

In March 2013, I underwent a Bone Marrow Transplant with Aby's Blood Stem Cells. It saved my life. I am the only child of my parents, and Aby's gesture has given them and me a new lease of life

Mayur Shankar Bargaje

BLOOD BROTHERS OF DIFFERENT MOTHERS

Sowmya Rajaram met Mayur Shankar Bargaje and his hero Aby Sam John when they were in the city for an event. Their story

In 2010, I was diagnosed with Acute Lymphoblastic Leukemia. It was a shock. I underwent eight cycles of chemotherapy and went into remission in the first cycle itself. I resumed normal life and continued my job as a software developer. But in November 2013, I had relapsed. My only option was to have a bone marrow transplant.

FINDING A DONOR

Siblings are the first option, but because I had none, we decided to test my parents and go for a half-match with my dad as the last option. We also checked foreign registries and found a match in a German registry, but it cost Rs 40 lakh, and we couldn't afford it. In Jan 2014, we approached a non-profit organisation that works towards creating a database of potential donors that can be accessed by a patient in need of a stem cell transplant. They found me a match — It was Aby.

ABY HAS SAVED MY LIFE

Until I got the donation from Aby, I was very worried. When my cancer was detected the first time, I was very confident that I could, with a positive attitude and rigorous adherence to the doctor's instructions, beat it. But when the cancer relapsed, I was shattered. However, I got a new lease of life, when on March 28, 2013, I had my bone marrow transplant. I was quarantined for 24 days. It was

tough — physically, mentally, emotionally and financially.

IT FELT GREAT

I was curious about my donor and wanted to meet him. In January this year, Datri arranged a donor-recipient meeting in Pune. I was called up on stage, and then they called Aby to the stage. Prior to this, for a million times I had thought of what I would say to Aby when I met him. But when we actually met, I didn't know what to say. I was overwhelmed. Later, we met again in the evening and we spoke a lot. He told me that he was very scared of injections, and had to take one every day for five days to do the donation!

HE'S FAMILY

I've never had a sibling, but my parents and my dad too are very fond of Aby. In fact, they often say things like 'we won't do this for you...we'll do it for our other son'. We are constantly in touch, talk on the phone and chat on WhatsApp. He told me he is getting married this year and that my family and I have to come because I am his brother. He's a great guy. I want to stay in touch with him all my life. I cannot express how I feel about him.

BONDED BY BLOOD

We are total opposites...he talks a lot, I don't talk at all. But after the BMT I talk a little more. Do you know why? Because I have his blood in me.



Name: Aby Sam John
Age: 26; **Place:** Kochi;
Nominated by: Mayur Shankar Bargaje (29), Pune

THE HERO SPEAKS

I had been working in Chennai as a genetic research analyst for one and a half years. Datri was in the same building, and had a small awareness camp in 2012. I registered as a donor without giving it much thought, honestly. In February 2013, I got a call saying I was a match for somebody.

I was shocked. A rep met me and explained the process to me, and I was convinced it was safe. But my mother was worried, especially because we were still recovering from the recent death of my father. But she also told me that I was mature enough to make my own decision.

On March 27, I did the donation after being administered injections on four days to increase the blood stem cell count and mobilise them. I don't like injections, but knowing that I was saving someone's life helped me go through with it. On the day of the donation, I was hooked to a syringe for four hours. That's the only irritating thing, because you have nothing to do and get free process.

I wanted to meet the recipient of the donation, but since there was an 18-month confidentiality period, I had to wait. One fine day I was told the name of the recipient — Mayur; I saw his photograph too and I was told that two days later, I would meet him in Pune.

When I met Mayur, it was a very joyful moment. I kept asking him how he was feeling, but he is an introvert and didn't speak much. I also spoke to his parents — though I don't speak Hindi or Marathi, we didn't need words to communicate. Today we are in touch constantly and have even got each other gifts. I feel much happiness when I think about him or talk to him.

When you donate stem cells, after two weeks, the patient's blood group changes to the donor's. He was a B+, but is now an A+ like me. He is my blood brother.

(Aby used to help Datri in their awareness drives in Kochi. "The volunteering would give me a good feeling, giving me purpose in life. Until then I always wondered about the meaning of my life. But not anymore," he says. Aby quit his job and began working for Datri full-time in March 2014.)