

*Anything, except pathology.*

Before starting medical school, I had decided that I would do anything except pathology. I aspired to become a cardiologist, rushing to the emergency room to stent a "widow-maker" heart attack, or an anesthesiologist, with total control over my patient's physiology. I wanted to do something exciting—to move mountains with my hands—and to my pre-med eyes, a pathologist secluded in the basement, cut off from patient care, made no such impact.

Pathology found me in 2019 through a health career fair and a 54-year-old woman, 'L'. As a healthy, young college student, I was an ideal registrant for the bone marrow and stem cell registry through Be The Match. Before I knew it, I was sealing away a swab full of cheek cells and was ready to become just another number on another list. Little did I know that cheek swab would be the start to my interest in laboratory medicine. Six months later, I received a call from Be The Match informing me that I was a match and I made one of the most important decisions in my life: I said yes.

All in all, the process of donation—from the inciting phone call to the health checks to the Filgrastim injections—was quicker than I imagined, and after just a few short weeks, my medical laboratory scientist wife was smuggling a blood sample of mine into work to make a smear and take pictures under the scope. That evening, I peered at pictures of my  $30 \times 10^3/\mu\text{L}$  white cell count in a few grainy images taken from a cell phone, realizing the weight of my decision to donate. Two days later I had finished my donation. 3 years later, I received an email from 'L'. My 8 hours of apheresis had given her more years as a wife, mother of 2, and grandmother of 4.

Before signing up for Be The Match, I did not know what a peripheral blood stem cell was or why it was important. I had never heard of Filgrastim. Myelodysplastic syndrome sounded scary, but I could not tell you it was pre-cancerous. I thought the bands and metamyelocytes in that grainy cell phone picture were the stem cells I was donating! Signing up for Be The Match did not just save L's life, it sparked an interest in laboratory medicine that would steer the course of my medical training. Histology class became a treat to study, as I wondered what other mysteries lay hidden beyond the microscope. My summer research focused on liver histopathology, as I learned to think like a pathologist by processing, embedding, sectioning, and staining slides, to ultimately grade mouse liver pathology on a scale of my own design.

By the time I reached my first pathology rotation, I had made a complete 180-degree flip from 'never pathology' to being passionately dedicated to becoming a pathologist. After sharing my story with residents and faculty, I found that my sudden shift in perspective was more the rule than the exception, and that pathology has a funny way of finding us, rather than us finding it. Working with the mountain-moving pathology residents and faculty at my first pathology elective helped me realize that this profession was responsible for everything from determining my HLA type from a cheek swab back in 2019, to validating the CMP that monitored my calcium during apheresis, to monitoring L's bone marrow for residual disease.

My candidacy brings my experience as a hematopoietic stem cell donor and a unique view of the clinical impact of transfusion medicine, HLA, and hematopathology. I look forward to the opportunity to complete pathology training where I can take care of patients like L from my seat behind the microscope. I hope you will strongly consider me for your Pathology Residency Program. *By Nolan Donahue, DO (Twitter: [@hisDOlogy](#))*