was having my hair done and afterwards she took photos and the two of us sat at a coffee shop and did the interview.

I came home at 3 pm and put the meat cooking while I made final preparations for their arrival. I am so happy and full of adrenaline that it's hard to understand. My neighbour Magdalena, whom I helped take care of her little girls while she was studying for exams and preparing her masters degree, helped me out. She dried my laundry and ironed all the tablecloths and clothes that day. Meanwhile, my husband has come back from the trip tired and sleepy but there is no sleeping as they are coming at 7 pm. Nataša Kraljević Kolbas and a camera man are coming to film my home and later we'll go to the airport. I've made two plates: one with cheeses and the other with meat products. I also cut the cakes and the drinks are in the fridge. In the meantime, Nataša's husband, a camera man, has come to film the event from different angles. Although I don't understand why one camera man can't film a meeting of two people (Gaylon and I) by himself, it is fine by me.

Gaylon and Melissa are scheduled to arrive to Pleso airport at 10.30 pm. We left home at 9. I am in HRT's car because they are filming all the time and my husband is driving by himself as we'll need room for their luggage.

When we entered the airport, we saw that the flight is one hour late. My book editor, Sandra Pocrnić-Mlakar, and Nives from IK Profil have also come. They brought books so I could give one to Gaylon but they also wanted to meet and welcome him. They waited with us although it is late. I feel like I'm about to give birth. My heart is pounding, eyes are full of tears and shining, cheeks are red and I am restless. I was looking towards the exit gate all the time and pacing up and down.

When I read on the display that the plane had landed I approached the window and waited to see them impatiently. When I saw them I started waving my arms and jumping and the whole airport could hear my heels clanking. Gaylon and Melissa walked through the gate holding hands, went into the luggage area and then headed for the exit, i.e. towards me.

I WILL NEVER FORGET THE MOMENT OUR EYES MET AND I HUGGED Gaylon, as well as Melissa. Everybody's eyes are full of tears of joy, including Gaylon's and my husband's, but not mine, although I am usually very emotional and cry of sadness at other people's misfortune or from joy at their happiness. I feel hypnotised, but very, very happy.

MY DONOR, THE BEST MAN IN THE WORLD, AND HIS WIFE ARE STANDING IN FRONT OF ME. THE MAN WHO GAVE ME LIFE AND THANKS TO HIS KINDNESS I AM ALIVE AND FEELING GREAT TODAY. That's unbelievable, just like a fairy tale or a dream, except my fairy tale is real.

I WONDER HOW MUCH KINDNESS THIS MAN CARRIES IN HIS HEART AND SOUL WHEN HE GAVE LIFE, AND AT HIS OWN EXPENSE (the plane tickets alone cost 2500$). He flew in with his wife from far away Oklahoma.

After filming at the airport we headed to my home. My husband took their bags to the suite and I brought them to my flat to have some rest and eat. I welcomed them at the airport and in my home and offered them food and drinks while Gaylon smiled shyly and asked if he could take photos. I told them to feel at home and that they can do as they like. First, I called their children via Skype and Little Gabe went to get his grandma and grandpa. They told them they arrived safely and that they are at our flat. Everybody was relieved they were safe. Everything they ate or drank they found delicious. I am glad it was so as there is a big cultural difference. I LOOKED AT HIM like he is God, at Melissa also. I told him: "I am sorry am staring but I still can't believe you are here". He took my hand and told me he feels the same and added: "Ana, I'm here, Melissa is here. This is real."

When my husband came back after dropping off their luggage and sat at the table, Gaylon, without a trace of a smile, takes out a million dollar bill from his wallet and hands it to my husband, thus buying me and here's what it means. A month before their arrival my husband was angry at me for some reason and joked that I should ask Gaylon while I talked to him over Skype (I was still using Google Translate) if he could sell me to the Native Americans. Gaylon laughed, accepted the joke and wanted to know how much he's asking. My husband said a million dollars and Gaylon answered that money is an insult to Native Americans, but that he could get ten best horses, ten best quilts and ten beads from the ground, possibly out of silver or gold for me, which is the ultimate price, since I have a sharp tongue and thick black hair. My husband asked if he could get a donkey and Gaylon asked why he would want one. I answered that Croatia is a tourist country and that my husband would take the donkey to the seaside to have pictures taken with tourists. So a deal was struck (it was all a joke, of course) that Gaylon would bring a donkey and I would go to Oklahoma.

A few days before their departure Gaylon asked if my husband had prepared my documents because he had prepared the donkey's. I laughed and told him he wants a female donkey because they said on Nova TV news that one litter of donkey milk costs 600 kn (110 $). He answered that his plans were disrupted as it's hard to find a female and she would be too loud in the plane. We laughed and Gaylon said he would steal me anyway. I told him I was not for sale and that women decide their fate for themselves in Croatia and that I'm very loud and he couldn't get me over the border. He told me laughing that I have Native American blood and that they can sneak behind a man's back unnoticed and he would get me over the border and sell me as a slave for a lot of money. I told him Lincoln abolished slavery in 1865, but he answered only for the blacks and not Croats. I told him Croats have never been slaves, although they were often oppressed by other's rule. We laughed to tears. It was all a joke, of course.

My husband looks at Gaylon and then the bill. Melissa is also serious. I start laughing and tell my husband it's a fake, which he knew as there is no million dollar bill. I can tell you that someone could believe it is real because it's well made on a quality paper but it misses the golden thread and the water stamp. We escorted them to their suite at around 3 am and wished them good night and pleasant dreams.

When we returned home I couldn't sleep until 5 am from all the excitement.

September 15th 2013 (Sunday)

THE CITY SIGHTSEEING

I woke up at 7 after sleeping for only 2 hours. I have to prepare the meat and put it in the freezer and start preparing breakfast and lunch. Nataša will come to film the documentary and last night, Nives from IK Profil marketing, told me that the journalist Sandra Bolanča from Jutarnji list called her and insisted she gets the first interview at 10 am. I told her no because I don't want to wake people up after travelling 37 hours in one direction. Nives then told me they printed several thousand books for me for free (although I signed the contract for only a thousand) and I am obligated to give a promotional interview to the press. Of course, I had to say yes thinking they would also write about the Ana Rukavina foundation and the world register of blood-forming stem cells and ways of donating.

Sandra called at 9 and asked for the address saying she would be quick. I asked her to hold off until 11 at least and sent my husband to get them. My heart and soul ache and I will never forgive myself that we woke them up because I saw that Melissa was unhappy that morning. Honestly, I would have been as well. They are tired from the trip and the time zone difference is 7 hours. The filming and interview started at 10. First I told my story and then Gaylon when he arrived at 11. It dragged on until 12.30 and they still hadn't had breakfast. I hurried her to finish up so we could relax. She writes everything by hand and I can't figure out why a publisher house so big doesn't have Dictaphones, at least borrowed ones, so she could finish in no time. In the meanwhile, we drank coffee and juice made from Ankica's oranges and ate some cake and after Sandra and her photographer left we had breakfast. I asked them what they will have for breakfast and they say "eggs and cheese", meaning homemade cheese with red paprika they ate last night. I told them they would get eggs and cheese for breakfast only today, but will eat Croatian breakfast from then on.

It's late and I start preparing lunch. I already cooked the octopus for the salad in the morning; I cleaned it and made the salad. I cut big veal stakes I had softened up in milk for several hours and filled them with ham and cheese and made "Zagreb" stakes with rice and beans. They found it all delicious and told me the soup smells like meat and noodles. Melissa dipped the bread in octopus gravy. I am happy they like the food as my husband was worried about that. They enjoy our beer but started drinking tap water after seeing me do it. The camera man was filming it all and Gaylon stood beside me and watched everything I was doing with curiosity and a smile on his face.

We had lunch and Nataša and the camera man went to HRT because she had to do a short report for the central News. It's an event the whole Croatia will hear of. We agreed we would meet in town later.

At 5 pm I asked them if they would like to see Zagreb and its landmarks so we headed for the town centre together. Gaylon saw a newspaper with his picture on a newsstand while we were waiting for the tram. It was "24 hours" and I bought two copies. The journalist Iva wrote a very good article and explained everything important about the Ana Rukavina foundation and our register, as well as the world register. They don't have trams in Oklahoma and were delighted by the ride while there still wasn't a lot of traffic.

We stepped off at Josip Jelačić square (town centre) and took the cable car to LOTRŠĆAK castle. The ride was interesting, although our cable car is the smallest in the world. I bought tickets for the three of us, while my husband waited for us as we have been there several times already. We climbed around the castle sightseeing while Melissa took photos the whole time. When we came down I asked them if they wanted some souvenirs and they chose fridge magnets with a picture of Zagreb. I also bought one for her mother. Later, we went for a walk and to St. Marko's church, "Banski dvori", and while I prayed at the "Stone doors" he took off his baseball cap and paid his respect to Mother of God. We went to see the Cathedral; Melissa just took photos, then to Manduševac (fountain) where we tossed a few coins in. Zagreb is a nice city with 1500 year old buildings that are a part of our history. The rest of the buildings are modern.

Later, we went for coffee and beer to Bogovićeva Street. We sat, drank, talked and laughed while they observed everything around. They couldn't figure why so many people are sitting and drinking coffee and all of them having company, none sitting by themselves. You can't see that where they come from. People drink coffee but sit alone and read newspaper or talk on the cell phone and work over the Net. I explained it's a part of our culture and tradition.

Gaylon saw a few children, 6 or 7 years old, walking by themselves, and asked, in wonder, where their parents were. I told him parents bring their children to school only for the first few weeks of first grade and after that children take the tram, bus or walk and nothing bad happens to them. They found that odd because there is a lot of violence and murder where they come from and children are driven to school until they are 16 and can take the driver's exam and drive by themselves.

We came home at 10 pm and had dinner. My boys finished their seasonal jobs and returned home. I am very happy because they speak English well and will help me with translation. Gaylon and Melissa are also happy and talked and laughed with them until 1 am. We agreed to visit Plitvice tomorrow without any reporters.

September 16th 2013 (Monday)

TRIP TO "PLITVIČKA JEZERA" NATIONAL PARK

I woke up at 6, drank coffee and I'm unpacking the clothes boys brought from the seaside, putting it in the washing machine and hanging it to dry. There is enough for a few rounds. We arranged to meet with Gaylon and Melissa at 9 in front of their suite. We are driving towards Plitvice and there is a baker's shop Monika both in Karlovac and Turanj with good pastry. They didn't have "burek" with meat, but we bought pizzas and juices and continued our trip to Plitvice. There was long queue at the ticket office when we got there. My husband went to park the car and I waited in line while they waited in front. We headed together towards the train that drives tourists and when we got to our destination we sat down and had coffee. Then we went sightseeing. I route was four and a half hours long. My husband has a bad back so he can't walk for long and sits down often.

They are in awe of the nature and Gaylon, who is Native American, has a special respect and love for Mother Nature. He looked at every little rock, touched the trees and grass, and even took some leaves and rock from the ground to take with him to Oklahoma. He says that Plitvička jezera are a wonder of nature. Melissa constantly took photos and I think they have over 500 photos just from Plitvice.

When we stepped off the boat and returned to our starting point, Gaylon took an umbrella he was carrying, hid behind a tree and started saying trrrrrrrrrrr, trrrrrrrrrrr and laughing because he was imitating me talking fast as I was shooting a machine gun. We all laughed. "Lička house" unfortunately burned down so we didn't find roast lamb, our traditional Croatian meal, in Plitvice. I asked if they wanted to stop at Rastoke to have lamb, but Melissa said they weren't hungry and that they will eat in Zagreb. I told Melissa to pick out souvenirs for herself, Gaylon, the children and her parents. She chose fridge magnets and bought her mum a bell so she could wake up dad every morning. I bought figures of "lička" bear with cubs standing on a mountain over Plitvice for Gaylon. I also told them to choose greeting cards for their parents and friends and write messages, then I bought stamps and we mailed them. Melissa kept one greeting card for herself as a memento. When we came back to Zagreb, we went to "Old Sava" restaurant because they have the best pizzas. We ordered "slavonska" jumbo pizza and beer and I wanted to order more. They said they had enough as it is very filling. I asked the waiter to put a lot of pepperoni and chilli peppers and I would pay extra but they didn't charge us for that. I asked Melissa if they have such big and tasty pizzas at home and she said they do but that they are not as good as ours and she took photos.

We drank coffee, talked and laughed when we got back home. Gaylon is very funny and he always imitates me talking and doing everything fast. He says nobody would ever have guessed I was so sick. I brought out ham, cheese and cake again and we hung out until 1 am. My husband drove them to their suite; I put pork and veal in a marinade, ironed and folded the clothes I washed that morning. I fell asleep at 3 but didn't feel tired from all the adrenaline and happiness.

September 17th 2013 (Tuesday)

"HUŠNJAKOVO-KRAPINA"

I woke up at 6 because I had to prepare breakfast and lunch and the reporters from RTL and Nova TV will be here for interviews. Nataša will come after that and we'll go to the Museum of Neanderthals in Krapina. The schedule is tight and time is little so we need to organise it properly. Although Nataša tells me I shouldn’t cook every day but give them sandwiches now and then instead, I can’t do that. They should have the best and tastiest. I put chicken soup cooking and I’m preparing breakfast. We arranged to meet them at 10 in front of their suite. While my husband was driving them over, I set the table and squeezed the orange juice. I made espresso coffee and Melissa likes coffee so she asked if she could make it for herself and I showed her how and told her she could cook as much as she wanted. They like the homemade cheese and sausages very much. The journalist and camera man from Nova TV came at 10. They filmed for two hours and we laughed a lot. Gaylon said he broke the Native American tradition as they are forbidden to give away anything biological. He said he believes in it, but doesn’t obey by it, and that someone should modernize that tradition because many Native Americans and their families get sick from different types of malicious blood diseases, and that tradition prevents them from finding a donor. He brought me two buffalo bone necklaces which he made as he is an Native American artist and painter. The journalist asked him to put it around my neck. I read excerpts from the book to him and she translated. It was very interesting.

While they were leaving, the RTL TV crew came. And we started all over. I asked them where the book can be found and read. While they filmed I peeled potatoes, roasted the meat and prepared the salad. It took away time we could have used hanging out together, but on the other hand, Gaylon needs all those DVDs and newspapers to bring back to Oklahoma and justifies the tradition in front of the tribal council. When they left, Nataša called to arrange when we’ll go to Krapina. I told her we were having lunch and they can meet us on the parking lot in front of the building at 3. My husband stayed home because he went to a butcher’s shop on Kvatrić to buy bacon which the butcher had cut for us and he also cut 6 kg of prosciutto I bought a week before for the promotion of the book and for Gaylon and Melissa. Prosciutto is a Croatian product made from the best quality pork smoked and dried in strong wind. It dries depending on the weight, one month for one kilogram.

Driving towards Krapina, Gaylon and Melissa observed the woods and vineyards and were amazed by the nature. Gaylon said that Croatia is a beautiful country with all the geographical attributes, while Oklahoma is flat with fertile red soil. When we arrived to Hušnjakovo, we first watched a film about Neanderthals and then headed to explore the cave. The figures of Neanderthals in real size and the fire they made looked real. The bones of Neanderthals and their cutlery were found in that cave and that's why the Museum is there – the only one of its kind in Europe. Melissa managed to take a few shots inside the cave for her album with the help of the camera man. The museum director talked to us later and gave us some brochures and I promised to send her the book. After that, we went to get coffee and drinks at a restaurant across the street and talked to the restaurant staff.

It was 9 pm when we came back to Zagreb and Nataša is giving me the contract I need to sign so they could pay Gaylon 1000 $ through my account. Sanja Ivancin, the head director of the documentary sent me a mail on Friday which said that she had sent the contract which I need to sign to the foundation. Since I had troubles with my tooth and a lot of work, and Nataša didn't show me the contract, I forgot about it. I simply trusted our deal and agreed on filming the documentary "NATIVE AMERICAN BLOOD" and since Gaylon is not a Croatian citizen his money would be paid to my account. When I read the contract the ground started spinning beneath me. I thought I was going to faint. The contract says that the fee for authorship rights is 1000 $ and HRT has the rights to loan, rent and film to third parties. My eyes are filling with tears and I tell Nataša this is not what we agreed on and ask her why she didn't give me contract on Friday while I was cleaning the foundation, thus saving money for HRT and myself as well as time. If I had seen it then I would have thanked them and there would be no filming. We would have had more time to hang out and go to the seaside. Nataša told me our deal stands and that HRT only has contracts in that form. I told her IK Profil also have contracts in certain form but they made a special contract for me as it was the first time they printed a book for free. They also told me I can take the contract to my lawyer first and then sign. All done legally and correctly.

I look at Gaylon and Melissa. They go back on Friday morning and more than half of our time was taken up by filming the documentary and he needs the proof from Croatia. They don't care about the money, but I promised and don't want to lie. Nataša says I have to sign and they would pay the money tomorrow to my account and promised me an annex to the contract that would stipulate the authorship rights were not sold, so I signed. As I am paying all the expenses of their stay in Croatia, I could also pay for their suite and say the Foundation or the register paid it so Gaylon wouldn't know it was my money. For example, our trip to Plitvice (4 tickets, gasoline, food and drinks) cost the same as 6 days in a suite. I was very sad, bitter and helpless. If only Gaylon didn't need that film to justify tradition and we hadn't spent that much time filming, I would never have signed that contract. The most important thing is that their stay here and the promotion tomorrow go well and I'll fight HRT until I get an annex to the contract stipulating I didn't sell the authorship rights and the film would be shown for common good, spreading awareness of the importance of bone marrow, blood-forming stem cells and cord blood donation. They don't know how persistent and stubborn I am yet. Gaylon sensed something was wrong, but I didn't want to burden them while they are in Zagreb. They will read it when I find a sponsor and the book is translated to English. After Nataša left, I made scampi risotto and tomato salad for dinner. They talked to their children and Melissa's parents via Skype and then we hung out. They asked my boys everything they wanted to know about Croatia and they answered. Gaylon brought pictures of his Native American family and his great-grandfather, German Rudolf Fisher, and told us how he got to USA and all his adventures while we listened carefully. My husband drove them home around 1.

September 18th 2013

THE BOOK PROMOTION

I slept only 4 hours last night because I'm happy and excited, but also, numerous commitments keep me up. It is a big day for me, Gaylon, the Ana Rukavina foundation and the Croatian and world registry. While I'm preparing breakfast and setting the table, my husband is driving over Gaylon and Melissa. We agreed they would come at 8 and we'll have coffee and breakfast because Melissa and I are scheduled at the hairdresser's at 10. My husband drove us there and Gaylon and he went to Arena Centre (Biggest shopping centre in Zagreb with all the world's fashion brands). They welcomed us nicely at the hairdresser's and offered us coffee because I always get my hair done there. Melissa was a bit sceptical at first because she thought they were going to do it their way. She showed them a photo of the hair do she likes and wants and when it was over I saw a smile on her face, she was satisfied. She was a little surprised as her hair do was firm and looked nice. Probably because our electric current is stronger than theirs (220W). I called my husband and they came to get us. When we returned home I asked Gaylon and Melissa to cut some bread and cheese and I ironed the clothes for the promotion. Since I cooked the veal stew in the morning and have home noodles that only need to be cooked, I wanted Gaylon and Melissa to have lunch before returning to their suite, but they weren't hungry.

I arranged with Mrs Marija Rukavina to come to the Foundation earlier so Gaylon and Melissa could talk with her. Gaylon wrote to me he wants to meet her.

The promotion is at 5 pm but I need to be at the Foundation at 1. My husband drove them to their suite so Gaylon could put on his traditional Comanche Native American clothes which takes him about 1,5 hours, including painting his face. Nataša will pick them up at 2 and drive them to the Foundation while filming the documentary on the way.

My husband first drove me to pick up the flowers and the cake at "Vincek" on Kvaternik Square. I didn't have time to by a numeral "3" candle but I found "happy birthday" candles. October 7th will mark 3 years since my transplantation and I want to celebrate that day with my brother in blood because he is the reason I am alive. I arrived at the Foundation at 1.15, at the same time as my friend Ana. Ana, who went through everything with me and was my support during hardest moments. She took a day off to be with me and help me with arranging the food.

Mrs Marija Rukavina came up to me, hugged and kissed me like I was her own daughter, congratulated, wished me all the best and gave me a bouquet of beautiful roses from everyone from the Foundation. That really touched me and we both shed tears. Every time I see her, I feel sadness and pain and think to myself: "The others and I are here, but Ana is gone". We are alive thanks to Ana's letter and Mrs Marija.

My other friend, Anđa, came soon after with her son, Ivan, to help. Since I was worried and tired I forgot to take the cheese from home so I sent Ivan to the store to buy another. Anđa and Ana set prosciutto, bacon and cheese on treys and we left the bread in the bags so it wouldn't dry. I have plates, forks, knives, napkins and tooth picks for everybody. IK Profil also participated in the promotion and brought "Kala" water and cakes from "Horak" sweets shop. Everything is nicely served and covered. The books are also set on one desk along with the Foundation's box for voluntary donations that has a "Thank you" sign written on it.

IK Profil had an idea to put a portion of books in Profil and Mozaik bookstores and donation boxes would be by the cashier. People would get the book for free and the voluntary contributions would go to the Foundation for blood sampling, etc.

Since the President will be attending the promotion, his security came to check out the premises with dogs. Everything was all right and they left while Nataša, the camera man, Gaylon and Melissa came. Gaylon's outfit is beautiful, as are Melissa's shoes, dress and make up. She could be on a women's fashion magazine cover.

I introduced them to Mrs Marija Rukavina. Nives, from Profil marketing, found an official interpreter for English so they could talk to Mrs Marija and for the promotion.

We stepped in Ana's room (that's what we call Mrs Marija's office as she has Ana's photos all over the wall, from the times of her being very sick, to those in remission and her wedding) and Mirta brought us coffee while Mrs Marija, Gaylon, Melissa and I talked. It gives me goose bumps to think about that conversation. Mrs Marija talked about Ana and her illness, life, articles from "Vjesnik" where she worked as a research journalist, her childhood, etc. Everyone's heart tightens at a moment like that and you ask yourself where that woman find kindness and strength, but we all know the answer. Ana is strength. She asked them about their children and said that she has another daughter and three grandchildren who give her life meaning. I saw that Gaylon and Melissa were very impressed by her because they were wiping their eyes frequently. Journalist from "24 hours" asked for an interview and then we all went to the courtyard to meet president Josipović and the guests. We greeted the President, thanked him for coming and I introduced him to Gaylon and Melissa. Then we all entered the ballroom where the promotion was held. The room is full of good people and you can sense positive energy in the air. I wanted to share this joyful day with people who had been with me during hardest moments, and those are: my brother in blood, Gaylon, his wife, my family, Mrs Marija Rukavina, people from the Foundation, doctors and nurses from the sterile unit and haematology department at "KBC Rebro", my doctors from "Šarengradska", doctors and nurses from "KB Dubrava", my gynaecologist, dentist, six of my good friends with their husbands (Ana, Jasna, Anđa, Ankica, Zvjezdana and Marion), director, editor, chief editor and Nives from IK Profil, and my two neighbours, Žaklina and Magdalena. Unfortunately, a doctors and nurses' strike has begun today so many of them couldn't come but the room was full. Journalists from other magazines, newspapers and TV houses were also there. My gynaecologist, who is retired, came with her husband from Bjelovar and I am very grateful, as I am to Julija from "Šarengradska".

Since our President has a lot of obligations, he could stay for only 30 to 40 minutes so the protocol was for five of us to speak 6 minutes. First, Mrs Marija greeted all in attendance and thanked them for coming in the name of the Foundation and said this was the first book written in the sterile unit and it will be a comfort for all those lying in the sterile unit to those waiting for a donor. She also said she was proud of me and that she hadn't met a person so positive and cheerful in these seven years of Foundation's existence and that I was accepted into the Foundation's executive board. After her, my editor Sandra talked about the book and how Profil became the sponsor. I was next, but as everybody only had six minutes I talked fast to leave Gaylon more time. I wanted him to share his experience of donating blood-forming stem cells and break the prejudice about drilling and sawing bones. I thanked all in attendance for coming there and their support and told them I kept a journal in the sterile unit not to go crazy, and thinking, if I find a publisher and it ever sees the light of day, it would help people dealing with serious illness. Gaylon was very touched and couldn't talk. He just thanked everyone, excused himself and joked that I was better at talking and I should continue. I saw tears in his eyes and kissed his cheek, told him everything is OK and to cheer him up, told everyone that the day before he said he was in Croatia to form a new nation of Croatian Native American. Everyone laughed and professor Mirando Mrsić, Ana's doctor, took the stage. He wrote the forward for my book and the medical commentary after certain chapters. It gives the book greater value and can help sick people from the standpoint of both the patient and doctor. He joked I didn't get the information about Gaylon from the American register, and knowing me, I would have been so persistent I would have found him myself. He talked about the benefits of the book, how it will help everyone and that having faith in good is rewarded with good. Mirta brought out the cake, lit the candles and everybody started singing "Happy birthday". I blew out the candles and Gaylon helped. Then we cut the cake and passed it out. Gaylon and Melissa said it was delicious. I wanted to bake the cake at home and bring food, but Mrs Marija told me to buy everything and keep receipts, in case, God forbid, someone got sick, I would have proof where I bought everything.

The signing of the book started as soon as the promotion ended and Gaylon and I signed the first one and gave it to the President, Dr Ivo Josipović, who had photos taken with us and thanked Gaylon for the donation and me for the kindness and optimism. Mrs Marija got the next book and so on. Everybody was delighted and wanted to take pictures with Gaylon. I saw that Gaylon is also happy and proud. I was sorry my son, Alen, didn't attend the promotion, but he had an important exam that day.

In front of the Foundation, Mrs Marija Rukavina sent a formal invitation to the American embassy in Croatia and wrote that this is the first meeting of donor and recipient in Croatia and invited them, considering Gaylon is an American citizen, to attend the promotion. They didn't even dignify a response. I know Mr Ambassador is very busy bur anyone from the embassy could have come. The meeting between Gaylon and me will not just help the Croatian, but also the American and all other world registers. It doesn't matter which register people enter as we are all one world register. That is how my donor was found. Nobody knows who is next to get sick or where their donor will be found. Sickness doesn't care if you are in a high function or an ordinary worker, if you are rich or homeless, which skin colour you have or which religion and nation you belong to. It comes suddenly and before you know it you need a donor. You can be the wealthiest person alive, but if you don't have a matching bone marrow donor or if that donor hasn't registered, you can't buy life with money. That is why I knew this story would have a great impact in Croatia, Europe and the world after I found out Gaylon is Native American.

The crowd was slowly dissipating and Nataša went for a walk and final interviews and filming with Gaylon and Melissa. Mrs Marija, Mirta and Marija Stapar from the Foundation, my husband, my Igor and I stayed to put away the tables and chairs. We drank coffee and talked and they helped me carry flowers and other things to the car. I got a lot of flowers and gave the most beautiful bouquet with red roses to Mrs Marija Rukavina and asked her if she could visit Ana's grave the day after because I wouldn't have time. I gave her two additional bouquets for her and her daughter Gordana, who had had her third child 20 days before and couldn't come. Our eyes are full of tears and Mrs Marija says she would ask her son in law to take her to the cemetery in the early morning and she would tell Ana that her wish for the great Croatian register of voluntary donors is coming true day by day and that the other Ana is continuing her work here on Earth. My heart and throat tightened. I couldn't speak a word.

We all headed home. Nataša will take Gaylon and Melissa to their suite. When I asked if they were hungry and if they would like something to eat at my place or a restaurant, they said they were just tired and wanted to go to sleep. I believe them as I am barely standing myself.

It was 8 pm when we arrived home and I still had a tone of work. I found out today was Gaylon and Melissa's 20th marriage anniversary from Nataša and they were planning a trip to Europe, which coincided with meeting me and the book promotion. I don't know why they didn't tell me over Skype or wrote before they came here. I wouldn't have considered filming a documentary or letting journalists near us except on the day of the promotion. We would have gone to the seaside on Sunday morning and come back Tuesday evening. I would have scheduled a press conference on the day of the promotion for all the reporters and at least we would have had more time to get to know each other. He probably didn't tell me because he gave me life and didn't want me spending money on them as it would have made him uncomfortable.

That is why I will start making a cake today and finish it tomorrow. Time flies and they are only in Zagreb for another day.


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November 19th 2010, Thursday

VISIT TO THE STERILE UNITS

I woke up at 6 am, because today we will go to the Rebro hospital in Zagreb and to Maksimir Park, as Natasš says that she misses going around the around the city together. I prepare breakfast and finish the cake. The cake is great, and I mixed herbal cream and put fresh cheese and added cherry juice and butter, and made cream from it. I sprayed the cake with lemon, water and rum and I put cherries with cream on the first level and repeated so 2x. I put the cake in the fridge to cool, and I am preparing breakfast and squeezing the orange juice, while my husband went to pick them up.

Today we agreed to meet at 8 am, because we need to be at the hospital at 11 am. Yesterday I in the Foundation I asked dr. Serventi when we could come and when she would have some time to take us through the sterile units. Dr. Serventi is a very good and professional doctor and she manages the department of sterile unit autoimmune transplantation. While I had the transplantation done in 2010, she was in America on specialization. Dr. Serventi is above all a great woman, and then a doctor. I appreciate and I believe her 100% and I am glad that professor Labar when he went to retirement, recomended her to me.

Gaylon needs to autograph 50 books that will be donated to the hospital and at least 20 for me, and I also need to autograph the books for the hospital. We're all tired and sleep deprived, but we'll do it. Gaylon wrote that Melissa is nurse and works in ER in Oklahoma City, and that she has a desire to visit the sterile unit where I was stationed, the register of bone marrow and blood bank when they come to Croatia in Zagreb, , and then compare it to the hospital and treatment in Oklahoma.

We came to the hospital at 11.15, and Nataša and the cameraman are already waiting outside the main entrance of the hospital. Dr. Serventi had important work in her department, so we waited a little, and then we went in and got dressed (we put on a protective green coat, mask, hat and galoshes) and washed and disinfected our hands. We came in front of my sterile unit, number 3 and dr. Serventi said that it was the sterile unit in which I lay for 42 days. Given that it is not allowed to film patients inside the sterile units, I showed the book through the door glass to the man lying there and pointed to Gaylon. Gaylon waved to him, and the man explained that he had watched the book promotion on TV the day before. The doctor told them about hte sterile units and the procedure, and then we said hello to the head nurse Mrs Nurka. She told me that it's amazing how Gaylon and I looked alike in the face, as if we were siblings.

After the sterile units, Dr. Serventi took us to her office where she explained the procedure and the course od my transplantation to Gaylon and Melissa, during which I was autographing books for the patients. Dr. Serventi wanted to tell Gaylon that my transplantation had failed, but that I was in remission and that the general situation was good, and that his transplant, ie. his stem cells had cleaned up my bone marrow, and that it worked with the capacity of 90%. Although I always tell the truth, I asked her not to say anything to Gaylon and I promised her that I would say it when the opportunity presented itself. I did not have the heart to spoil his happiness he felt at that moment. After the doctor took us to the blood bank and we saw apheresis, i.e. the procedure when of taking blood-forming stem cells from blood. Dr. Serventi asked Dr. Mazić to show us how blood is stored in bunkers at -196° C in liquid nitrogen.

In the end we went to the Croatian registry of voluntary bone marrow donors and there Mrs. Nataša Bjelić explained to Gaylon how our registry works.

After the hospital we went to Maksimir park, where we had coffee and a walk, and Nataša and the cameraman were constantly following us. I generally do not have stage fright, but I felt that I was under constant pressure. Nataša wants to do another interview with Gaylon, and I ask her to drive me home, so I could finish making lunch.

I made homemade beef soup with homemade noodles. As I have already cooked goulash, I just heated up and cooked wide homemade noodles and made a mixed salad of fresh cucumbers, tomatoes and peppers. Gaylon and Melissa told that the lunch was delicious and the cake phenomenal. Although I baked a lot of cakes, they tried all, but they were most delighted by the cake and they ate it the most. Nataša and cameraman Silvio had lunch with us, and then they went home. It was already around 8 p.m.

After my son Igor took them a football match - Dinamo (Croatia) and Metal (Ukraine). He bought them scarves, hats and t-shirts with the logo of Dinamo, and after the game took them to the city center. They came home after midnight, and Melissa all was wrapped in Croatian symbols and kept shouting in Croatian: "Dinamo, Croatia-good, good." We all laughed. It was very cute and sweet.

We sat awake until 2 a.m., ate cake, cold cuts and cheese and drank beer and fine sweet wine. It was the last night of our first meeting. They greeted the boys and husband took them home, because they had to get up early, because they had a flight to Frankfurt at 7.40 a.m.

Although I was very tired and exhausted I can not sleep. I lie and I keep spinning all the events in my mind. All of this was like a fairy tale, a dream. This amazing, but a true story. The story that happens only once. I fell asleep after 3 am and woke up at 5.30. I quickly showered and brushed my teeth, drank espresso and we walked to the apartment where Gaylon and Melissa stayed, which was five minutes drive from our apartment. We agreed that at 6 am they will be in front of the apartment, and Nataša and cameraman Silvio also came, because the cameras recorded our meeting and socializing so they wanted to capture our parting. The airport is about 15 minutes away, but they have to get at least 1 hour before for inspection of luggage.

When they put luggage on the scale, they told them they had to pay extra $ 100 for each suitcase and bag. I feel sorry and I recommend them to leave all the newspapers and cut out just the parts about Gaylon and me and to take only 5 books. He doesn't want to do so and they say that they will pay. He took 20 books and magazines and 5 newspapers. When they were coming to Croatia I told them via Skype not to carry a lot of their own luggage, because when they will be returning their suitcases will be full of gifts, which will then exceed the allowed weight and that they will have to pay for the excess weight. In addition to newspapers their bags were full of gifts for all family members.

Since Melissa's parents took care of the children while they were with us, my husband and I sent them some gifts. I bought a crystal fruit bowl, souvenir magnets with the logo of Zagreb, Plitvice and Neanderthal Museum in Hušnjakovo in Krapina and decorative bottle volume of 1 liter with a picture of St. Anthony for Melissa's mother. I sent two ties to her dad. We gave crystal champagne glasses on a stand three decorative bottles to Melissa and Gaylon. Gaylon's bottle had a painted emblem of FC

"Dinamo" on one side, and on the other the flag of Croatia, Melissa's bottle had a picture of the Mother of God, and the third bottle had a picture of the "Vučedol dove" - the symbol of defending Vukovar. I explained that we Croats have a similar history as Native Americans. In one bottle I put plum brandy, and in the other one my home made cherry liqueur, because it only one bottle of alcohol was allowed per person. I gave 3 ties to Gaylon and his older son Gaylon Jr. two. I gave a leather wallet brand "Valentino" to Melissa and put 10 kuna in it. When she comes home and passes her state exam for head nurses she will have a higher salary than the present, and I wished that her wallet is always full of money. In Croatia, it is customary to put some money in a wallet if you give it to someone as a gift, because it is believed that if you give it empty it will stay empty. I sent a checkered red-and-white T-shirts and perfumes to the children, and Igor bought some extra things for Gabe. I was trying find a bord game "Win the Adriatic" in English for Gabe, but it must be ordered directly from the author from Pula, so I will send it to them via post. All of these gifts are just small tokens of appreciation and are not expensive, but they will help me to reduce the debt to Gaylon.

They brought us some gifts too. They brought "adidas" t-shirts for my boys with the logo of the football club Oklahoma, number 1 and 11. Until then I did not know that my son Alen was a fan of Oklahoma. Me and my husband got t-shirts with the logo of Comanche tribe. He brought all kinds of sauces and spices in small bottles, seeds of all kinds of chili peppers for me to plant them. Gaylon is an Native American artist and painter, so he brought a lot of jewelry that he himself makes. I got two necklaces made of musk-rat bones, which Native American women wear and three pairs of earrings, brooches etc. One of the necklaces I wore to the promotion. My husband and the boys got matching necklaces and belt clips. I got a book "Empire of the Summer Moon" which I will slowly translate into Croatian. After the promotion Gaylon gave an eagle claw and some feathers to my husband and told him that only married men when they pray the Great Spirit are allowed to wear these. THESE GIFTS ARE SACRED to me, and I will make a glass case for them and put it on the wall in the living room, so that everyone can see them. I AM PROUD OF IT.

I'm sorry they have to pay excess baggage, but I'm glad they got the money (allowance because the story wasn't sold) for HRT recording. When we paid the apartment $ 300, they were left with 700, so it will cover a part of the costs. When they handed over luggage we still talked for a while, and then we had to say goodbye. I could not control myself and I started to cry. Gaylon, Melissa and my husband's eyes were filled with tears, and Gaylon's turned and went back to hug me one more time and comforted me by saying that this was not our last meeting. I waved and sent kisses until they exit the airport building, and then Nataša, the cameraman, my husband and I sat down for coffee. I told Nataša that everything in life happens for a reason and that today is September 20th 2013, and exactly 4 years ago on September 20th in 2010 I was taken into the sterile unit for transplantation. Nothing is by chance, because we Europeans love Native American history and we learned about their life before the arrival of the white man and after it. In Croatia we are taught a lot of about the European and world history. Since I was a child I loved watching Native American westerns, and because of long black hair, bushy eyebrows and a low forehead in school plays I always played an Native American or a gypsy. I love Native American folk costumes (of all tribes) and war paint. Whenever an Native American in film was shot and fell dead to the ground, I cried and no one could comfort me. I was sorry, because the fight was unfair and the whites had much better weapons. I felt sorry for them, because they only had a bow and an arrow, and I knew they were fighting for the right thing, ie. For their country that was illegally taken

away from them.

I can not explain to anyone, nor can anyone understand, but them leaving was so hard for me because I felt as if a part of me was leaving. This is my blood brother, after my children and husband, he is the most important person in my life. Of course Melissa had a major role in everything and they did it together and she supported him in all of this. She is a medical nurse and she gave him stimulus injections for10 days in the belly so that haematopoietic stem cells would initiate and come in the blood, so it would be easier to remove them. Medical researches have shown that every organ in the human body except for the brain has blood-forming stem cells. Melissa explained Gaylon everything regarding the transplantation. Because of it I feel great respect and gratitude for her, and she is my sister-in-law, and their children are my nephews.

However, Gaylon is the one who gave a part of himself, and he violated the old Native American tradition of gift-giving by entering the registry, thinking that he would save someone from his (Native American) family. He did not know that it will go to Europe (Croatia), until the stem cells were removed. The main rule of all bne marrow registers in the world is that no one knows where and whom are they donating their cells until the transplantation is over. The same also applies to the recipient. I only knew that the he was a young man from the United States and nothing more until he agreed to meet.

Gaylon did it with the desire to help his Native American people. In fact, many Native Americans are sick (leukemia and various types of cancer), and are dying because they do not have identical donor, and the majority does not have health insurance. I'll try my best to find translators for this book and to put it on the web site of all registers in the world in English and Croatian free of charge. This way, I believe that many patients around the world, including the Native Americans will read it and enter the register. In America, the greatest problem is to find a match because of all races are mixed. Doctors say that medicine has proven that the only identical races can be a match: white-white, black-black, yellow-yellow and red-red. Native Americans are a red race, but my example proves that Gaylon and I are above these researches. Maybe it's because his great-grandfather (mother's father), was a German - RUDOLF FISHER, but I believe that this is the work of God and that God has a reason for connecting Gaylon and me. I believe that the Grand Chief of the Comanche tribe will understand this wonderful act of giving.

I also believe in God and I am a practical believer, there is only one God but people went their own ways and gave the same God different names (God, Buddha, Allah, Great Spirit, etc.). For me there are only two kinds of people in the world, and these are humans and inhumans. According to an Native American saying: "There are two wolves in every man -good and bad. Which wolf wins, depends on us, because the one you fed will win. We should give our best for good from the beginning becuase evil only encourages more evil and for it no effort should be put.

It does not matter what your faith, nation and color you are, the only thing that is imortant is to work on yourself and be a good person and do not say things what you do not want others to be saying about you. Don't wish bad things to other people. As big the world might seem, my example showed how small it actually is.

THOUGHTS AND IMPRESSIONS

When we got home from the airport it was around 9 am, and I immediately fell asleep and slept until the next morning (24h). I can imagine how Gaylon and Melissa were tired. The trip is long and hard with long layovers and connecting flights, and in Zagreb they have been exposed to a media frenzy. I wanted to help all the sick and our Foundation "Ana Rukavina" and her mother Mrs. Marija Rukavina-the director of the Foundation, which all of us who recieved a transplan in Croatia owe our life to. I also want to present Gaylon and Melissa to Croatian and the world public, so that everybody hears for their kindness, because to donate a part of yourself is the biggest and most sacred human act which a person can do – TO GIVE THE GIFT OF LIFE by giving a part of yourself. Gaylon needed all the articles from newspapers and video from the HRT and documentary. However, they were only here for five days and it was very, very hard. Journalists of all TV houses and magazines passed through my apartment. Since I had a sponsor for the book and that I didn't want it to be sold for money so I was required to give interviews to all the journalists they sent.

Before all interviews I asked that the newspapers articles and videos are translated into English, so that Gaylon and Melissa could know and understand what I and other people were talking about. All promised to translate it, but no one actually did it, not even Natasha and the documentary cameraman who stole about 30 hours of socializing from Gaylon and me. II even called SOME OF THEM UP TO 30X SEND SMS AND E-MAILS TO SEND ME A DVD. While reading these articles in newspapers, I saw that the journalist from the newspaper "Jutarnji list" Sandra Bolanča, because of who I had to wake up them up didn't write a thing about the Foundation "Ana Rukavina" and the Croatian Registry, which is a part of the global registry, about donating and other important things . Gaylon was interesting because he is an Native American, and her boss published the story in other newspaper he owns - "Slobodna Dalmacija". She even asked them an e-mail while I was squeezing juice, promising to send them an article translated into English, and when they returned to Oklahoma, she asked him to write about their visit to Croatia and their impressions.

I wanted this meeting to be written about and seen on TV, so that many people would enter the register, because in that way chances for finding a donor increase. I did not want anyone to earn money because of it. Gaylon and I agreed to shooting and talking to the media becuae we wanted to spread awareness around the world about the importance of donating bone marrow and hematopoietic stem cells, and the possibility of including Native Americans in the donating process.

Today when I think about it, I should have given the book to be digitally printed and I should have printed only a few copies for the hospital, Gaylon and the Foundation. In that way I would not depend on anyone, and no one could boss me around (blackmail me) and tell me when and who to give an interview to. We should have had a press conference on the day of the promotion of the book and that is it. Nothing more. HEALTH AND FREEDOM ARE THE GREATEST WEALTH one can have.

Although several days have passed since their departure, I still feel fatigue and drowsiness, and I decided to have my blood drawn and to have an appointment with dr. Serventi. Unfortunately, this immense stress had a reflection on my health and my blood results. White blood cells are high (17 700), and platelets are low (150). I tell to the doctor that prof. Labar said taht if my blood results get bad to add some more donor stem cells (T cells), which would then kill the disease. However, when they went into the blood bank, they had no cells, because they were not stored. Prof. Labar thought they were frozen and stored. Usually when they are taking the transplant they take the precentage depending on the recepient's weight, and if the cells move slowly they take a little bit more, and they separate T- lymphocytes from the leftover.

Since Gaylon's stem cells were extremely slow, he had leukopheresis 2x and recieved injections 2x for 5 days, so in the end all together 586 ml of stem cells were drawn. These were all given to me intravenously and there was nothing left.

The doctor suggested we initiate a new donor search in the World Registry. I asked Gaylon on New Year's Eve if he would agree to donate 2ml T cells again if necessary, and he said that he would DONATE AGAIN IF NECESSARY.

Croatia is a former socialist republic (it was part of Yugoslavia) and here transplants are still free, i.e. at the expense of Croatian Institute for Health Insurance and are covered by the fee paid each month if you are employed. Therefore, they always look for the donor first the Croatian and European Register, and only later in the World Registry, due to lower costs. I believe that all countries have such practice. Doctors say when the first transplantation does not work, ten they searche for another donor. At the doctor's council they said that I was under a lot of pressure and stress because of the book promotion and the documentary, and to be a good host to Gaylon and Melissa, and when my body calms that everything will fall into place. I remembered Dr. Kinde when before the first transplantation he told me that stress usually affects the psyche of the people, and in my case the bone marrow.

Before the transplantation when they took my bone marrow and wanted to process what was left of it they found nothing because my bones were as dry as dust. Regardless the fact my blood type hasn't changed, I recieved Native American blood and Gaylon has become my blood brother for life. Gaylon said: NATIVE AMERICAN BLOOD IN A CROATIAN BODY. This is true and I am very proud of it. He told me that I am now their (member of the Comanche tribe). And I am. For spending such a small amount of time together we concluded that we have a lot in common. We are similar in character; we like the same things, we are sociable and we love to help people, and he said that because of that I am similar to the Native Americans.

I believe that nothing in life happens by chance. So one day I left my Facebook on and fell asleep. About 2 a.m. I heard a message. I got up and looked and got a friend request from Mrs. Vlatka Bukva from Karlovac, employed in the newspaper "Vecernji list". I accepted it and got a new message in which she wrote that just now she read the book from cover to cover without stopping and that she was crying and laughing while reading my book. She said she couldn't stop reading it and when she came to the end and found out that Gaylon was from Oklahoma and her only son Marko studies at Oklahoma university and works as a football coach there. I asked here where Marko was then and if he could take some gifts to Gaylon and his family in Oklahoma. He said he could and would. I quickly kicked into action. Since I had already knitted and sent scarfs and gloves and Licitar hearts to Gaylon and his family, I had some wool left to knit scarves and I immediately went to buy a V-cut green sweater for Gaylon since he likes dark-green colour. My husband bought him a silver necklace, because we wanted to buy it when he was in Croatia but we didn't have time because of the journalists. We wanted him to choose what he likes. As I promised I sent the board game to Gabe, scarves and Croatian sweets to the rest of the family.

All these things are small things, but they help my soul. Throught his stay Gaylon pointed out that I DID NOT OWE HIM ANYTHING and not to stop thanking him all the time, but I can not help myself. As long as I'm alive I'll send them Christmas and birthday gifts as a small token of gratitude and respect.

So Marko took the gifts, and Mrs. Vlatka invested significant effort and found a translator for this book. First she spoke to Mrs. Nada Murgić- an MP and director of the Home for the elderly in Karlovac. Mrs. Nada remembered Mr. Damir Mandic, religion teacher and headmaster of a high school in Karlovac, and he thought of his former student, now Professor of English Mrs ANAMARIA KASUNIĆ. We got in touch and thanks to these good people, especially ANAMARIA KASUNIĆ, who translated and edited this book free of charge, the whole world will be able to

READ IT FOR FREE.

Profil bookstores raised 5166.88 kn (about $ 950) and deposited it into the account of the Foundation "Ana Rukavina", for further collection of blood samples.

I still have not received the annex to the agreement for the documentary film "Native American blood", because I asked them to donate all the money made from the film, to the Foundation "Ana Rukavina" and to inform me how much will they sell the film for and what they are planing to do with the film, but they refuse to send the annex. They wrote in the annex that when they cover their expenses (they recorded around 30hrs) they will donate the rest to the Foundation, without consulting me. So it can be less than $ 1. I do not want to sign such a contract. The deal was that movie would be translated into English, and when I realized that they started manipulating and that they wanted to make profit I I told them that I knew what they were planning so they reduced the duration of the documentary form 50 to 30 minutes and didn't translate it into English. Thus, the movie was only on HRT, on November 28th in 2013 as a reminder the 7th anniversary of Ana's death. I talked to Nataša to put the movie on YOUTUBE so anyone could watch it for free and she promised to do it but never did.

Although Gaylon and I had the best intentions and did everything for the common good, not all people are so benevolent and unfortunately they want to use this wonderful story for their personal gain.

I hope that when you read this book, you will think carefully and on your own accord decide to enter the Register and by doing so save someone's life, as Gaylon has saved mine. THANK YOU ALL. I am very happy and proud because since Gaylon's visit to Croatia 9 000 potential donors entered the Croatian Register. This is a great opportunity for affected people worldwide.

AT THE END OF THIS BOOK I PUT A LETTER WRITTEN BY THE NATIVE AMERICAN CHIEF, because everything he said is true. All natural disasters happening today are a result of a man's hand and nature will treat us the way we treat it and as we deserve.

Chief Seattle's Letter to the President of the United

States, 1852

(attributed to Chief Seattle, but unverified; this is one of several versions)

"The President in Washington sends word that he wishes to buy our land. But how can you buy or sell the sky? The land? The idea is strange to us. If we do not own the freshness of the air and the sparkle of the water, how can you sell them? Every part of this earth is sacred to my people. Every shining pine needle, every humming insect. All are holy in the memory and experience of my people.

We know the sap which courses through the trees as we know the blood that courses through our veins. We are part of the earth and it is part of us. The perfumed flowers are our sisters. The bear, the deer, the great eagle, these are our brothers. The rocky crests, the juices in the meadow, the body heat of a pony, and man, all belong to the same family.

The shining water that moves in the streams and rivers is not just water, but the blood of our ancestors. If we sell you our land, you must remember that it is sacred. Each ghostly reflection in the clear waters of the lakes tells of events and memories in the life of my people. The waters murmur in the voice of my father's father. The rivers are our brothers. They quench our thirst. They carry our canoes and feed our children. So you must give to the river the kindness you would give any brother.

If we sell you our land, remember that the air is precious to us, that the air shares its spirit with all the life it supports. The wind that gave our grandfather his first breath also receives his last sigh. The wind also gives our children the spirit of life. So if we sell you our land, you must keep it apart and sacred, as a place where man can go to taste the wind that is sweetened by the meadow Flowers.

Will you teach your children what we have taught our children? That the earth is our Mother? What befalls the earth befalls all the sons of the earth.

This we know: The earth does not belong to man, man belongs to the earth. All things are connected like the blood that unites us all. Man did not weave the web of life; he is merely a strand of it. Whatever he does to the web, he does to himself.

One thing we know: Our God is your God. The earth is precious to him and to harm the earth is to heap contempt on its Creator. Your destiny is a mystery to us. What will happen when the buffalo are all slaughtered? The wild horses tamed? What will happen when the secret corners of the forest are heavy with the scent of many men and the view of the ripe hills is blotted by talking wires? Where will the thicket be? Gone! Where will the eagle be? Gone! And what is it to say goodbye to the swift pony and the hunt? The end of living and the beginning of survival.

When the last red man has vanished with his wilderness and his memory is only the shadow of a cloud moving across the prairie, will these shores and forests still be here? Will there be any of the spirit of my people left?

We love this earth as a newborn loves its mother's heartbeat. So if we sell you our land, love it as we have loved it. Care for it as we have cared for it. Hold in your mind the memory of the land as it is when you receive it. Preserve the land for all children and love it, as God loves us all.

As we are a part of the land, you too are part of the land. This earth is precious to us. It is also precious to you. One thing we know: There is only one God. No man, be he Red Man or White Man, can be apart. We are all brothers."

Chief Seattle

"Native American isn't blood. It is what is in the heart. The love for the land, the respect for it, those who inhabit it, and the respect and acknowledgement of the spirits and elders. That is what it is to be Indian."
White Feather, Navajo Medicine Man

"We are all one Tribe,
the Human Tribe... "

AUTHENTIC TEXT OF CHIEF SEATTLE'S TREATY ORATION 1854

Version 1, which appeared in the Seattle 'Sunday Star' on October 29, 1887, in a column by
Dr. Henry A. Smith.

"Yonder sky that has wept tears of compassion upon my people for centuries untold, and which to us appears changeless and eternal, may change. Today is fair, tomorrow it may be overcast with clouds. My words are like the stars that never change. Whatever Seattle says, the Great Chief at Washington can rely upon with as much certainty as he can upon the return of the sun or the seasons. The White Chief says that Big Chief at Washington sends us greetings of friendship and goodwill. This is kind of him for we know he has little need of our friendship in return. His people are many. They are like the grass that covers vast prairies. My people are few. They resemble the scattering trees of a storm-swept plain. The great - and, I presume - good, White Chief sends us word that he wishes to buy our land but is willing to allow us enough to live comfortably. This indeed appears just, even generous, for the Red Man no longer has rights that he need respect, and the offer may be wise, also, as we are no longer in need of an extensive country.

There was a time when our people covered the land as the waves of a wind-ruffled sea cover its shell-paved floor, but that time long since passed away with the greatness of tribes that are now but a mournful memory. I will not dwell on, nor mourn over, our untimely decay, nor reproach my paleface brothers with hastening it, as we too may have been somewhat to blame.

Youth is impulsive. When our young men grow angry at some real or imaginary wrong, and disfigure their faces with black paint, it denotes that their hearts are black, and that they are often cruel and relentless, and our old men and old women are unable to restrain them. Thus it has ever been. Thus it was when the white man began to push our forefathers ever westward. But let us hope that the hostilities between us may never return. We would have everything to lose and nothing to gain. Revenge by young men is considered gain, even at the cost of their own lives, but old men who stay at home in times of war, and mothers who have sons to lose, know better.

Our good father in Washington - for I presume he is now our father as well as yours, since King George has moved his boundaries further north - our great and good father, I say, sends us word that if we do as he desires he will protect us. His brave warriors will be to us a bristling wall of strength, and his wonderful ships of war will fill our harbors, so that our ancient enemies far to the northward - the Haidas and Tsimshians - will cease to frighten our women, children and old men. Then in reality he will be our father and we his children. But can that ever be? Your God is not our God! Your God loves your people and hates mine! He folds his strong protecting arms lovingly about the paleface and leads him by the hand as a father leads an infant son. But, He has forsaken His Red children, if they really are His.

Our God, the Great Spirit, seems also to have forsaken us. Your God makes your people wax stronger every day. Soon they will fill all the land. Our people are ebbing away like a rapidly receding tide that will never return. The white man's God cannot love our people or He would protect them. They seem to be orphans who can look nowhere for help. How then can we be brothers? How can your God become our God and renew our prosperity and awaken in us dreams of returning greatness? If we have a common Heavenly Father He must be partial, for He came to His paleface children. We never saw Him. He gave you laws but had no word for His red children whose teeming multitudes once filled this vast continent as stars fill the firmament. No; we are two distinct races with separate origins and separate destinies. There is little in common between us.

To us the ashes of our ancestors are sacred and their resting place is hallowed ground. You wander far from the graves of your ancestors and seemingly without regret. Your religion was written upon tablets of stone by the iron finger of your God so that you could not forget. The Red Man could never comprehend or remember it. Our religion is the traditions of our ancestors - the dreams of our old men, given them in solemn hours of the night by the Great Spirit; and the visions of our sachems, and is written in the hearts of our people.

Your dead cease to love you and the land of their nativity as soon as they pass the portals of the tomb and wander away beyond the stars. They are soon forgotten and never return. Our dead never forget this beautiful world that gave them being. They still love its verdant valleys, its murmuring rivers, its magnificent mountains, sequestered vales and verdant lined lakes and bays, and ever yearn in tender fond affection over the lonely-hearted living, and often return from the happy hunting ground to visit, guide, console and comfort them.

Day and night cannot dwell together. The Red Man has ever fled the approach of the White Man, as the morning mist flees before the morning sun. However, your proposition seems fair and I think that my people will accept it and will retire to the reservation you offer them. Then we will dwell apart in peace, for the words of the Great White Chief seem to be the words of nature speaking to my people out of dense darkness.

It matters little where we pass the remnant of our days. They will not be many. The Indian's night promises to be dark. Not a single star of hope hovers above his horizon. Sad-voiced winds moan in the distance. Grim fate seems to be on the Red Man's trail, and wherever he will hear the approaching footsteps of his fell destroyer and prepare stolidly to meet his doom, as does the wounded doe that hears the approaching footsteps of the hunter.

A few more moons, a few more winters, and not one of the descendants of the mighty hosts that once moved over this broad land or lived in happy homes, protected by the Great Spirit, will remain to mourn over the graves of a people once more powerful and hopeful than yours. But why should I mourn at the untimely fate of my people? Tribe follows tribe, and nation follows nation, like the waves of the sea. It is the order of nature, and regret is useless. Your time of decay may be distant, but it will surely come, for even the White Man whose God walked and talked with him as friend to friend, cannot be exempt from the common destiny. We may be brothers after all. We will see.

We will ponder your proposition and when we decide we will let you know. But should we accept it, I here and now make this condition that we will not be denied the privilege without molestation of visiting at any time the tombs of our ancestors, friends and children. Every part of this soil is sacred in the estimation of my people. Every hillside, every valley, every plain and grove, has been hallowed by some sad or happy event in days long vanished. Even the rocks, which seem to be dumb and dead as they swelter in the sun along the silent shore, thrill with memories of stirring events connected with the lives of my people, and the very dust upon which you now stand responds more lovingly to their footsteps than yours, because it is rich with the blood of our ancestors, and our bare feet are conscious of the sympathetic touch.

Our departed braves, fond mothers, glad, happy-hearted maidens, and even the little children who lived here and rejoiced here for a brief season, will love these sombre solitudes and at eventide they greet shadowy returning spirits. And when the last Red Man shall have perished, and the memory of my tribe shall have become a myth among the White Men, these shores will swarm with the invisible dead of my tribe, and when your children's children think themselves alone in the field, the store, the shop, upon the highway, or in the silence of the pathless woods, they will not be alone. In all the earth there is no place dedicated to solitude. At night when the streets of your cities and villages are silent and you think them deserted, they will throng with the returning hosts that once filled them and still love this beautiful land. The White Man will never be alone.

Let him be just, and deal kindly with my people, for the dead are not powerless. Dead, did I say? There is no death, only a change of worlds."

Chief Seattle

The Ana Rukavina Foundation in the world register

Finally, I want to explain how important it is to support the work of ours and yours Ana Rukavina Foundation. I say “ours” because it's the foundation of all of us and I dare say more for the poor than for the rich. When a man is rich and ill and needs a heart, lung, liver, kidney or pancreas transplant, he can be treated abroad or pay to cut in line. A poor man has no money and is only left with prayer and faith in God.

However, when you need a bone marrow, blood-forming stem cell , or like me, umbilical cord stem cell transplantation, if you don't have a brother or a sister that are your match, we have our Ana Rukavina Foundation, which is in the World Registry. Here you will find a matching donor. You can be the richest man in the world, but if you do not have a matching counterpart who is in the registry and willing to help, you have nothing. Wealth cannot buy you that. That's why I say that it is our Foundation. Just have to firmly believe and hope.

Dr. Mrsić was Ana's resident doctor and she talked to him about the expansion of the voluntary bone marrow donor Register. Only 155 people were registered then, mostly relatives of patients. Anna wrote a letter in *Gloria magazine*, which makes me shiver even now. Ana believed a donor would be found for her, and that money collected for her treatment would be used to expand our register.

Unfortunately, God took Ana to himself, and the money collected for her treatment was used to found the Ana Rukavina Foundation. Her account has received approximately 1.4 million kuna, and the account for lymphoma and leukemia about the same. Thanks to Mrs. Marija and Ana's husband Igor all the money was taken from the account to the last penny and used for the common good.

Mrs. Marija told me that it was good people's money that made payments for Ana's treatment. If she couldn't be helped, others should be. Everyone deserves a second chance. That can be said and done only by great people like her. While the Foundation carries Ana's name and while she is still alive, every *kuna* and *lipa* will be used for tissue sampling, she said. When she won't be able to anymore, there is Ana's sister Goga, who also helps a lot with the legal side, and Goga has little Ana, who is the same aunt Ana, and a son Ante. This chain of control will continue, and all the people working at the Foundation are honest people, because only one works for salary, and the rest volunteer.

Thanks to her and Dr. Mrsić, who fulfilled the promise given to Ana, today we have about 40,000 DNA samples stored in the blood bank at KBC Rebro. We are first in the world per capita. Around 40,000 blood-forming stem cell donors and 5,000 cord blood donors.

If Mrs. Maria and Ana's husband hadn't given that money, we wouldn't have our foundation today, and so the seriously ill they wouldn't have hope and an opportunity to get well, and I wouldn't be writing this because I wouldn't be alive. This, along with the illness itself, should be written and spoken about, because if we remained quiet about it we wouldn't be able to help each other.

I am a Croatian pensioner, with a miserable disability pension.

I would long be dead if the Foundation hadn't been established and a matching donor found for me. Everybody can contribute to the work of the Foundation by donating 1 Kuna from your heart, entering the donor list and by blood transfusion, which is always needed in surgery and transplants. You donate bone marrow, which is taken from the pelvic bone under anesthesia, which is short, and a hematopoietic stem cell leukapheresis donor, which takes four to five hours and is painless as blood tests.

On the day of my transplant, an American doctor came and brought my transplant. She visited the sterile units, the typization center, the cord blood bank and the Ana Rukavina Foundation. She was fascinated by what she had seen and in awe by Ana's story. She said that America does not have as many samples per capita as Croatia. So let's continue and support the work of our Foundation.

I ask all people of good will who want to become potential donors to think hard prior to entering the register if they want to be donors and save someone's life when called upon. If they only sign up and withdraw, they give false hope to patients and waste Foundation's money used on typization tests.

Seven million people are currently seeking donors worldwide. Usually 30 percent find donors within their family, and 70 percent in the global registry. *Bone Marrow Donors Worldwide* global registry holds 20,790,748 potential donors today (20,229,219 bone marrow and 561,529 cord blood donors).

Please be somebody's counterpart and save their life.

At the end of this book, here is some useful information from the Ana Rukavina Foundation pages for everyone.

I ask all the sick people being treated for hematological diseases (leukemia, lymphoma and other) to watch the film "Class Optimist" and to fight with all their strength to survive. I also ask their families, friends and others who are their material and psychological support to watch it and to remain loyal friends through thick and thin. It would be good for healthy people to watch this documentary also, people who just rush, hurry and run for the material, to pause for a moment and reflect on the meaning and the transience of life.

I poured my experience into a book, and Lana in a film. We'll be happy if it helps at least one person to fight for life and survive, as have the two of us. Optimism and hope must never be lost. When it is hard, cry, it's no shame, but continue fighting immediately after. A Chinese proverb says: "Fall seven times, but get up eight times." There is no shame in stumbling and falling, but there is shame in not trying to get up.

Lana Šarić: Class optimist

A member of the Executive Board of the Foundation, Lana Šarić, a leukemia survivor herself, directed her first documentary film "Class optimist" about dealing with the potentially fatal disease - leukemia and everything that comes after treatment. The film premiered on the 4th of March 2010 as part of Zagrebdox programme.

Lana Šarić was born in Zagreb in 1983. She graduated dramaturgy at the Academy of Dramatic Arts in Zagreb. She writes for theaters and television and directs theater plays. "Class optimist" is the first film she has directed. In his spare time she likes to sail.

During her leukemia treatment she stayed at the same hospital ward as Ana, they fought the same battle with the disease. After Ana's death she actively joined the Foundation, warning to the problems of patients, through which she herself had gone through. So I'm going to use this opportunity to quote Lana again:

We have the Foundation, the Registry and the cord blood bank, but it is not enough for patients. What more needs to be done is not the job of the Foundation, but the resource ministry and the state. Those who were healthy yesterday, see their world crumble away when they find out the diagnosis. From a normal life you must enter half-life, combat, isolation, and torture that lasts for months. Those who must endure such a thing deserve the best hospital conditions that exist, they deserve all medicines free of charge and all the examinations right away, in Croatia and for free.

Since writing this article some things have changed. Croatia has acquired a PET scanner, the patients' examinations are covered by HMO, the Department of hematology at Rebro is being renovated, new hospital rooms are being built, of which each will have its own bathroom. We have witnessed some tragic cases at the department of hematology which were made public, but the conclusion is that those cases have shown even more with what kind of situations hematologists deal with and how thin the line is between life and death.

We were all mostly young people and presented with very banal problems, such as the lack of infusion stands with which we could move, inedible hospital food, uncomfortable beds (during my first treatment alone I had to spend 40 days in a room no bigger than several square meters. That was my whole world.), lack of sanitary facilities, ventilation equipment, shortage of hospital beds.

Many patients had to seek treatment abroad or pay for their treatment by themselves.

How is it when a family does not have money? What then? Go to the newspapers? Another nausea and bitterness? How does a child feel when it has to pose for *Jutarnji list* to buy life? Why can't we do without that? A hundred thousand kuna for a large system is not much. For an average Croatian family it is an unreachable sum.

The fact that the hematology department was even able to function for those two years I visited it is a miracle. We have only doctors and nurses to thank. And almost everybody who has ever been in that department has had the need to give or do something for it after finally saying goodbye. Sometimes I want to take a camera and show what it looks like, what every sick person has to go through looks like.

…A few months ago I said I don't want anybody writing letters like Ana's anymore. Her letter shook Croatia. But I hold true to my wish.

Today, two years later, there is another big step before the Croatian public, and that is that people who want to join the register and become potential bone marrow donors at a given point in time really do become donors. Some of them accepted it without reservations, while fear and probably lack of information about the possible health issues for donors overcame others. Croatian citizens are in principle altruistic and more and more aware of the importance of voluntarily helping sick people, and the task of destigmatization of bone marrow donation as a potential health risk for donors is before the institutions, the Foundation and all of us.

Questions and answers about the cord blood bank

Prof. dr. Mirando Mrsić:

Cord blood bank

More and more attention of the scientific public has been focused on stem cell research in the last ten years. The research in this field, especially when talking about cloning and fetal cells, is the subject of ethical debate and controversy. Thanks to these issues, which have emerged with the turn of the century, researches have focused on stem cells found in the umbilical cord.

1. What is cord blood?

Blood from the umbilical cord, which is also called the umbilical blood is the blood found in the blood vessels of the umbilical cord and placenta. After the baby is born the umbilical cord is tied and that blood remains in the blood vessels. Studies have shown that the umbilical cord blood contains highly valuable stem cells from which, with the exception of bone marrow cells, other cells can be born.

2. What are stem cells and what do they do?

Stem cells have the ability to create different tissues, organs and organ systems in the human body. Stem cells, which are found in the umbilical cord blood, are capable of forming bone marrow and defense system cells. From these cells, red blood cells are formed – which carry oxygen, white blood cells – which defend our organism, and platelets - cells that prevent bleeding. There are three sources of these cells In the human body. These are bone marrow, peripheral blood and umbilical cord blood. At the present time, stem cells are applied in the treatment of hematological diseases, such as leukemia and lymphoma. After administration of chemotherapy and prior preparation, the stem cells infused into the patient by peripheral blood and thus the ill bone marrow is replaced by the healthy. The ability of these cells to develop into other cells and organs was discovered only recently, which may open new opportunities in treating many diseases (so-called regenerative medicine) such as myocardial infarction, spinal cord damage, cerebral infarction and Alzheimer's disease. The most intense research today is moving in this direction and we can expect big advancements in this field.

3. What is the difference between umbilical cord stem cells and other stem cells?

Umbilical cord stem cells are the youngest cells. The second are embryonic cells, which, because of ethical controversy, are no longer used in the treatment. The third and the oldest group are adult stem cells found in children and adults. They are already directed towards a particular tissue, such as bone marrow stem cells and peripheral blood. Those cells do not have such proliferative abilities as umbilical or embryonic cells.

4. Which diseases are treated by umbilical blood stem cells transplantation?

Mostly patients suffering from leukemia and other malignancies, and patients with hereditary defense system, metabolism and hemoglobin synthesis problems are treated by transplantation.

Malignant diseases are acute lymphocytic leukemia, acute myelociticleukemia, chronic myelogenous leukemia, myelodysplastic syndrome, neuroblastoma, and non-malignant diseases are adrenoleukodistrophia, amegakariocitic thrombocytopenia, Blackfan-Diamond's syndrome, congenital diskertosis, Fanconi anemia, Gunther's disease, Hunter's syndrome, Hurler's syndrome, severe aplastic anemia, Kostman's syndrome, Lesch-Nyhan's syndrome, osteoporosis, severe combined immunodeficiency, thalassemia, X-linked limfoproliferates.

5. How is umbilical cord blood collected?

Cord blood is collected immediately after the birth of the child and its separation from the placenta. The child is separated from the placenta by cutting the umbilical cord. Even as the placenta is still in the uterus, the umbilical cord is disinfected and umbilical vein is probed by a needle attached to a bag that allows collection of large quantities of blood that remained in the placenta. The procedure takes a few minutes.

The normal progress of labor should not be changed due to cord blood collection. The safety of mother and child is in the first place. The procedure of blood collection is painless and is not dangerous either for the mother or the baby.

6. What does the process of storing these cells look like?

The collected cord blood must be processed and stored within 48 hours of birth. Immediately after collection, the blood is submitted to the bank in a controlled environment. Automatic processing of the collected blood removes erythrocytes and plasma, and extracts a layer of leukocytes which contain stem cells. This layer of cells is used for transplantation. A cryoprotective solution is added to the cells which allows freezing at very low temperatures. Frozen cells are kept in tanks with liquid nitrogen at -196 ° C.

7. Is collecting blood always successful?

Unfortunately, the collection of cord blood is not always successful. Sometimes the volume of cord blood is insufficient or the blood may coagulate during the collection. This does not mean that there are problems with the health of the mother or child! It is generally accepted that only every third donated blood satisfies the set criteria for storage in a public bank. Cord blood that doesn't meet the quality requirements for a public bank can be used to improve the methods of storing and processing blood, and for research for the development of transplantation.

8. Does quantity matter when it comes to cord blood?

Yes, it is necessary to collect every milliliter of blood from the umbilical cord. The number of stem cells is proportional to the volume of cord blood. In most cases, the number of stem cells is correlated with the stored volume. The larger the volume, the more cells. This is particularly important when the cord blood is donated to a public bank that stores transplants for the treatment of adult patients. However, when the cord blood is stored for personal needs, the volume is important, but not crucial for storage, because it is unknown whether the cord blood will be used to treat a child, an adult, or to rebuild damaged tissue, which needs a smaller number of cells.

9. Who can donate cord blood?

Most women can donate cord blood. However, we must make sure that the donated cord blood is safe for the recipient. Therefore, each cord blood donor fills out a health questionnaire with questions about their own health, as well as the health status of family members, including questions about pregnancy and medications taken. One part of the questionnaire is concerned with the current and previous way of life, and includes questions about sexual activity and drug use. The pregnant woman who is donating cord blood must be of legal age (over 18 years old). In case of twins or other multiple pregnancies, the cord blood cannot be donated. In multiple pregnancies the placenta is smaller than with single pregnancies so there is not enough of cord blood to be collected for a public bank.

10. Can stem cell collection hurt the mother or the child in any way?

The blood is collected after the child has been born, the umbilical cord, tied and the child separated from the placenta. The collection is painless, simple and safe for the mother. The collection, by itself, has no impact on the normal progress of labor. In most cases, the collection of cord blood takes about five minutes, because after that the normal clotting process in the umbilical cord and placenta starts.

11. What are cord blood banks?

Establishing umbilical blood banks is a sign of technological progress, and the start of such a bank ranks Croatia among the countries in which such programs have been conducted for many years. The banks store umbilical cord stem cells that can help in the treatment of many life-threatening diseases. As the umbilical cord blood can be used in hematopoietic stem cell transplantation (KMS) in the same way and for the same patients as the bone marrow or KMS from peripheral stem cells, cord blood banks are being opened.

12. How many banks are there in Croatia?

There are two types of banks for storing umbilical stem cells, the voluntary "Ana Rukavina", and the family or personal needs umbilical blood bank. The Rules of Procedure for cord blood banks, which was adopted by the Ministry of Health and Welfare, stipulates that the two banks are under the same roof. One such bank in Croatia is located in the Clinical Hospital Centre Zagreb.

13. For how long can the frozen cells be stored?

It is not yet known for how long the frozen cord blood sample can be stored. Research has shown that cord blood has the same biological properties as before freezing after more than 15 years of storage in liquid nitrogen. Further studies may show that the lifespan of these cells is limited or that blood-forming stem cells can be stored indefinitely.

14. What is the difference between public and family banks?

Public banks are non-profit institutions and store the cord blood in the interest of general welfare. They are linked into an international network and so the stored grafts can be used to treat patients worldwide. Family banks store cord blood for personal use, in order to be used in treatment of family members, if necessary. This blood is a kind of biological insurance. Given that the exact purpose for the cells is unknown, there are no clearly defined quality requirements to be met by the autologous cord blood stored in a private bank. Therefore, all the collected cord blood that can be adequately treated is stored in a private family bank.

15. How much does storing cells in family banks cost?

The price of storage and preservation until the child becomes of legal age (18 years old) is about 15,000 kuna, while the cost of collecting cord blood and preparing it for delivery is 1,000 kuna, and is paid at the maternity ward where the cord blood collection is taking place.

16. What are the main reasons for donating cord blood to a public bank?

The modern method of treatment consists of destroying the sick bone marrow by high dosage of cytostatic and radiation, however, these procedures also destroy the patient's stem cells. Without other stem cells, whether they are the patient's own stem cells stored in liquid nitrogen or donor stem cell, that is, cord blood, the patient's life would not be possible. Without the help of these cells, patients cannot survive for more than two or three months.

17. Is the acquisition of special material for collecting cord blood for the purpose of storing in a public bank necessary?

It is not necessary. The family that donates blood has no expenses. When the cord blood is collected for personal needs, the material is charged. In this case, the material is charged with the cost of collecting and storing. At the beginning of the public bank's work expendable materials were procured by the Ana Rukavina Foundation. Today, the public bank is financed by the bank for personal use funds.

18. How much does storing in public banks cost and how long is the cord blood preserved there?

The donation of cord blood to a public bank is voluntary and anonymous. The family that donates blood has no financial obligations. There is no data about how long the cord blood cells can be preserved for now. Most public blood banks keep the cord blood for 10 years. The blood is stored in liquid nitrogen at minus 196 degrees Celsius. Based on the results of modern scientific research, it is assumed that the cells, under controlled conditions, could be kept indefinitely.

19. What if somebody needs the cord blood of my child?

The public cord blood banks submit data on available transplants to national registers of voluntary stem cell donors which are linked into an international network. When a patient needs treatment by blood-forming stem cell transplantation, the registers are searched. The chance of donated blood being issued is 15% after a lapse of ten years after entering the register. A family bank, that is, a cord blood bank for personal needs, does not enter the Voluntary cord blood register, as it is not intended for treatment of other persons than family members.

20. How likely is it to happen?

Cord blood stored in a family bank cannot be issued for the treatment of other patients as it is intended for and owned by the family that has stored it.

21. What is the probability of finding an adequate donor in a public bank?

The chance of one cord blood being used for transplant is about 1:30,000 to 100,000, depending on the ethnic group. As it is unknown what blood will be used, all the collected blood is processed, tested and stored in the same way.

22. Who can use the cells from the family bank?

The cells from the family bank are intended to treat the owner of the blood and family members whose blood is stored.

23. How is the cord blood delivered to the banks?

Cord blood can remain at room temperature for up to 36 hours without the need for refrigerated storage. But in any case, it is better to deliver the blood to the Bank as soon as possible. The Clinical Hospital Centre Zagreb organizes the transport of blood for all the maternity wards in Zagreb. For maternity wards outside Zagreb the blood is delivered by ambulance or courier service.

24. How can I donate blood if I live somewhere outside of Zagreb?

Except in Zagreb's hospitals, the blood for public bank storage is also collected in other cities across Croatia - Split Zadar, Osijek, Rijeka, Dubrovnik, Karlovac, Čakovec, Virovitica, Vinkovci, Pula, Koprivnica, Varaždin and Zabok. The blood from these centers is transported to Zagreb. So, all those who wish to donate cord blood to a public bank can do so.

25. Where can I get further information on storing cord blood?

For all additional information, the interested families can contact the Institute for Clinical Transfusion at KBC Zagreb - tel. 01 23 88 708. Additional information is also found on the website www.kbc-zagreb.hr and zaklada-ana-rukavina.hr.

I want life by Ana Rukavina

With the permission of Mrs. Marija Rukavina

ZAKLADA ANA RUKAVINA
WWW.ZAKLADA-ANA-RUKAVINA.HR

I asked Mrs. Marija if I could put Anna's letter at the end of the book, so we could all be reminded what this young and brave women wrote and how this letter moved and united all Croatian citizens and our neighbors from Bosnia and Herzegovina, who, unfortunately, still do not have a register or a bank.

I remember like it was today. That day I went to a regular control at KB Dubrava to prof. Pejša. I bought *Gloria* at a newsstand, sat in a tram and read. My tears dripped on the letter, I couldn't stop them. I believed that a donor would be found for Ana and she would be cured. I prayed for her recovery and didn't think for a second that she might lose this battle.

My test results were great then, and the disease was in remission (in a dormant phase) for eight years. A year later there was a gene mutation and the disease changed into myelofibrosis, with thrombocytopenia. A search for my donor began three years ago and I had a transplant thanks to the Ana Rukavina Foundation. If not for the Foundation, which accelerated the process of scanning the world's registry, I would not be alive today.

I write this because no one knows when they will get sick and from which disease. Yesterday it was me, today someone else, and tomorrow it will be another person. Only united can we help each other and do a great thing.

While my children were small, and I worked a lot, I often wondered what the meaning of that life is. I come home from work and cook, wash dishes and clothes, iron, control and help with homework, when they are sick, I measure their temperature and don't sleep, etc. During the war and afterwards I took care of my mom and aunt. Sometimes I was so tired I fell asleep on the tram. I was not aware that these were the best years of my life.

I hadn't known who my donor was. America is big, with people of all races, religions and nations living in it. I only knew that he is a GREAT MAN and that is all that matters. For me, there are two kinds of people, good and bad. You are either a human or non-human. That's why, in the letter, I called my donor: GOOD, UNKNOWN MAN. For me, it's the biggest of titles.

Hello,

I'm Ana Rukavina, I was born and live in Zagreb, soon I'll be 30, I am a journalist for a political newspaper Vjesnik, and, unfortunately, it's all that is good about me for now. My true identity card is actually somewhat different, since May 2005 I am suffering from leukemia, so I ask you for 10 minutes of your time so I could briefly describe my story from a patient's room at Rebro. Don't be afraid, it is not so tragic, I'm not depressed, life just happened to me, from which you might learn something.

In mid 2005, chronically exhausted, I ended up in an ambulance. The doctor that admitted me at Rebro kept nodding his head worriedly, and I, it's kind of funny today, kept convincing him to give me medication, let me go home and I'd be back in a few days if I didn't feel better. Unsuccessfully, my blood picture was worse than all those desperate photos on our new IDs.

I felt discomfort, fear and I had a thought in my head that I might be suffering from the same disease the lead actress dies from in that 70s movie all the mothers cried about, I think it was called Love story. Unfortunately, I was right, but I couldn't pronounce that word. Tears, Valium, and then indifference.

I drew the line thinking that in my 28 years I managed to grow up loved in a beautiful family, to deserve love, a husband and friend, to travel, to do a job that still brings me joy. I sank comforting myself with the logic of the situation, until one quite silly idea crossed my mind. I love ice cream, hazelnut is my first choice, but that summer I haven't tasted it yet, I was forestalled by going to hospital.

Is it possible I will never eat hazelnut ice cream again? Am I willing to give up everything and everyone I love? That day, scared but determined, I set off into lobbying for my own recovery. I accepted the challenge and was painful aware of what had befallen me from the first day. I already lost one battle against such an opponent, and I can't stand being shamelessly robbed and defeated. My dad Gordan, died in 2003, at the age of 54, of lung cancer. That really broke me. So, I was treated for six months, until October 2005, at the Department for bone marrow transplants at KBC Rebro, with Professor Boris Labar and his medical team. I must admit I adore my doctors and nurses, and what's even nicer, I think the feeling is mutual. Without overstating, they are my big family, and they give me a sense of security so it is not hard to leave my destiny in their hands.

I did chemo and then the transplant. It all went smoothly and each day I grew better. Finally, I thought this summer, life is slowly returning to the right track and I'm leaving all that is ugly behind me. I firmly believed that. But then September came and the first headaches started which soon turned into day and night migraines, I lost sight in my right eye, and suffered unbearable pain and had difficulty walking. Nevertheless, the test results were fine, and then it started all over again.

In mid-October, that same ambulance, Rebro, this time I at least knew the procedure. The test results confirmed my old acquaintance was back, they found leukemia cells in the cerebrospinal fluid. What can I tell you about how I felt, honestly, I don't like to remember, the hardest thing was actually informing my family again.

I searched for motivation, something to get me going because I am anything but a sad and depressed person. Surrender was never an option for me. I often got burned in life and work because of that, but what can I do when I don't know otherwise. I have infinite love for life and people, I know and have someone to live for. Sometimes it seems not 100 years would be enough for me to do all that He in heaven intended for me.

Nevertheless, I've came to a point where I can no longer go on my own and I need help from good people.

Talking to my medical team about further course of treatment, chemotherapy, brain radiation, and in the end, a very risky bone marrow transplantation from a non-matching donor which is due around New Year, a possibility has opened for treatment in the United States, and/or acquisition of expensive drugs, immunosuppressants, which are not available in our market, and could help me get out of this story, and give it a happy ending.

Actually, I find it difficult to articulate exactly what I want to ask from you, I know, I said 10 minutes at the beginning, but I wasn't being completely honest. Don't hold it against me, it's not easy for me. All my wishes actually fit into three words, I want life. I am aware of all the risks that await me, I'm even ready for the thick end of the stick, I'm not afraid, I just don't want to turn around and go not being sure I've done everything I could to stick here with you for a while longer. I absolutely trust my doctors, but I know where I live, so I kindly ask you to help me. The only thing I can *promise to you and to myself is that I will try to be brave and cheerful even when it gets tough. And it will, I know that for sure.*

Have a nice day!

Thank you!

Ana Rukavina

Acknowledgements

Finally, I want to thank everyone. Do not hold it against me that I put it in this order. First, I thank dear God for creating two identical counterparts in the U.S. registry, to my donors who enrolled in the registry, the Ana Rukavina Foundation, the entirety of expert healthcare professionals headed by Professor Labar in the sterile units and hematology at KBC Rebro, Dr. Kindi. They are all so nice and warm and full of understanding. The sterile unit is a special department, where the sickest patients lie. Their warm look and smile instills you with hope and confidence. I also thank Nataša Bijelić who works at the Registry, physicians at the typization center and the blood bank, and to the doctor from America that brought the transplant.

I thank my family, especially my husband, who has been my support the whole time in every meaning of the word. I wouldn't have made it without him. He took care of everything, and my only concern in the sterile units was to fight and survive. I thank my friends who have been my support in good and bad. These are: Ana, Jasna, Anđa, Ankica, Marion and Zvjezdana. I thank everyone who called, sent a message and asked for me. I thank the team of the "Mission together" show that found my roots, especially Sanja, Rahaela and Robert.

I thank on behalf of all the sick people to all the people of good will who helped in the work of the Foundation in any way, from those who donated 10 kuna to those who enrolled in the registry.

My special thanks to Mrs. Marija Rukavina and her family and Dr. Mirando Mrsić.

I thank media of all kinds that helped in educating citizens and promoting the work of the Foundation. Those are all TV stations, newspapers, radio and the Internet.

I thank all the previous governments and political parties that helped the work of the Foundation with money or in any other way.

I thank the President of the Republic of Croatia Dr. Ivo Josipović.

I'll be very happy if with the sales of this book, the money donated to the Foundation provides for one typization and that typization helps someone, or if someone sick reading this wins the battle for his life. Believe me, no one knows how strong they are until they start fighting. If did it, so can you, because I was no better or smarter than you, maybe just a little more optimistic.

THANK YOU ALL!

Ankica Begić

Author's biography

Ankica Begić was born in 1964 in the village of Tisova, Prijedor county, Republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina. She finished administrative school in Prijedor and has been living in Zagreb since 1985.

She is married and has two twin sons. She worked at the Justice department. Today, due to illness, she is retired on a disability pension.

She led the stem cells treatment diary in case that, if she lives, she could help the Ana Rukavina Foundation, the Croatian registry of bone marrow and stem cells donors and to all those being treated for hematopoietic malignancies.

Biblioteka Profil klinika

Published so far:

Roberta Berci i Dragica Barbarić: Životolovka - Od depresije do punine života

Ankica Begić: Indijanac Komanč, moj brat po krvi - Dnevnik liječenja matičnim stanicama, ispovijest iz sterilnih jedinica

To be written:

Fighting anorexia

Fighting asthma