



Musselman's Lake resident Lise Lowe beat breast cancer but now must battle leukemia. Country music star Johnny Reid autographed a guitar for her, which is being raffled to aid a charity.

## Cancer, leukemia have Lise giving back

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**I**f Lise Low knew what she knows now, she may be living a very different life.

One that doesn't consist of her alarm clock sounding at 8 a.m. every day to ensure she takes her morning medication on time.

Or a life that doesn't entail taking 16 pills a day and inhalers and traveling to Markham Stouffville or Princess Margaret hospitals for check-ups every other week.

In 2007, the Musselman's Lake resident underwent a routine breast exam and heard a very different result than in previous years.

She had breast cancer.

The only option for Ms Low, she said, was radiation treatment, if she wanted a fighting chance. According to Ms Low, the 25 doses of radiation would reduce her risk of the breast cancer returning within five years from 25 per cent to five per cent because she was a long time smoker - 40-odd years.

She doesn't recall the side effects of radiation treatment ever being discussed.

Little did she know, while curing one deadly disease, she would be potentially setting up her body to

house another one.

A year after completing her radiation treatments, Ms Low found that she had virtually no energy. A routine blood work-up during her annual physical uncovered that her hemoglobin "had crashed," she said. Hemoglobin transports oxygen from the lungs to the rest of the body.

For almost a year, Ms Low received blood transfusions every four weeks at Markham Stouffville.

"I always felt great after the transfusions because I had blood, which meant I had energy," she said.

### RADIATION CAUSED LEUKEMIA?

But in early 2009, shortly after a transfusion, she wasn't feeling her normal energetic self.

Further testing by a blood specialist at Markham Stouffville revealed Ms Low now had acute myeloid leukemia.

Here in lies the rub.

"There's a chance the leukemia came from the radiation treatments," she said.

As part of the transfusion process, Ms Low was getting regular bone marrow checks. The one in Oct. 2008 was normal.

"By January (the leukemia) was starting to rear its ugly head and in February it was full-blown," she said.

Not only did Ms Low have to deal with learning she had leukemia, but she was also told she had only three to six months to live.

"It's the most deadliest of the leukemias," she said.

Acute myeloid leukemia starts in the bone marrow, which is the soft inner portion of the bone and where new blood cells are made, typically the white blood cells, which dictates a person's immune system.

Ms Low was given the option to undergo aggressive chemotherapy or do nothing.

She opted for the chemo.

"Either way, there was a high risk," she said. "I'm a fighter. I'm a thoroughly strong person and the three to six months was not an option."

Ms Low spent five weeks last spring at Princess Margaret undergoing chemotherapy.

She then returned home and waited for her last hope - a stem cell donor.

Two matches were found within a few months, neither of whom were family members.

"I feel very fortunate," she said.

On Dec. 3, Ms Low received a stem cell transplant.

"I will end up with the donor's immune system," she said.

A check of her bone marrow 60 days after the transplant revealed

normal blood cell levels.

While Ms Low was undergoing chemo treatments last spring, her husband, Tom Turner, came across a pink guitar and picked it up for his wife knowing it would somehow be utilized to raise money for charity.

The couple spent a lot of time poring over cancer-related charities trying to find the perfect one.

They were coming up empty.

While in the hospital, there isn't a lot to do for a patient other than read and watch TV, when not being poked and prodded.

### PROVIDE TVS, PHONES

But Ms Low could not afford the \$500 a month, she said it cost for a TV, especially since Mr. Turner was fired from his job at a construction equipment rental company.

"It's obscene. Who can afford that?" she said.

Ms Low's patient care liaison provided assistance with her medication costs through the Trillium Foundation and she came through again for Ms Low by connecting her to the CHIP Foundation, which assists long-term hospital patients with staying in touch with family and friends when their own funds have been depleted.

"CHIP's primary goal is to enable those least able to afford (communi-

cation) services a chance to stay connected to the outside world through phone, long distance cards and TV," according to the foundation.

Ms Low opted to forgo the phone and long distance calling cards because "I have a very large family and if I had a phone I'd get no rest," she said. She, did, however, accept the TV.

"It just makes it easier to be in the hospital," she said.

The couple also found a charity for the pink guitar.

But this isn't just any pink guitar. This one has been autographed by Canadian country musician Johnny Reid. Mr. Turner spent years working with Mr. Reid's father and asked if he would mind having his son autograph the guitar. Both Reid men obliged.

Ms Low is hoping to raise \$20,000 for CHIP through the sale of raffle tickets for the guitar. All of the money will go to CHIP.

Tickets are \$10 each and available at Stouffville Florist, Boston Pizza and the Earl of Whitchurch pub. The draw takes place in June.

For more information on the pink ribbon guitar draw, go to [www.pinkribbonguitar.com](http://www.pinkribbonguitar.com) and for information on the CHIP Foundation go to [www.chipcharity.com](http://www.chipcharity.com)

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