

Student loses long struggle with leukemia despite search for bone marrow match

Natasha Collins, a member of the Class of 2012 whose classmates rallied to find her a bone marrow donor, died on August 12 at the age of 26.

Collins had been diagnosed with acute myelogenous leukemia about five years earlier and had received chemotherapy and a cord blood transplant. When the cancer returned in February, her classmates launched an international search for a bone marrow donor—an effort complicated because Collins was biracial.

“Great efforts were made to get a match,” said Mark D. Siegel, *M.D., F.R.C.P.*, ’95, associate professor of medicine (pulmonary), who oversaw her care in her final days. Siegel spoke at a meeting in August to inform the medical school community of the circumstances of Collins’s passing. “Unfortunately, they could never get a perfect match. The leukemia got to the point where her only chance for survival was to go with a transplant with a slight mismatch.”

After the transplant Collins developed a severe form of a liver syndrome, which led to multiple organ failure and her death.

Her friends, family, classmates, and teachers gathered in Battell Chapel on September 22 to remember and honor her. They recalled a young woman of promise as well as sensitivity, honesty, compassion, joy, and warmth. They shared memories of her playing violin in the medical school orchestra; a homemade kale and bean soup that went awry; and her open and honest approach to her own cancer.



Natasha Collins, who died in August after a bone marrow transplant, as a first-year student in anatomy class with one of her teachers, Cheryl Walters, and classmate Jordan Sloschower.

“I do not believe,” said one of her teachers, John E. Fenn, *M.D.*, clinical professor of surgery, “that her illness enhanced the kindness that was already there. . . . Her compassion existed irrespective of her illness.”

“It was one of my favorite moments of each day, walking in, sitting next to her, and seeing her smile,” said classmate Whitney Sheen, recalling attending lectures with Collins. Sheen accompanied herself on the guitar and sang a Kate Wolf song, “Across the Great Divide,” in Collins’ honor.

“What a great doctor she would have been,” said Nancy R. Angoff, *M.P.H.* ’81, *M.D.* ’90, *Ph.D.* ’93, associate dean for student affairs. “What better doctors we can each be because of her. She will shine on in us and make us better people and better doctors.”

—John Curtis