

Can my sister and I both beat cancer?

Glamour associate editor Erin Zammett's leukemia has been in remission for two years. Her sister Melissa hasn't been so lucky.

On November 15, 2001, Erin Zammett, now 27, was diagnosed with chronic myelogenous leukemia (CML), a cancer that until recently proved fatal for many patients. For more than two years she has shared with *Glamour* readers her experiences of living with cancer—including, in April 2003, the shocking news of her sister Melissa's diagnosis of Hodgkin's lymphoma, generally a more curable form of cancer than Erin's. Melissa achieved remission in October 2003 after chemotherapy and radiation treatments. But less than a year later, the Zammett family must endure the unendurable once again: a relapse for Melissa.

SEPTEMBER 16, 2004

Worst fears come true

Melissa's cancer is back. She had routine tests done last week and yesterday she and our younger sister, Meghan, went to get the results. Melissa wasn't anxious since she'd had a relapse scare in May and it turned out to be just scar tissue. At this visit she was actually hoping to find out when she could have another baby. She loves her son, Andrew, more than anything, but she really wants him to have brothers and sisters. Now that hardly seems possible.

"Melissa relapsed, the cancer is growing fast and she has to have a transplant," Meghan said breathlessly when she called me on the way home from the appointment. Melissa's doctor told her to prepare for lots of chemo and a stem cell transplant—doctors will extract her stem cells (we all have billions of these "beginner" cells in our bone marrow), give her chemo to essentially kill her malfunctioning immune system, then give her back her stem cells so they can create a healthy immune system. This is the same procedure as a bone marrow transplant, but now doctors can extract the stem cells from your blood instead of your bones.

I started bawling. I'm doing great now, but if I relapse I'll need a transplant; it's the one thing that's been haunting me since I was diagnosed. Now, instead of me, my sister is going to have one. It seems so unfair, like she's taking the heat for something I did. Growing up, Melissa was the one who did the bad things (the worst: sneaking my dad's car out before she even had her permit!) and I was the one who covered for her. As her younger sister, I liked being able to help her out, to protect her. I wish I could do the same now.

SEPTEMBER 30, 2004

Focusing on the future

Not surprisingly, the only information Melissa retained from her relapse appointment was the fact that after the transplant, her fertility would be zapped. Naturally, she couldn't accept that and immediately made an appointment with a specialist to discuss her options. We were all a little dubious—shouldn't she just focus on getting well?—but Melissa was determined to create some embryos before she got treated. And as of today, only two weeks after she was re-diagnosed, she and her husband Ysrael have seven healthy embryos on ice. Now she feels she can handle anything.

OCTOBER 16, 2004

Good news we all need

A few months ago, Nick and I set a wedding date—July 2005—and now I have a wedding dress! Well, a drawing of a wedding dress, anyway. My mom, Meghan and I are in Portland, Oregon, right now. The main purpose of the trip was to get a checkup with Dr. Michael Mauro, my oncologist here who treats me in conjunction with a New York doctor, but we also came to see his wife, Anne, who happens to be a super-talented bridal gown designer (nice coincidence!). We just left her studio, where we tried on dresses and discussed fabrics and finally decided on a low-cut halter with a band

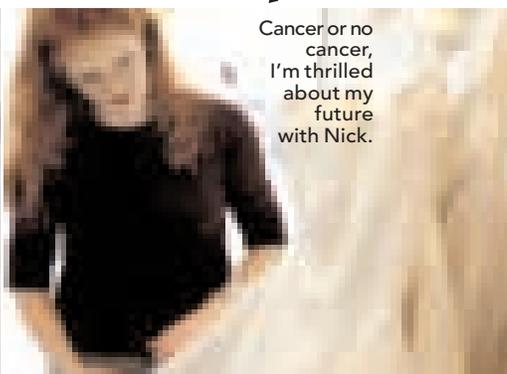
“Growing up, I liked being able to cover for Melissa, to protect



Melissa has lost her hair again, but not her smile.



My wedding's been a welcome distraction for all of us. Here, I'm sketching my dream gown.



Cancer or no cancer, I'm thrilled about my future with Nick.

BOTTOM ROW FROM LEFT: COURTESY OF ERIN ZAMMETT; BASIL CHILDERS (4); OPPOSITE, TOP: COURTESY OF ERIN ZAMMETT



Melissa, left, and me celebrating our remission in Miami just a year ago. Already, her cancer is back.

of antique beads under the bust. I'll have to come to Portland for fittings, but coming for a fitting is better than coming for a biopsy. Unless I don't lose the 10 pounds I plan to lose before the wedding. In that case I'd prefer the biopsy.

Yesterday we met with Dr. Mauro, who gave us a "state of Erin's leukemia address." He said my CML was at a level at which I had the lowest chance of relapse. And it looks like I'll be able to stay on Gleevec, the drug that's been controlling my disease, for a long time. Maybe even a "long, long time," he said. And if I can't, there are drugs being developed for patients who build up a resistance to Gleevec. My prognosis is stellar. It's a good thing, because I couldn't bear to give my parents any cancer news that isn't really good. They're all but crumbling at this point, and I don't want them to worry about me one bit.

NOVEMBER 7, 2004

Treatment gets tough

Melissa's first round of chemo has been awful for her. In addition to the drugs, she had surgery yesterday to put a port, a large IV tube, in a vein in her chest. This upset Melissa—not because she was afraid of the surgery, but because she's afraid the port will show when she wears her bridesmaid's dress for her friend Amanda's wedding next weekend. But

she needs it. She'll be able to get her future chemo treatment through there and have her stem cells harvested there. Although it seems—and looks—like something out of *Frankenstein*, it's going to make her life with cancer a lot easier.

"I'm starting to feel sorry for myself," she said to me today when I went up to Memorial Sloan-Kettering to visit her. Her port left her in pain, the medication she was taking to counter the pain made her nauseous, the anti-nausea pills made her drowsy and the chemo did all three. I didn't know what to say because I felt sorry for her too. I tried to distract her by talking about my wedding dress sketch, which arrived this morning (gorgeous). She tried to sound interested, but then she just rolled over and I left. I cried the whole way back to the office. I couldn't help it. I missed my sister.

NOVEMBER 14, 2004

Celebrating cancer-style

Melissa is a trouper. She spent the whole week after her chemo throwing up, but she—and my whole family—made it to Amanda's wedding last night. Melissa looked beautiful (and 11 and a half pounds thinner, as she pointed out), and the shawl of her dress covered the port perfectly. She even danced the salsa with Ysrael. It was only for a minute (and she later told me it was just so I'd have something positive

to write about her), but it was great to see her smiling again. And as I watched her twirl around the dance floor, I felt hopeful for the first time in a long time. I know that the next few months will be the toughest of Melissa's life, but I also know she will be OK. She has to be. ©

her. I wish I could do the same now.



These days, my biopsies are a piece of cake.



Dinner with family friends in Portland. Sometimes good food and wine are the best medicine.

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