



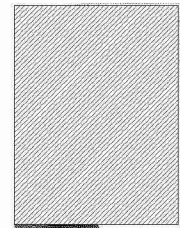
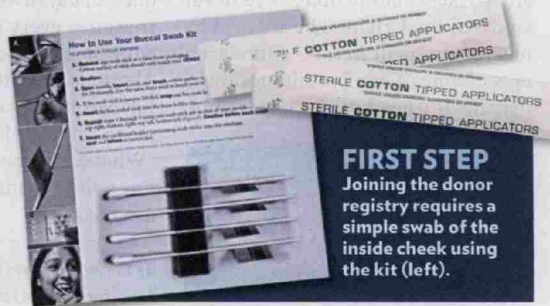
People | HEROES AMONG US

A PATIENT'S MISSION: RECRUIT MARROW DONORS

ANH REISS, 42
Houston

Anh Reiss was headed to the gym in February 2009 when she got the call that changed her life. Test results held unimaginable news: She had a rare blood disorder and perhaps only six months to live. Her only hope, her doctor told her, was a bone-marrow transplant that could restore her ravaged immune system. But Reiss learned to her dismay that she had a far slimmer chance than many Americans of finding a suitable donor. Although there are more than 8 million potential donors on the national Be the Match Registry, Reiss' search yielded only 15,000 of Vietnamese descent—whose genetic makeup was most similar to her own—and none was a match. The mother of two despaired. "The thought of leaving my family was overwhelming," says Reiss, who is herself an ob-gyn. "I cried a lot."

But rather than give up, Reiss took action. She and husband Josh, 42, a lawyer, began crisscrossing the Midwest and showing up at Vietnamese festivals to break down cultural barriers against becoming a donor. Allaying fears, sharing her story and



Photograph by MATTHEW MAHON 69



"The odds are against me," says Reiss (recruiting donors at a Vietnamese festival in Missouri in 2009), "but maybe I will beat them."

MARROW DONATION THE FACTS

- Every year some 10,000 people are diagnosed with diseases for which a marrow transplant from an unrelated donor may be their only hope. In a successful transplant, fresh blood-forming cells help reboot the immune system.
 - White patients are 30 percent more likely to find a match than Asians, Hispanics and African-Americans.
 - Marrow donation contains few risks for the donor. The most common procedure is done in a doctor's office and involves blood drawn through a needle in the arm. The more invasive procedure extracts marrow through a needle in the pelvic bone and is done under anesthesia. Those donors may experience aches and pains for anywhere from a few days to a few weeks.
 - The donor's marrow replenishes itself within six weeks. "There are rarely any long-term effects," says Mary Halet of Be the Match.
 - Another way to help: cord blood donation, in which cells from donated umbilical cords are transfused into a patient.
- bethematch.org

“ I WANT TO FIND A DONOR FOR MYSELF. BUT THERE ARE MANY MORE WHO NEED A CURE ” —ANH REISS

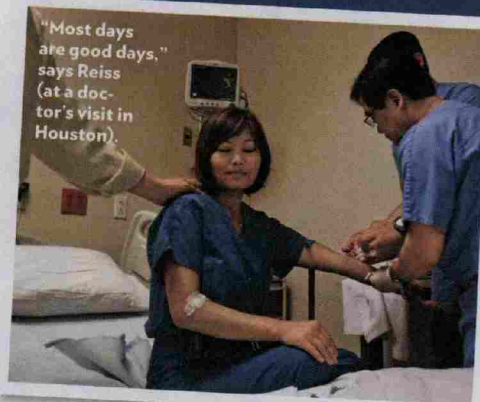
swabbing cheeks herself, she has helped add as many as 10,000 Vietnamese donors to the registry. "There's no telling how many lives she's saved," says Mary Halet, director of recruitment for [Be the Match](http://bethematch.org) (bethematch.org).

Reiss—who came to this country at age 7 as part of the wave of Vietnamese "boat people" in the 1970s—noticed she was feeling weak during a vacation last year. The lifelong runner was shocked to learn she had myelodysplastic syndrome (MDS), a life-threatening disorder that usually strikes older people. "I've never smoked, I eat right. There's a 'Why me?' component in this." More grim news: None of her five siblings was a match; she'd need an unrelated donor.

Rather than dwelling on her bad luck, Reiss is thrilled she may have been able to help people like Matthew Nguyen, 28, a pharmacy student from San Francisco diagnosed with leukemia in 2007. On dialysis, he finally found a match in early 2009, shortly after one of Reiss' drives, and is in remission. "I owe Anh gratitude," he says, "that I can never repay."

Although Reiss has yet to find her own life-saving match, she controls her condition through medication—she's back to practicing medicine full-time and works out four days a week—and treasures every moment with Josh and children Alexandra, 19, and Aaron, 15. "No one is guaranteed more time," she says. "Whatever time I have, I'm going to make the most of it."

By Steve Helling in Houston;
 Jennifer Wren in New York



"Most days are good days," says Reiss (at a doctor's visit in Houston).

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