

“My leukemia is now a full-time job”

Last November, *Glamour* assistant editor Erin Zammett, 24, was diagnosed with chronic myelogenous leukemia (CML), a cancer that until recently proved fatal for most patients. Since then, she has been sharing with readers the daily challenges of coping with this disease. At first, Erin tackled sickness the same way she'd tackled every obstacle in her life: Work harder, do more, be the best. This month, she finally begins to accept that cancer may slow her down—but she still refuses to let it stop her.



My third bone marrow biopsy— you never get used to the pain.

I've always been a doer. Just seeing my little sister, Meghan, or my boyfriend, Nick (both world-class relaxers), sitting on the couch in the middle of the day used to stress me out. I'd say, “How can you just sit there and do *nothing*?” But I figured cancer would force me to relax, watch some *Real World* marathons, miss a few days of work. Instead, I'm busier than ever. With work, Nick, family obliga-

tions, leukemia fund-raising and doctor visits, I barely have time to sleep. I know I should go easy on myself, but I've always wanted to do things bigger and better than expected; I guess cancer is no different. The only problem with being an overambitious perfectionist these days is that I'm on chemotherapy two weeks a month (I take Gleevec, a pill, every day, then I add chemo injections in two-week cycles). I have more to do and less energy to do it with.

the pain.

I said the “F” word three times. I felt like a foulmouthed New Yorker in front of all the nice Oregon folks. The bluegrass nurse stopped singing when I said *fuck*.

MAY 15, 2002

Am I falling down on the job?

I got a promotion in January, and I want to prove that I deserved it, that I can handle all the new responsibilities. I don't want to fall behind or have people help me out just because I have cancer. I have the same work ethic and standards that I did before—maybe higher, because I don't want people to doubt me. Still, sometimes I can't help being exhausted. One of my coworkers said that if he were me, he'd come in at noon every day with a limp. I hold the cancer card, I admit, but I have yet to play it—except once to get out of jury duty. Who wouldn't?

MAY 25, 2002

Fighting for life and love

Nick and I are in Flint, Michigan, for the weekend, visiting his family. Nick is so much a part of my family that he gets my mom Mother's Day presents and knows

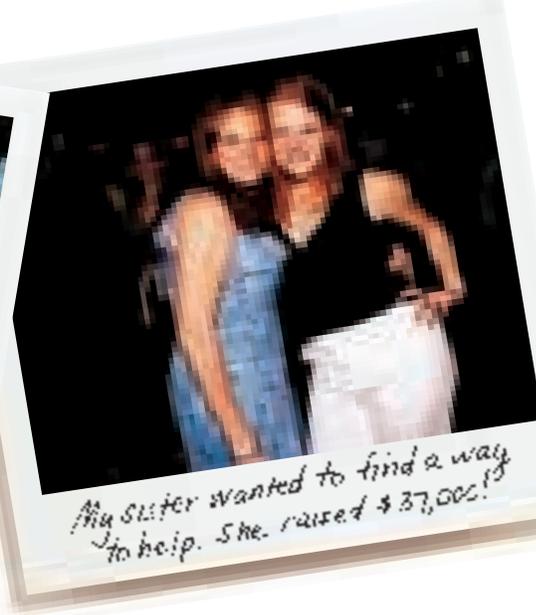


Our fund-raiser in Huntington— Nick never left my side.

my cousins' girlfriends, but I'd met his father only once before this trip. It's been great hanging out with his family, even more so with him. Lately, it seems all we do is argue over stupid things. Life is stressful for him right now—he works 40 hours a week, goes to school full-time, has a new apartment to furnish and no money to do it with, has an obsession with golf and now a girlfriend with cancer. I know I need to be there for him and talk him out of his moods, but sometimes I feel like saying, "Hey, asshole, I have cancer and you don't hear *me* complaining!" I feel bad, though, because I've spread myself so thin these days that I don't have much left to give. He tells me he can't sleep at night when we're fighting, that he loves me more than anything in the world, that he'd rather do nothing with me than something with anyone else. And I feel the same. I guess we just need to show each other a little more.



This nine-year-old has leukemia too. She's an inspiration.



My sister wanted to find a way to help. She raised \$37,000!

JUNE 11, 2002

Partying for research

For the past six weeks, I've been involved in a fund-raising competition for the Leukemia & Lymphoma Society—my older sister, Melissa, was the candidate on my behalf. Every weekend, I've been going back home to Long Island to help Melissa and my mom send donation letters, plan parties and secure auction prizes. Most people run 10k's to raise money for charity,

but not the Zammetts—we party. And it works. Last week, we had a fund-raiser in Huntington, my hometown, that netted \$13,500 (*Glamour* had one in the city a couple of weeks earlier that raised \$8,000 in just two hours). Altogether, we raised around \$37,000 for the society, killing the competition and setting a new record for the New York City chapter. And last night, Melissa was named the Leukemia & Lymphoma Society's Woman of the Year.

As much fun as it was, the fund-raising drive was like a second job—and with my actual job at *Glamour* and trying to manage my cancer treatments, I'm already working overtime. I hope I'll have some time to wind down now, time to reflect on all the craziness in my life, time to just be.

JUNE 22, 2002

Struggling to stay strong

To look at me from the outside, nothing has changed. I still hit the gym every morning, shower and go to work. But on the inside, I'm dragging. Some days, walking on the treadmill feels like walking through quicksand. I can't keep up with myself anymore.

Last night was my grandma's eightieth birthday party. There's always someone in my family being baptized or turning 80 or graduating from the sixth grade. Even during a quiet dinner at my parents' house, some friend or neighbor will stop by to return a ladder they borrowed, my dad will offer them a glass of wine, and *boom*—it's a party. Part of my job as a daughter with cancer is to take part in the craziness, to show them I'm OK, to calm their fears by being the same hyperactive Erin. But I know I'll never truly be my old self again.

JUNE 25, 2002

What's next?

My bone marrow results are in—the percentage of leukemia in my cells went from 98 percent at diagnosis to 4 percent now! I'm thrilled, but it's still not zero. And if that 4 percent goes away, then what? The next step is “as clear as mud,” my Oregon doctor says. I'd like to live to 100, which would mean 76 years on Gleevec—he isn't sure that's a good idea since the drug is so new and there are so many unknowns. But why do a bone marrow transplant—the risky alternative—if the drug is working?

There was a part of me that thought, OK, if my results aren't great, at least it'll give me an excuse to scale back. Instead, I've had an amazing response to the drugs, all while running myself ragged. People say it's good for me to stay busy, to keep my mind off “everything.” But I sure would love to have a few days with nothing on my to-do list. I know that the day may



Speaking to junior high students about my leukemia.

come when I have to be in a hospital for weeks at a time—when cancer is not just a part of my life, but my whole life. Knowing that keeps me going now, while the going's good. I love everything I'm doing, and I feel like if I can't do it all, then I'm letting this disease win. And I just can't do that. ©

The next installment of Erin Zammett's diary will appear in November.