

A professional photograph of a female nurse with long blonde hair, smiling warmly at the camera. She is wearing blue medical scrubs and a stethoscope around her neck. The background is a hospital room with medical equipment, including a monitor and an infusion pump. The lighting is soft and natural.

Blood Bond

by Holly HARVEY

Nurses work to save lives and care for patients everyday in their work and McKinney nurse Tasha Terjak saves lives in her off-hours as well.

The Collin College nursing alumna had registered as a bone marrow donor while she was a student after hearing a radio advertisement for a blood drive for a young girl who had blood cancer.

"I went online and filled out an

information sheet for being a donor and registered my blood type. I never dreamed I would actually get a call," Terjak recalled. "But six months later, I was told I was a 98 percent match for an anonymous recipient. I was floored."

From there, Terjak had a procedure that retrieved her healthy cells for donation. For two years after her donation and procedure, Terjak was in the dark about whether the procedure worked.

"Because of rules about donating, I had no clue whether the recipient even survived with my donation," Terjak stated. "I didn't know who he or she was or anything about them."

While she waited, Terjak continued her studies at Collin College. She had gone back to school to study nursing after losing her infant daughter to a genetic condition twelve days after birth.

"The neonatal nurses that took care of me and my daughter were so caring and supportive," Terjak shared. "We stayed in touch afterwards and I was really inspired to pursue nursing because of them."

At Collin College, Terjak completed her nursing pre-requisite courses and clinical classes. The National League for Nursing has named Collin College as a Center of Excellence in Nursing Education. Collin College is one of only three institutions in Texas and the only community college in the state with the designation. Only 42 of more than 1,900 nursing programs in the United States have earned the College of Excellence designation.

"When you decide to go back to school after a while of being out, you wonder about whether you can do it," Terjak said. "I was really pleased with the challenge that Collin College offered. Whether it was a nursing class or a math class, I always felt that my instructors were encouraging me."

Now, Terjak works in the Intensive Care Unit at the Medical Center of McKinney dealing with the center's most complex patients.

"Sometimes it can be a struggle to remember what you go into the profession for," she commented. "It's a highly stressful job and you always have to keep the patients as the priority. I know from my experience with caring nurses that it's critical to



remember the families and care about their wants and needs."

In addition to working full time, Terjak also has plans to attend Texas Woman's University to further her nursing skills. And, in 2014, she found out what happened to her transfer recipient.

"I received an email from a woman named Anne who lived in Germany letting me know that she was alive and well after receiving my donation," Terjak said. "She had finally been able to go back to work after the procedure and was back to her old self. She was only one year older than me."

Since discovering each other, Anne and Tasha have kept in contact by regularly emailing each other, and have found out some surprises.

"Initially, Anne had erroneously been told that her donor was a man," Terjak said. "So she took to calling the

donation and cells 'George' when she would talk about her recovery. Even now that we know each other, she still refers to it as 'George.'"

After having been through this life-changing procedure, Terjak encourages others to see if they could be a donor match.

"The procedure itself was almost completely pain free," Terjak related. "I had to get a few muscle injections a couple of days before the procedure and from then, a machine pulled stem cells out of my blood for donation. It's a simple thing that anyone can do."

For more information about Collin College's nursing program, visit www.collin.edu/nursing. ■

Holly Harvey is a public relations writer at Collin College.

Photos: Nick Young, Collin College.

“Whether it was a nursing class or a math class I always felt that my instructors were encouraging me.”