



I picked up my messages and heard: “You’re a perfect match”

By Lynn Winton

Kimmy Strelley will never forget the day of 23 June 2021 when she received an urgent voice message that was going to change her life. The message was from Anthony Nolan, the charity that collates the register of prospective stem cell donors. “Hello, it’s Liam from Anthony Nolan. You’re a donor on our register and you’re a perfect match. Please call back as soon as you can.”

What was not disclosed to her by the charity until much later was that an 11-year-old boy, George Shaw, was in Sheffield Children’s Hospital dangerously ill with a rare leukaemia, and that she was the sole match worldwide for a life-saving bone marrow transplant. Not even his own twin brother was a match. Without Kimmy, he was going to die.

Kimmy, a highly articulate woman who owns the Kimberley’s Salon in Fortis Green, N2, and is mother to eight-year-old Jake, was brought up in Muswell Hill and attended Fortismere School. “My mother died of cancer when I was a teenager and being one of six children I had to leave school and start to earn a living,” she told me. She registered as a donor with Anthony Nolan 13 years ago and, as it only involved sending back a cheek swab, had quickly forgotten about it.



Going home: Kimmy gives George a hug as his family gather round

Recovery was easy

Once the call came and Kimmy said she was unreservedly ready to do anything to help, things moved quickly. But by now George was too ill to receive a transplant and needed more treatment first. It wasn’t until December 2023 that George was strong enough to go ahead and Kimmy was driven to the London Clinic in Marylebone where she donated

bone marrow under anaesthesia and came home the next day. “Recovery was easy,” she said, “as there were no stitches and I didn’t even need any painkillers. I just took it easy for a few days and Anthony Nolan called to check up on me every day.”

George went from strength to strength after his bone marrow transplant, and by now, George and Kimmy were anonymously writing letters to each other via the charity. At



Life-changing: Kimmy Strelley with George Shaw, who received the bone marrow she donated

last the day came when George was better and was going to be given an absolute discharge from hospital.

There is a tradition for an outgoing patient to ring a bell on the wall and all the ward staff line up to clap them out. What George didn’t know was that his family had invited Kimmy, along with little son Jake, to hide in a side room and emerge to give him a hug.

Younger donors

Since its inception in 1974, Anthony Nolan has made possible over 26,500 transplants, and there is a pressing need to recruit more people aged 16-30 to join the register. Research has shown younger donors offer better survival rates for patients. Kimmy is a fierce ambassador and hopes that Archer readers will register or encourage young people to come forward, as she once did. “To think I have saved a life is a sobering thought. What would have happened to George and his wonderful family if I hadn’t

come forward is something I can’t bear to think about.” Find out more at anthonymolan.org

Warm spaces

Warm space and coffee morning sessions will start running on Thursdays this month at the Tarling Road Community Hub, Fellows Close, N2 8LG, just a few minutes’ walk from the High Road. They are open to the whole community and are free.

There will be free hot drinks and a range of activities such as arts and crafts, talks and gardening. The sessions run from 9.30am to 12noon and are provided by the Grange Big Local team, who welcome any volunteer support.

They start on Thursday 12 and 19 December then resume after the holiday break on Thursday 9 January, running through to the end of March. To volunteer, email Lizzie@grangebiglocal.org or go along and have a chat.

Cake sale clears plates

My name is Ella and I am almost 10 years old. I go to Brownies in Muswell Hill and I have been gradually getting different badges.

We get badges for doing different activities. For example, to get your charity badge, you have to donate something to a charity.

I chose to raise money for Finchley Foodbank because I like how they help people in need of food. I decided to make butterfly cakes and chocolate-chip cookies with my parents. We baked a LOT and the raw cookie dough was so yummy, it was hard to resist eating it!

On the day, we set up outside in the front garden of my house in East Finchley, and my friends and brother helped me sell them. Almost immediately, we got our first customer and it was a neighbour from a few doors away. After about an hour, we had sold out of everything.

Altogether, we had around 20 customers and we raised £87. My favourite part of the day was how everyone gave lots of generous donations, and it was also fun meeting different neighbours and people living nearby.



Big bake: Ella Halliday, second left, with brother Louis, left, and friends Harper and Flynn

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