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Milwaukee Man's Prognosis May Help Other Leukemia Patients

By Jay Saunders

MILWAUKEE - Since he was young, Eric McLean has been a fighter.

"Eric has always strived to do the best," said Mary McLean, Eric's mother.

And now her 25-year-old son is in the fight of his life, quite literally.

"I'm living on borrowed time," said Eric McLean

Six years ago, Eric was diagnosed with leukemia.

"I was just about to turn 19 and then the bomb dropped," he said.

He survived, went into remission, and then four years later another bomb dropped.

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Story Created: Nov 26, 2009 Story Updated: Nov 28, 2009

"Wow, that's really hitting you in the gut," said Mary.

His mom remembers the day her son was diagnosed with leukemia for the second time. So does his doctor.

"Quite to our surprise he relapsed four years later which is a little late," said Dr. Christopher Bredeson of Froedtert Hospital and the Medical College.

But then, a third punch in the gut. The leukemia Eric beat not once but twice, came back.

His doctors gave him only two months to live.

"There's so much more I want to do before I pass on and that's where the whole bucket list came from," said Eric.

That's where we first heard of Eric's story. He was compiling a bucket list. For a lack of a better phrase, it's a list of all the things you want to do before you kick the bucket.

Among other things, he went skydiving and in June threw out the first pitch at Miller Park.

By now, though you're probably doing the math in your head and asking, "If he was given two months to live in June, why is he talking to you in November."

So we tagged along with Eric during a doctor's appointment at Froedtert to find out.

After taking a cocktail of drugs the last few months, something quite unusual has occurred.

"We didn't see evidence of the leukemia," said Dr. Bredeson.

"It's been a wild ride. They're using drugs on me they've never used on patients before," said Eric.

"And I must admit to my surprise, it seems to have gotten his disease back under control," said Bredeson.

Bredeson and his staff of doctors are now in uncharted territory, essentially making up the treatments as they go along. And it seems, at least for now, to be working.

"We're talking anywhere from zero to five percent that I would even be able to have this conversation with you. It's the greatest day of my life," he said.

"But the story doesn't end there. Eric started a Web site, www.givetolife.org. On the site, he's raised

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tens of thousands of dollars for cancer research.

And it's gotten the attention of one of Eric's heroes.

"Everyone on this planet needs a friend like Eric," said Larry Hisle.

Hisle is a former Milwaukee Brewer, all-star, and two time World Series winner.

The Brewers introduced the two when they found out Eric was going through his current battle.

"From the first day I said hello to him I knew this man was special and if he didn't mind I would like to spend as much time with him as humanly possible," said Hisle.

Hisle now goes to every doctor's visit with Eric.

It's support not just from the former major leaguer, but from family and friends and even his doctors, that Eric credits his current success.

And while his mother agrees, she knows it's much more than just that.

"I have learned so much from him. It's usually not that way but I have learned so much from my son," she said.

She's learned her son has chosen to look death in the face and smile and fight back, teaching us that a day, no matter how crummy it maybe is just that.

"It's a day," smiled Eric.

It's a day to be thankful.

"Live every day like it's your last, quite literally," he said.

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