An Acute Myeloid Leukemia Diary: Siri Lindley

A former world champion triathlete, Siri Lindley, 52, lives with her wife in Longmont, Colorado. She was treated for acute myeloid leukemia.

August 25, 2021 By Kate Ferguson

November 2019

After eight years of training hard to become the number one triathlete in the world, I went for a pre-op for hip replacement surgery. My blood work came back like something was up. Next, I went to UC Health at University of Colorado Anschutz Medical Campus for a bone marrow biopsy and all sorts of different blood tests and spinal taps. The testing took all day. When the results arrived on November 26, the diagnosis was acute myeloid leukemia.

I was devastated. My wife, Rebekah, stood next to me listening while the doctor was on speakerphone. Tears flooded her eyes. I felt such love for her, and how much she loved me. At that moment, I decided to survive and thrive.

Siri Lindley running in the 2001 Triathlon World Championship Courtesy of Siri Lindley

December 2019

One of the doctors at UC Health was running a new clinical trial for a type of targeted treatment and an antiviral medication. The goal was to be in this clinical trial until I went into remission, then I'd go to the hospital for a week of intensive chemo and radiation and then have a bone marrow transplant.

For the transplant, my doctor chose to use umbilical cord blood from an amazing donor as well as cells from my sister who had agreed to donate. (Umbilical cord blood is sometimes preferred for bone marrow transplants because it can grow more blood cells and offers patients less risk of rejection, contamination and infection.)

While my sister sat in a chair with tubes attached to her for eight hours, my mom stayed with her. Upstairs, I underwent other tests—like a lung function test and MRIs—to make sure my body could handle what it would be put through. But I did get to go visit her.

At the end of December, I got another bone marrow biopsy to check where things stood.

January 2020

I started the second round of treatment in the clinical trial and thought about the Believe Ranch and Rescue that we started in 2016. That year, I rescued this amazing horse, Savannah, and we saved 129 horses from slaughter. Many of them were adopted by equine therapy centers around the country.

At month's end, I was in remission.

February 2020

On February 14, I went into the hospital for seven days of intense chemo to prepare for the bone marrow transplant on February 21. The procedure took three or four hours. I chose to be awake for everything. I think that my experience with Savannah helped me to find strength I never knew I had.

The first 10 days weren't painful but pretty intense. Afterward, I was sick and weak and losing weight rapidly. I had no appetite, so I just drank Ensure.

Siri Lindley and her wife, Rebekah, at their wedding on January 15, 2015Courtesy of Siri Lindley

March 2020

While I was in the hospital, my wife told me we needed to cancel this charity gala we'd been planning for two years. I refused. Making a difference in these animals' lives inspired me to get through treatment and recovery and survive.

Rebekah ran the gala and we raised $400,000 for the horses. I attended via Zoom. After three weeks, I got out of the hospital. But one day later, I got a high fever and had to return for another week.

April 2020

We rented an apartment in Denver to be close to the hospital. I was healing and very weak and struggled with depression. I still had no appetite. I tried to stay positive and walked every day with my mom. When COVID-19 started, I called my doctors and told them I'd feel much safer at my ranch, even though it was 40 miles away. They allowed me to go home!

I was able to drive to the hospital every day. Being home accelerated my healing because I could see my horses and go outside to cuddle with them. They calmed my anxiety and reduced my fear.

I got pneumonia soon after I got home. It stayed with me for a couple of months, but every day I exercised outside and built up my strength.

May 2020

I'd been dreaming about riding my fierce, fast, strong and powerful horse again. On May 31, I rode Savannah for the first time since coming home. She took slow little steps as if she knew I was weak and she needed to be careful.

After a bone marrow biopsy, I learned I was cancer-free. This was the greatest news ever!

Siri Lindley with her horse, Savannah, when she returned from her bone marrow transplant procedure Courtesy of Siri Lindley

July 2020

Now, I saw my doctor at the hospital once every two weeks. I did a virtual speech for Tony Robbins at his big event, Unleash the Power Within, my first for him since the diagnosis. It energized me.

August 2020

I got off all medications, except for the prophylactic antiviral drug, which I must take for about five years. But after being on 60 different meds, I could handle being just on one drug. I was beginning to heal and get my appetite back.

September 2020

Now, I only go to the hospital once each month to get a checkup. I started feeling normal again and began eating simple foods, like pasta and bread. I ate Tillamook ice cream and started putting on weight.

December 2020

Now, I can run for an hour a few days each week. I feel strong and healthy, even though I still need strengthening and healing. When you're in the middle of recovery, you just think it's never going to end.

February 2021

This month, they will do all the tests again—like the pulmonary function test and bone marrow biopsy—to see how I'm doing. I feel very hopeful and really good, thank God!

June 2021

I got back to speaking at Tony Robbins' events and for my company, Keppler Speakers. We also started doing equine therapy events at the ranch. We teamed with Small Choices Foundation to bring over 40 cancer patients, survivors and caretakers to our ranch for equine coaching clinics. It has been incredibly healing and powerful for people, so we will continue this amazing program.

My wife and I have saved a total of 148 horses since we founded the ranch. We are close to getting the Safe Act passed in Washington, which will ban the slaughter of horses permanently.

My life coaching has been incredibly fulfilling for me. However, my health remains my top priority so I am taking amazing care of myself, which then allows me to thrive in life, relationships and my career.

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