

5/30 ~ Dear Family & Friends [of Marc & Karen Heminger]

It is almost June! We started Marc's stem cell transplant journey in Seattle on April 9th. With the exception of a couple days off we have had appointments every single day and through the weekends for 52 straight days! We thought about adding up all the actual scheduled appointments but it seemed too daunting a task which might put us over the edge to know anyway. Considering the Seattle Cancer Care Alliance (SCCA) team is scheduling around 150 transplant patients at any given time we wonder who is sitting behind their desk at work trying to fit the puzzle together?

It was ten days ago when we last updated you on Marc's progress. At that time things were going even better than we had expected. Marc continues to be a shining star and the kind of person all caregivers and medical staff would be lucky to have as a patient. Our transplant "Rose" team told us today that we had earned an A+. One change recently is that Marc started to lose his hair 2 weeks after the Melphalan chemotherapy was administered. Pastor Dennis of our *Saddlerock Evangelical Presbyterian Church* in Wenatchee says he imagines Marc's look as a bald Omar Sharif. That's a compliment to Marc because *Dr. Zhivago* is one of his favorite movies.

We had an exciting 3-day Memorial weekend at SCCA. Marc's neutrophil numbers finally reached his goal of 500! The neutrophils are the white cells that protect your body from foreign pathogens. I spelled neutrophils wrong in the last email. The neutrophils grew from 420 on 5/24, to 690 on 5/25 and skyrocketed to 1,150 on Sunday, 5/26. Marc is now out of the real danger zone for acquiring infection. The numbers also inform us that his transplanted stem cells have begun to engraft (the process by which the normal growth and production of blood cells in the bone marrow resumes). The transplant team told us the stem cells should be fully engrafted by Day 18-19 post transplant. Today his neutrophils climbed to 1,260! The normal number of neutrophils in a healthy person's body is around 3-4,000. Marc's white blood cell count has gone from 530 on 5/23 to 2,500 today. We have reached glorious Day 19 post-transplant!

We are now preparing for Marc's final week here at Fred Hutchinson's Seattle Cancer Care Alliance! Marc has been given a release date of **Friday, June 7th**, 60 days from when we arrived. Marc has been receiving 2.5 hours of IV hydration along with some medications every day for the last 10 days. As his appointments wind down he will no longer need daily infusions but must increase his fluid intake at home. We have been slowly decreasing his medications for nausea. The nutritionist asked for Marc's intake of protein to be about 130 grams per day which we're discovering is a lot. As Marc's immune system regains itself he is experiencing more energy and enjoying longer walks around our temporary Seattle neighborhood. What a difference from 2 weeks ago when Marc could barely stay awake or have the energy to shower.

While we are ready for this long journey to come to an end it is also an emotional time for us. We have grown to respect the incredible staff here at SCCA and the wonderful care Marc has been given. We are realizing what the stem cell transplant means to Marc's future life and continued good health. While Marc's Multiple Myeloma bone

marrow cancer is not curable, it is very treatable after having transplanted new healthy stem cells created from his own body. Marc will be taking medications to control his cancer for life. He will resume weekly blood draws and regular appointments with his oncologist in Wenatchee when we return home.

We may not be able to personally thank each individual for their prayers, cards, emails, texts, phone calls, and gifts over the past 9 months, but please know how much your prayers and support have meant to us. Being surrounded by positive, supportive Christian friends has made our cancer experience much more tolerable. The stem cell transplant process is truly a miracle!

Thank you for being on our team! Love, Karen & Marc

P.S. - Our #10 grandchild is due the day before Marc is released from care here. Our daughter Laura & Gregory Lammert are due with a baby boy on June 6th!

