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TOMEH, Marell

MISSISSAUGA WOMAN OVERWHELMED BY SUPPORT IN FIGHT AGAINST LEUKEMIA

SOCIAL MEDIA MOVEMENT CREATED TO ENCOURAGE STEM CELL DONATION

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Marell Tomeh believed this year was going to be her year.

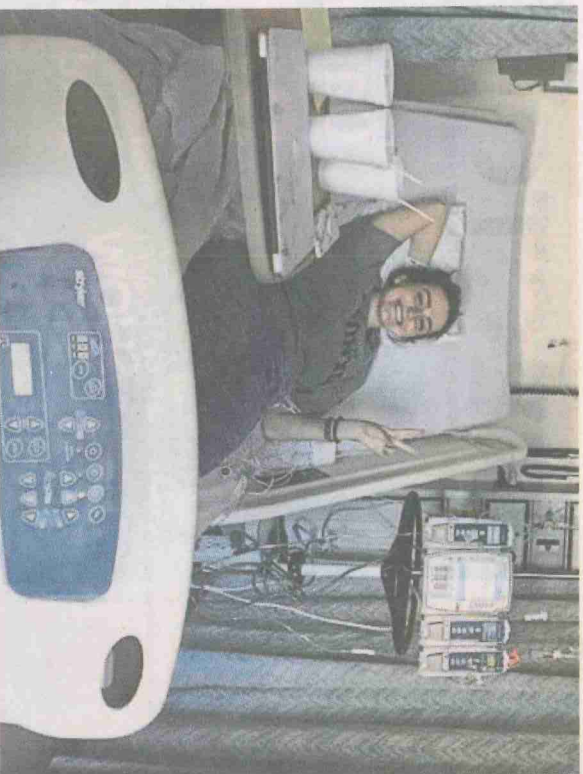
The Mississauga native had been in remission for three years after being diagnosed with acute lymphoblastic leukemia at the age of 19, and she was dedicated to completing her undergrad at the University of Toronto Mississauga after having to put that on hold for two years as she battled the disease.

She had just returned from a family vacation in Syria and was getting ready for the first day of school when she began feeling intense back pain and later had difficulty breathing.

After multiple visits to her doctor, as well as Mount Sinai Hospital, doctors told her she had relapsed.

"(Syria) was one of the best trips, and that's what made it so hard because I came back from it thinking, 'This is my year, I'm going to finish my undergrad and let go all of the baggage I was carrying for a long time,'" said Tomeh, now 24. "I felt like I was ready, and then got this news and it was like everything was falling apart."

Due to the nature of her relapse, she is in need of a stem cell transplant, and there currently isn't a match for her in the



A social media movement (#AreYouTheOneForMarell) is generating a lot of attention on social media. It's dedicated to promoting the importance of blood and stem cell donation in honour of Mississauga's Marell Tomeh, a 24-year-old who is battling Leukemia for the second time in five years. Photos courtesy of Olivia Monardo

worldwide stem cell registry. Friends and family are now doing their part to spread the

importance of blood and stem cell donors through a social media movement, #AreYouTheO-

neForMarell.

In a short time, her story was shared and promoted by over

300 people through Facebook, Instagram and Twitter. Among the people who have shared it are Cabbie Richards from TSN, CP24's Amber Payne and Z103.5, both on air and through their website.

"It makes a big difference because you realize people care and want to help. It's not just family and friends," Tomeh said. "They're taking care of everything and I'm just so overwhelmed by all of the positive support."

Friends and family are also planning a stem cell drive next month, not just in hopes of finding a match for Tomeh, but anyone in need of a transplant.

Tomeh's treatment at the Princess Margaret Cancer Centre involves a new drug therapy called blinatumomab, followed by radiation and chemotherapy to wipe her bone marrow out completely so it can be replaced with healthy stem cells that will hopefully produce new marrow.

Her first battle with leukemia involved two and a half years of treatment, and during that time, she also suffered through social anxiety and depression and was very private about her battle.

She eventually became involved with the Terry Fox Foundation as a public speaker who would go to schools and speak about the importance of cancer research, while also mental health aspect of fighting cancer. She finds discussing her journey with others to be very liberating.

"To go from being terrified of going to the mall to speaking in front of crowds was such a big leap for me," she said. "That's what actually got me (interested) in the professional writing and communication minor."