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# It's Good To Know A Miracle: Dani's Story: One Family's Struggle With Leukemia



## Synopsis

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In August 2002 Dani Shotel was a healthy twenty-six-year-old young woman with an almost perfect life. She had a gratifying job as a special-needs teacher in an elementary school, many friends, a loving family, and a fiancé, Scott Greene, whom she was soon to marry. One month later she was diagnosed with acute myelogenous leukemia (AML), and from that moment, her world turned upside down.

In this inspirational and informative book, Dani's parents, Jay and Sue Shotel, vividly convey the strength and courage their daughter displayed in her battle with AML as they recount her unforgettable journey to recovery. The Shotels provide a wealth of information about leukemia, about the role each family member played in supporting Dani, about the anguished quest for medical answers, the myriad decisions a family must make amid the medical maze, the value of love and friendship, and the generosity of the young German citizen, Tom, who donated the marrow that saved Dani's life. In this practical guide for others who must fight cancer, the Shotels discuss the importance of medical coverage, of being a self-advocate, of asking questions and educating oneself about the disease, of drawing strength and energy from and showing appreciation to those involved in the wellness process.

Listen to an interview with the authors.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

How can a book filled with medical terms and pharmacological interventions be a page turner? How can the chronicling of a young woman's sudden bad luck (leukemia) be a story full of laughter, joyful

tears, and renewed faith in our common humanity? Well, thanks to the talents, love, and devotion of an amazing family, Dani's story is all of that and so much more. Dani, a young, beautiful, and revered teacher, is the heroine. Though not a big woman, she has managed by sheer determination to become a star college fastball pitcher. Her perfect life is attacked by leukemia - so suddenly, so much like the intrusion by a thief in the night. Sue, Dani's mother, is herself a life long educator as is her professor husband, Jay. Now in the blink of an eye, they must respond as a team to save a life so cherished. Jay, ever the academic, fields the research arm of things. What is this cancer? What are the options? Who in medicine is best equipped to join the effort? Jay acts quickly and stays on task. From Virginia's Hospital Center Oncology Wing to Seattle's Cancer Care Alliance, Jay searches medicine's vanguard for a way to confront a leukemia known as AML (acute myelogenous leukemia). And then, Jay spearheads the search for a willing human being somewhere on this vast planet - a human being with a one-in-a-billion genetic makeup and a generous heart to match. The searching circle of love spreads faster than any cancer. Family, friends, educators, and even a professional basketball team join the desperate search. Sue utilizes her sharpened administrative skills to keep Jay's research focused on practical and timely initiatives. She becomes a fixture in Dani's hospital room and oversees every medical intervention at the point of delivery - every pill, every enema, every blood draw. Sue records all, each day, each hour, each human contact. Is she meddling? Yes. Is her heart full of love and appreciation for the doctors, nurses, and oncology staff at both ends of the country? Most certainly. In Virginia the love team includes Sue's sister Carol and her pharmacist husband, Bruce, as well as friends and countless professional colleagues. In Seattle by serendipity the family is joined by son Micah and his Microsoft colleagues and friends. And in Germany there is a young man. He is not Jewish and he is not of Eastern European stock. He should not be a likely donor. However, an incident in his young life causes him to have a likely donor's heart. There is a wedding in this story, a most beautiful wedding between a Christian man of unbelievable and much tested devotion and a Jewish princess, a real Jewish princess. At the wedding a guest from a far off land is finally united with his new family. Talk about love! Talk about love! You'll have to read *It's Good To Know A Miracle* for yourself. Oh, and all those medical terms and pharmacological interventions, they're nicely displayed and explained for all those with interest. Dani's Story is not just for those dealing with cancer. It is for all of us who again desire to be refreshed by the beauty inherent in the human spirit.

Did you ever think about what would happen to your life and those of your loved ones if someone in your immediate family had a life and death crisis? I honestly never did because that's the kind of

thing that "only happens to other people," but after reading *It's Good to Know a Miracle: Dani's Story*, I truly understand that it can happen to anyone of us. This powerful memoir tells the story of a vibrant 26 year old woman who is a caring special education teacher and an exceptional athlete, who had recently started dating her future husband, when she was diagnosed with acute myelogenous leukemia (AML). Within approximately a week of the onset of the symptoms, Dani's world and the people in it had their lives changed forever. This book enables the reader to follow Dani's life from the diagnosis of AML to a successful bone marrow transplant. It is the combination of a human interest story and medical facts and information that adds to the uniqueness of this book. In the prologue, we learn about Dani's life before AML so that you get to know her as a young person who is already contributing to society and dreaming of becoming a wife and mother. Then in the first few chapters, the reader experiences the shock of the diagnosis (it began with a simple sore throat) and the speed with which medical decisions had to be made. It was so difficult to imagine what it must have been like teaching in your classroom one day and fighting for your life the next. However, through the integration of memories written by Dani and her parents, detailed daily journal notes which included conversations with medical personnel, emails from friends and family, and excerpts from a website about Dani which was created by her brother, I truly felt as if I were living this incredible experience. Unlike only diary entries, this combination of a variety of sources and points of view made for interesting and informative reading. The range of emotions experienced by the reader, including hope, is one of the strengths of this book. Reading the many emails of support and encouragement which were sent to Dani by her friends and family (and even people who didn't know her personally) was uplifting. What was especially impressive was reading about the many ways people worked together to help in other concrete ways such as organizing fundraising and bone marrow drive events and donating frequent flyer miles so that her dad and boyfriend could visit her in Seattle where the transplant took place (everyone lived on the East coast). There were many opportunities provided, large and small, for people of all ages to be involved in this fight against AML. The most emotional moment of all comes when Dani and her donor, a 30 year old man from Germany (he was a one in an eight million match!), finally communicate with each other (they had to wait two years according to the rules and regulations). Their emails make you laugh (they both have a wonderful sense of humor) and cry and when he arrives in the United States to attend Dani's wedding, the feelings of elation gave me goose bumps. I actually felt like I was in the middle of their hug at their first meeting at the airport! The structure of this book enables you to step in and out of the book, that is, at times I was engrossed in the human feelings of the people and what was happening to them but at other times I was an objective reader learning information about this

disease. For example, I learned how Dani used what she knew about training as an athlete to fight AML. In addition, there is a lot of technical vocabulary relating to medicines and procedures which is necessary to understand. The words are printed in bold type with a quick definition within the text and highlighted in a gray box on the same page with a more in-depth explanation. Another feature, which was most informative and practical, was the appendix which included "Lessons We Have Learned," how to organize and publicize bone marrow drives and fundraising events, the purpose and design of a website, organizations that provide support for families, and how to be an advocate when dealing with insurance companies. This beneficial section is what you will remember if you are ever faced with such a life-altering experience. Can your world be turned upside down but have a happy ending? Can a "global village" unite to save one person? Reading about the Shotel family's journey to survive AML is a heartfelt account which will have you saying, "It's Good to Know a Miracle."

This book is a must read for anyone dealing with a blood cancer. I was diagnosed with acute lymphoblastic leukemia and this book provided a lot of insight on what can happen during treatment which enables patients and caregivers to be more informed and better positioned to ask questions of physicians.

Well written by two educators whose daughter and they battle for her life threatened by childhood leukemia. The telling is straightforward, yet not unemotional. The happy ending is that Dani and her husband are loving parents of an adopted son. Dani has taught all who know her about real courage.

The story of Dani's fight against leukemia is more than just a written history of her battle. Sue and Jay Shotel give practical advice that can be used by families dealing with any type of life-threatening illness. Three years ago my oldest daughter was diagnosed with cancer. I wish that I had found the insight shared by Sue and Jay in their book back then. My daughter is presently cancer free but faced major complications. I know we would have handled her treatment differently if we had read how the Shotels dealt with some of their unfortunate medical experiences during Dani's treatment. My family met Dani when my daughter joined a fastpitch softball league that was coached by Jay Shotel with Dani as one of the star pitchers. You wouldn't believe the power behind her small stature. However, as you will see from this book, Dani's strength from the ballfield to life's battlefield is truly inspiring. I have passed this book on to several friends who have been awed by Dani's

courage. Although you wouldn't think this book would be a page turner, you will be surprised as your interest in Dani's life will force you to keep reading. The value of reading this book is profound. A "must" read.

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