

# Living with cancer... four years later



Sharing some rare downtime with my husband, Nick

*Glamour* editor and leukemia patient Erin Zammett Ruddy reflects on her daily struggles and fears for the future.

**I**n November 2001, Erin Zammett Ruddy, now 28, was diagnosed with chronic myelogenous leukemia (CML), a cancer that until recently proved fatal for most patients. For the past four years she's chronicled her experiences in these pages—including, in April 2003, the shocking news of her older sister Melissa's diagnosis of Hodgkin's lymphoma. Recently married, and in remission, Erin's been trying to settle into newlywed life. How's she doing? Here, her inspiring update.

**NOVEMBER 16, 2005**

## Partying for a good cause

Yesterday was my "cancerversary," four years to the day since I was diagnosed. I can't believe it's been that long; when you first find out you have cancer, it seems like time stops and you can't quite comprehend how life will go on. I could have sat around all day thinking about everything I've been through, about how even though I'm in remission I'm not cured and may never be, but I didn't: I was too busy getting fake eyelashes put on for the Angel Ball, a star-studded gala benefiting the G&P

Foundation for Cancer Research. I cochaired the event and also gave a speech about coping with my leukemia.

The night was extra special, both because my entire family came and because Cindi Leive, our editor-in-chief, was honored for all the coverage *Glamour* gives women's health issues. Having my boss in the audience made me even more nervous about speaking (and about drinking too much wine!), but the event was a huge success all around—we raised \$3.3 million. At the end of the evening, the cochairs jumped onstage with Stevie Wonder and Patti LaBelle, who were jamming to "Dancing in the Street." If anyone had told me the day I was diagnosed that someday I'd be bumping hips with Star Jones Reynolds and helping to raise millions to fight cancer, I'd have thought they were nuts. Yet almost as soon as I heard I was sick, I started volunteering. This disease has a way of making you feel helpless, and doing something for others makes me *not* a victim. I've gone to so many benefits in the past few years that a coworker dubbed me the Paris Hilton of the cancer world.

I'm sure if I saw a therapist she'd tell me that I've overextended myself to avoid dealing with cancer or



With my sisters, Melissa and Meghan, at the Angel Ball

confronting big questions about the future—like, should Nick and I try to have a baby if I might not be around to care for him or her? She wouldn't be completely wrong about the denial thing. We have a huge, terrifying decision to make that already keeps us up at night. In order to get pregnant I'd have to go off Gleevec, the drug that put me into remission. But if I stop taking it, there's a good chance I'll relapse. So yes, maybe I do fill up my calendar to keep myself from thinking non-stop about stuff like that. So I don't want to dwell on my uncertain future. Who would?



DECEMBER 7, 2005

### Am I spreading myself too thin?

I'm on the train coming back from D.C., where I spoke to the planning committee for the Leukemia & Lymphoma Society's big Leukemia Ball. Because I tell my story so often, I've become immune to it; I hear the words come out of my mouth—"I have cancer...my sister has cancer..."—but they don't hit me. Today they did. Many in the room were cancer survivors or had family members or friends with the disease; I saw people tear up as I talked and *I* choked up.

Part of the reason I felt so emotional is because I had a week from hell. Once again I've been on a benefit bender—I told my story to a high-school class in Oregon, did events from Boston to London and went to endless meetings. Plus, we were on deadline at work; I had to shop for a bachelorette party I was hosting; and Nick and I were told we have to move out of our apartment next month. I felt so overwhelmed I considered canceling my speech. Thank God I didn't. I *needed* today. Afterward a man told me about losing his wife to leukemia and I realized how lucky I am to be here—and that stressing about when I'm going to find time to buy a penis necklace for my friend is not worth it.

I can't wait to get home to Nick; I haven't seen him much lately since I've basically become a professional cancer patient, something he doesn't always appreciate. "Can't you ever say no?" he's grumbled. As much as he respects what I do, he's not thrilled to have an absentee wife. But the truth

FROM TOP: CINDY ZANNETT; WILL RIGOZZINO/PATRICK MCKULLAN

is, staying busy isn't just my escape, it's my way of proving to the world—and to myself—that cancer can't stop me. I may have a terrible disease, but watch what I can do! I've always loved landing on my feet after getting knocked down, surprising people with my ability to make the most of things, and my attitude toward cancer is no different.

**JANUARY 27, 2006**

### **A big scare**

Melissa called me today in a panic. Her checkup is next week and she's convinced her cancer is back. She has this weird ache in her neck she'd attributed to a pulled muscle from salsa dancing at a wedding, but now she's sure it's her lymphoma returning. I can't blame her for being paranoid—a lump in her neck is how she was originally diagnosed—but she's freaking me out.

She also had a bad cough over New Year's that I can't stop thinking about. It's easy to put up a tough front when you're the one with the disease, but when it comes to your big sister, there's just no escaping reality.

**FEBRUARY 23, 2006**

### **Getting back to "normal"**

It's been an incredible few weeks. First, we found out that Melissa is cancer free—and she may be for good. Then we were on *Dateline*. They'd interviewed my entire family and

even filmed my wedding. We watched together and everyone was proud. Of course, being the deep person that I am, my big takeaway was that my hair looks good when I curl it (again, a therapist would have a field day with me).

Afterward I got a ton of calls and e-mails. Fellow patients thanked me for showing them they weren't alone. I even got a pen pal, Emily, who's nine and also has leukemia. We've been trading stories about our diseases and hobbies—she loves Polly Pocket; I told her I was more of a Barbie girl at her age. Her mom said corresponding with me has been great for Emily. All of this has been an important reminder: I have the opportunity to make a difference in people's lives, and there's no better feeling in the world.

But I'm not going to get carried away this time. Since *Dateline* I've been asked to be involved in a bunch of events, and I've actually said no to many. It hasn't been easy, but I owe it to Nick and to myself to be a little more of Erin the wife and Erin the editor and a little less of Erin the cancer patient. Though I sometimes think it would be nice to take a *complete* break from doing all the cancer stuff, I know that's never going to happen. This is my life. In a way, it's my medicine, maybe even my cure. Because as long as I'm out there fighting, I know I'll survive. ©

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*For past installments of Erin's diary, visit [glamour.com](http://glamour.com).*