

# CONTINUED...

## Grateful

continued from page 1

darkest moments, Jindrak recalled, "One of the nurses read my little misalette to me. Without me even asking. She's not even Catholic."

In May blood samples showed that 50 percent of her blood cells were her own and 50 percent her sister's. "It could have gone either way," she recalled. "I said it's all in God's hands."

On July 18, her 45th birthday, Jindrak went to the front of her church, St. Francis of Assisi in Auburn, and prayed. "You can heal me if you want to," she told God.

That day she learned her bone marrow was 100 percent her sister's. Her sister's cells had taken over production of Jindrak's blood.

"It was almost like a sign from God, a birthday present," Jindrak said.

"She really is kind of a miracle," said Lucy Wedow, nurse practitioner at Strong. "She has beaten a lot of the odds."

With the second transplant came high doses of three chemotherapy agents, and Jindrak remained hospitalized for nearly a month. She also was given growth-factor shots to stimulate her sister's bone marrow cells into crowding out Jindrak's unhealthy marrow, Wedow said.

"We consider her in clinical remission. I think because all her bone marrow stem cells are her sister's now it would be unlikely she would relapse," she said. "We think her prognosis is very good."

Jindrak is on minimal immunosuppression drugs and should eventually be weaned off them, Wedow added.

In the meantime, however, expenses mount for Jindrak and her husband, Mark.

The two transplants cost more than \$150,000. Drugs quickly surpassed the year's \$10,000 limit for prescription drugs under Jindrak's coverage. Antirejection drugs have cost her \$3,000 a month, and



other drugs have been prescribed to fight infections; other specialists have been seen.

Last month her mother, Jessie Speen, her other sister, Tina Hoskins, and other relatives and friends put together a benefit event at the Knights of Columbus hall in Auburn. Even people who didn't know Jindrak showed up for the \$10 admission price. With raffles, donations from individuals and such groups as the Sacred Heart Society, proceeds were about \$9,000, according to Hoskins.

It isn't clear yet exactly what debts will remain once medical insurance covers its share, but Jindrak at one time owed about \$40,000.

She is determined not to worry. "I just enjoy life now," she said. "I go out with my husband. I go out to the mall, walk around, shop. I visit church, friends, family. Nobody knows I was sick. I don't let people know. I'm alive."

"Before I go to bed, I say thank you God

for today. And if you want, give me another day, thank you."

Her husband works as a toll collector for the New York State Thruway (he's the "tall guy" at the Weedsport exit). Their son Mark is a wrestler on World Championship Wrestling on the TNT network; their son Michael is an engineer in Syracuse; and daughter, Stephanie, a secretary in Auburn.

The family is still accepting donations for the Roberta Jindrak Benefit Fund, c/o Tina Hoskins, 1306 Clark St. Rd., Auburn, NY 13021.

"She's an exceptional lady," remarked Father Robert Beligotti, former pastor of St. Francis of Assisi Church in Auburn, which Jindrak's family has long attended. "Her courage amazed me and her faith in God when I visited her in the hospital ..."

Jindrak is "the kind of person who didn't think of herself even in difficult situations," he said. A religious-education in-

structor for a short while, she primarily has enjoyed visiting and helping others, he said.

"I wanted her to be a lector or eucharistic minister," he said. "But no, those were too prominent roles. She didn't want to serve in the public eye, but behind the scenes. And unbeknown to anyone but the Lord."

Hoskins said that before she became ill, her sister was just starting to update her house with a new refrigerator and remodeling, since her children had left home. "All that came to a standstill," she said.

"I know medicine and doctors have done a lot for her, but deep down I still think it's a miracle. She's a very religious person and never gave up ... I didn't handle it as well as she did."

Hoskins and her daughter, Amy, 11, often accompanied Jindrak to the hospital, where, Hoskins said, "It was like she was giving religion lessons when we got there."

When Jindrak was having long-term treatments at Strong and was one of the few adults allowed to stay at the Ronald McDonald House in Rochester, she "was always helping someone there," Hoskins said. "I swear it was meant to be ... She was making all those other people happy, though she was in the same situation they were."

Father Beligotti also noted that Coleman was especially courageous as well. The two five-hour pheresis sessions to remove stem cells from her blood were painful and difficult for her as she is left with handicaps from the accident 20 years ago.

However, Coleman said, "I love her; I'd do anything for her." She recalled that her late father, Robert Speen, sat by her bedside 20 years ago encouraging her. "One time when I came out of coma I would say to my Dad, 'Am I going to die?' she said. 'He'd say, 'No, you're going to get better. God's got something in store for you.' If he was alive now, he'd be very happy."

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