

My Sister Saved My Life

When Paul Hallowes was diagnosed with leukaemia, the outlook was bleak, until his sister stepped in to help...

Erica, my sister, who is six years older than me, has always been very protective. As kids, whenever we had our photo taken, she'd always place an arm on my shoulder. And she could be quite bossy, too!

Although we became good friends as adults, Erica later moved to America with her husband, Michael.

We saw each other about once a year and sent letters with photos of our children and, later, our grandchildren.

In the spring of 2008, my daughter, Louisa, announced that she was expecting her third

child. She had two boys and was hoping for a girl.

As I'd been ill for months, my GP finally referred me to the Royal Marsden Hospital in London where tests revealed I had leukaemia. A high dose of chemotherapy would help, but it would also kill off my body's ability to produce blood cells, leaving me with a maximum of two years to live.

My only hope was a stem cell transplant. The consultant explained that my best chance of a match would be from one of my siblings.

Erica was in the US and, at 74, she was deemed too old to

donate stem cells. My younger brother and sister were tested, but neither was a match.

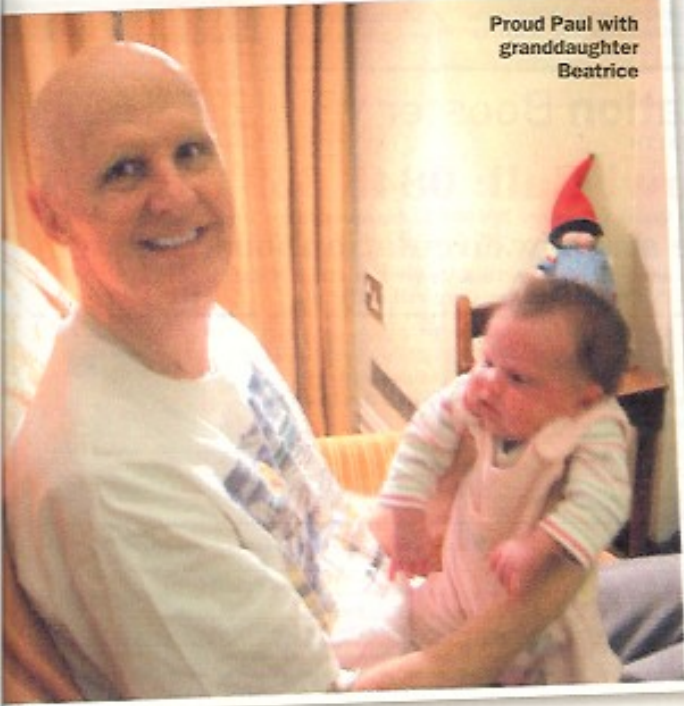
I then went on to a national database of 500,000 donors. But, as my blood group was very rare, the chances of a match were slim.

Around this time, Louisa had her 20-week scan. She didn't want to know the sex of her baby, but she got the sonographer to write it down and put it in an envelope for me in case the worst happened.

Just as the database was looking hopeless, Erica came home from America. When my wife, Mary, had phoned with the news that I was ill, Erica had



Paul with his lovely grandchildren



Proud Paul with granddaughter Beatrice

“Tests revealed that I could have just two years to live”

said: “I don't care who says I'm too old, I'll be up next week to see if I'm a match.”

It sounded just like my bossy big sister of old which was a great comfort!

My consultant was only too pleased for Erica to be tested and it turned out she was a positive match. It was a relief, but then I knew I had to undergo the chemotherapy.

After two months, my white blood cell level reached nil, meaning that I was now ready for the transplant. There was

still a ten per cent chance that I wouldn't make it, but I preferred to think about my 90 per cent chance of survival.

By now, I was in isolation in hospital and only Mary was allowed in to see me. My only contact with the outside world was a glass wall looking out onto the ward.

On “transplant day” I was already feeling positive when a cheery face appeared at the glass. It was Erica.

She went into the room next to mine where she was hooked