

Georgena Moran's friends are trying desperately to save her life. She has a severe form of multiple sclerosis, a disease that causes impairments in movement, cognition and other bodily functions.

A fiercely independent woman, Moran has made major adjustments since her diagnosis four years ago. Her developing disabilities led her to move her home and terminate her 17-year career as a cabinetmaker and carpentry business owner.

Many MS sufferers experience periods of progression and remission; some are able to slow or even halt the disease with medication. However, Moran has the primary progressive form, which is unresponsive to current treatments and does not remit once it strikes.

Her friends have organized a series of fundraisers to help her receive an experimental treatment called an autologous stem cell transplant, offered at the Fred Hutchinson Cancer Research Center in Seattle. Stem cells are immature cells that can mature into different cell types depending on environmental cues within the body. As MS is a disorder in which the body's immune system attacks the myelin surrounding nerve fibers, the goal of this procedure is for transplanted stem cells to generate a new immune system that won't attack Moran's myelin.

The first step is to give the patient an injection of growth factor, which sends stem cells from bone marrow to the blood circulation. Next blood is drawn, and the stem cells selectively are removed and saved for the transplant.

Then the patient's immune system is destroyed using a combination of antibodies, radiation treatments and chemotherapy. Finally, the stem cells are returned to the bloodstream, where they mature into cells of a new immune system.

SAVING GEORGENA

Lesbian with multiple sclerosis needs your help by Caitlin Smith

The procedure is promising in a limited study: 80 percent of severe MS patients who received stem cell transplants stabilized or showed mild improvement in their symptoms. But it's risky: Immunodepletion leaves the patient vulnerable to deadly infections during recovery.

And it's expensive. Moran's friends must raise an estimated \$150,000 by June.

In addition, recovery from the procedure requires an extensive support network and a fiery courage. Fortunately, Moran has both.

Her strong determination and buoyant nature have inspired her friends' tireless efforts. As Anne Bletcher says, "It's easy to help someone who has spent all her time and energy helping others."

Throughout the course of her disease, Moran's strength becomes even more apparent. She knows "every day will not be a good day, yet she finds goodness in every day," Bletcher says. Her positive outlook will see her through the rigors of the stem cell transplant.

Moran, who now works as an adviser to help people with disabilities live independently, remarks: "I do all I can to improve the chances of good recovery through how I care for myself. Physically, emotionally, spiritually...I feel more alive than I've ever felt in my life. If it's death that I face, I am pleased to be able to approach

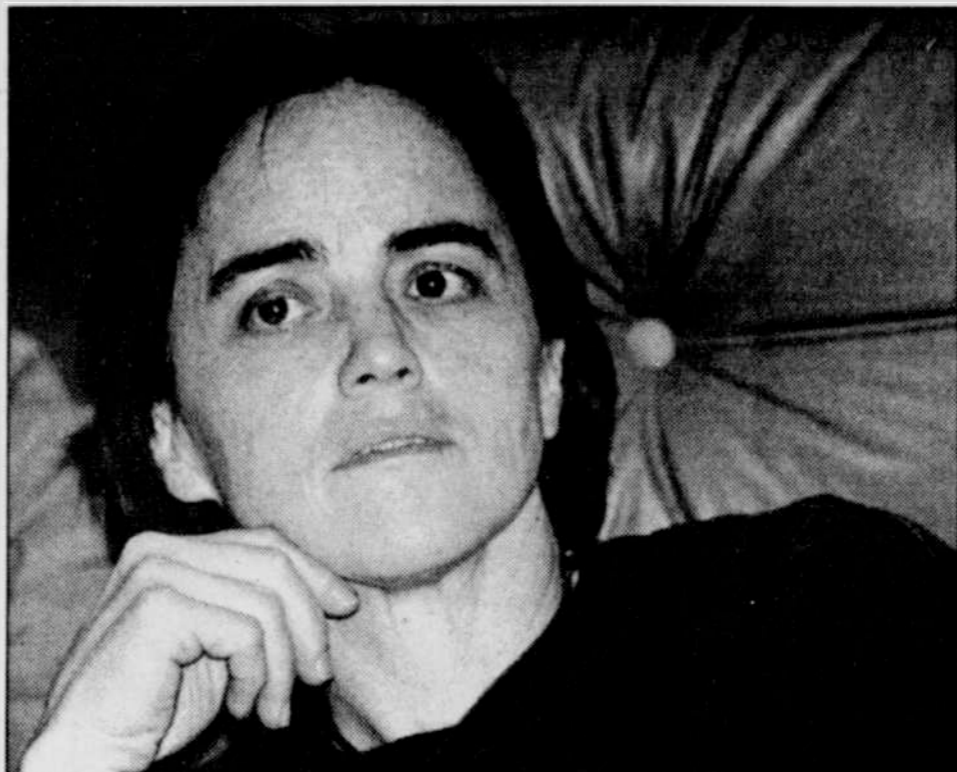


PHOTO BY MARTIN DAVIS

Georgena Moran "is a person who makes the world a better place," friend Zekra Brasher says

it without undo fear—as fully conscious as I've ever dared to be."

Donors can visit www.georgenasjourney.org for extensive information on how to help Moran out. But she admits some facts are missing from the Internet site.

"I'm not as pitiful as it may sound," she says. "My life and journey, in a nutshell, may seem pretty grim, [but] my life is a series of miracles. You may not be able to imagine what joy I get from being surrounded by such loving people. If you do, you'll realize how happy I am."

Moran's friends are determined to give her the chance to halt her MS, but they are racing time. According to Yama Crandall, they espe-

cially are seeking corporate sponsors.

"We need more networking to locate contacts for possible grants...everyone knows 10 people or more who may be able to help," she says. "I believe Georgena is fighting to live the fullest life possible, and given the opportunity for this transplant she will, hopefully, be with all of us with her humor, her laughter and her perseverance for many years to come."

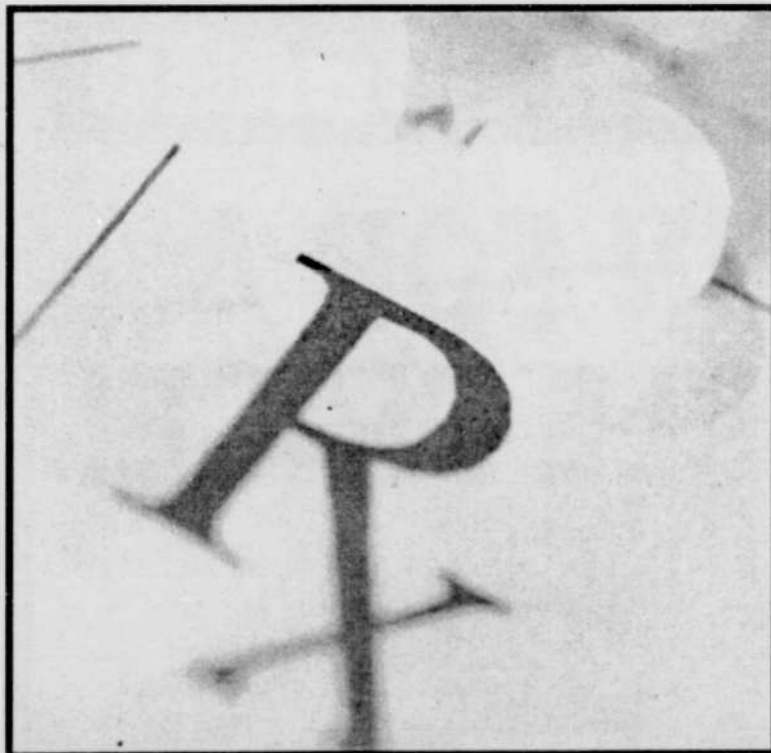
Bletcher says Moran "still meets every day with the idea that she will find something that can make a difference with her disease. Today

her hope is in a stem cell transplant. We want Georgena's hopes to become a reality."

Moran's friends know, with help, she can meet this challenge. And she'll do it with courage and grace. **JN**

GEORGENA'S JOURNEY: A COMMUNITY CONFRONTS MULTIPLE SCLEROSIS will hold a women's dance with DJ Lauren from 7 to 11 p.m. May 4 and a concert/silent auction from 2 to 7 p.m. June 1. Both benefits will take place at Trinity United Methodist Church, 3915 S.E. Steele St.

CAITLIN SMITH is a neuroscientist and free-lance writer in Portland.



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