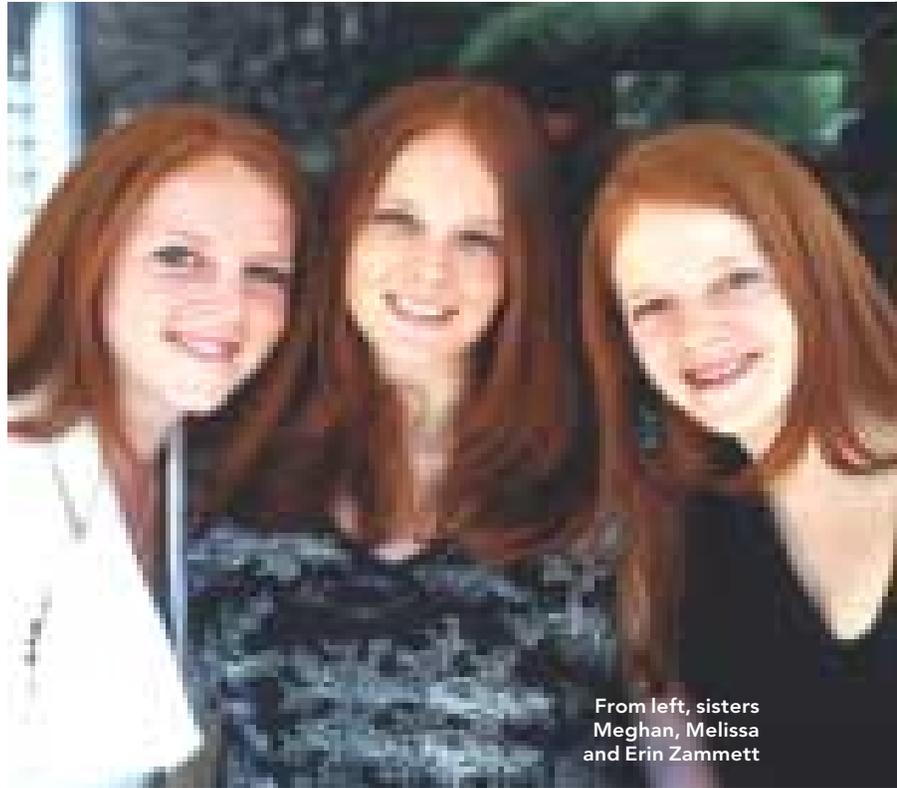


Now two of these three sisters have cancer

Glamour staffer Erin Zammett thought nothing could be tougher than leukemia at 23. Now her sister has been diagnosed with lymphoma. How much can one family take?



From left, sisters Meghan, Melissa and Erin Zammett

APRIL 15, 2003

Good news and very bad news

For *Glamour's* May issue, I wrote what was supposed to be my last regular column about my cancer—chronic myelogenous leukemia (CML). After 18 months on a drug called Gleevec, my disease was under control, and I was feeling good. Little did I know how bad things could get.

Today started out great. My oncologist, Dr. Mauro, called with exciting news: My leukemia levels are so low that tests can no

longer quantify them. It doesn't mean I can stop taking Gleevec or call myself cured, but it's a good sign. Then I got another call. It was my older sister, Melissa, who's 27 and seven months pregnant. I couldn't believe she was calling in the middle of *American Idol*, so I immediately asked if she was OK.

"Not really," she said. "Erin, I have Hodgkin's lymphoma."

I froze. "Are you kidding?"

"I'm dead serious," she said. "My doctor just called. Can you believe it?" I couldn't.

Melissa told me so matter-of-factly that I really did think she was joking. Didn't the fact that I got cancer mean the rest of my family was exempt? I guess not. In *Glamour's* March issue, I wrote: "Melissa loves to be the center of family attention. When I got cancer, I thought I'd have an edge. How can you top that?" Well, she has. She has cancer *and* she's pregnant. I hate that I ever wrote that. Melissa's doctors don't know what stage her lymphoma is in, but thankfully, they do know that it's 80 percent curable—and that's what you want to hear.

Talking to my parents later that night was hard. My mom has always said that having a sick child was her worst nightmare. Now she has two. I don't think she's had a good night's sleep since I was diagnosed, so I can't imagine how hard this is going to be on her. My dad just kept saying, "What the hell did we do wrong?"

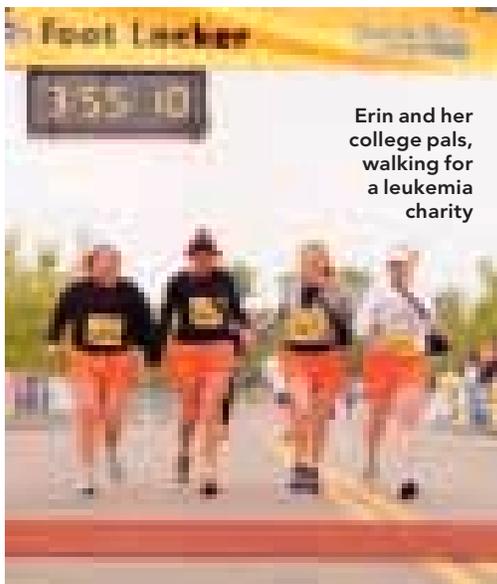
Of course, everyone wants to know how Melissa and I both got cancer, especially since we both have blood-related types. Our doctors say there's no evidence that either disease is connected to environmental or genetic factors, though. I guess it's just really bad luck. For now, all we want is for Melissa and her baby to be OK.

APRIL 18, 2003

Now I'm not the only patient

Being on the other side of the diagnosis, I'm finally realizing how helpless my family must have felt when we found out about my cancer a year and a half ago. But at least now we know who to call and where to go. Melissa had an appointment today at Memorial Sloan-Kettering Cancer Center in New York City, the same place where I see one of my doctors. (Dr. Mauro, my main doctor, is in Oregon.) I took the day off and went up to the hospital to be with her and her husband, Ysrael. I was glad to show them the ropes—where to park, which elevators to take, where to buy the best coffee—but while I was doing it I kept thinking, What the hell is wrong with this picture? I should be showing my sister around my neighborhood, not my cancer ward.

I had to leave the hospital early to pick up our younger sister, Meghan, who was flying in from college for Easter weekend. It was my job to tell her about Melissa. I



Erin and her college pals, walking for a leukemia charity



Melissa and Erin with Andrew



Thanks to Andrew, Melissa's cancer is bearable.



Melissa getting chemotherapy just days before her son's birth

per bag—if she's going to be a bald mother, she's at least going to be a stylish bald mother. At lunch we drank virgin passion-fruit daiquiris. It was like *Cancer and the City*.

MAY 21, 2003

I'm an aunt!

Melissa had her baby! Last night at 11:09, Andrew Rafael Gonzalez was born: six pounds, eight ounces—and so freakin' cute! Melissa was induced as planned, but after two days of labor, the doctors did a cesarean section. My mom was at the hospital with Melissa and Ysrael, and around 10 P.M., she called to tell us all to come over: We got there just in time to see Melissa coming out of surgery, holding Andrew. She was quickly wheeled away; the rest of us went to the nursery and pressed our noses to the glass to watch Andrew get weighed and washed and seemingly tortured. I had to hold myself back from banging on the glass and telling the nurse to be nicer to my nephew. I could have stayed there all night.

wanted to run when I saw her coming toward me with a huge smile on her face. Now that my big sister has cancer, I can't imagine what it would be like to have *two* big sisters with cancer. I waited till we got to the parking lot and said, "So, you ready for this one?" And then in the calmest this-is-not-a-big-deal voice I could muster, I told her: "Melissa was diagnosed with lymphoma." I immediately tried to downplay the situation: "She's fine, the baby's fine, and it's totally curable with chemotherapy." Meghan cried a lot, but in typical Zammett fashion, we had no time to get emotional; we had to get the cake and balloons (and our nails done) for Melissa's baby shower tomorrow. Nothing like being surrounded by 65 oohing and aahing women three days after being diagnosed with cancer!

APRIL 19, 2003

What about Melissa's baby?

Melissa has stage II Hodgkin's lymphoma; it isn't the worst, but it isn't the best. In addition to a lump on her neck, she has a large mass in her chest. Her doctors figure she's had the disease for about a year, which means she had it before she got pregnant. This type of lymphoma is commonly seen in women in their twenties, so it's not unheard of for pregnant women to have it. The baby should be fine, but Melissa has to start treatment right away to shrink the

mass in her chest. If she doesn't, breathing will become difficult and giving birth would be a nightmare. The plan is to start her on a chemotherapy that will not harm the baby, then induce labor at 36 weeks. Once the baby is out, she'll have six months of heavier chemo, then one month of radiation. She'll lose her hair, she'll be tired and nauseous, and she won't be able to breast-feed, but she should be cured. She can even have more children once she's been in remission for two years. I'm relieved for her, but I'm also jealous. I might never have children. And the only known cure for me is a bone marrow transplant, a procedure that could kill me.

MAY 10, 2003

Retail therapy

The one piece of cancer wisdom that I've shared with Melissa is the healing power of buying yourself presents. Sure, shopping won't cure you, but it does make you feel and look good, and that can be just as important as the right medicine. (You don't want people to say, "You can really tell she has cancer.") Today we went to the mall. Melissa bought Chanel sunglasses (which she loves so much she plans to wear them while giving birth) and a Coach dia-

MAY 27, 2003

New fears, new hopes

Sometimes I wonder what else is going to happen to our family now. When I was diagnosed with cancer at 23, I was perfectly healthy and had never had so much as a nosebleed, so we realized that anything was possible. Now that Melissa and I *both* have cancer, it's like the sky is the limit for the next bad thing to happen, and it scares me.

Every time the phone rings, my heart jumps; I know my mom's does too.

Still, since Andrew came home we've all had perma-grins—even my dad is talking baby talk (mostly discussing Andrew's future golf swing). And cancer or no cancer, this is the happiest time of Melissa's life. Someday Andrew will know what a blessing he is to our family,

how his birth gave us something to smile about when things were pretty depressing. Someday Melissa will be cured of her cancer, and someday I will be cured of mine. I wish I knew what the future held, but for now, someday is good enough for me. □

Sometimes I wonder what else is going to happen to our family now.

To read past installments of Erin's diary, and for future updates, go to glamour.com.

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