



MATT MILLER/DN

KRISTI GROOTHUIS can hardly stand to watch her daughter, Mindy Kellogg, get a bone marrow biopsy, Kellogg's third bone marrow biopsy in the last two months. The doctors took the biopsy to find out if an immune globulin treatment worked. Although tests showed a little improvement, the family is still waiting to find out if a bone marrow transplant is needed.

THE FIGHT OF HER LIFE

Northeast High student battles blood disorder

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an hour of tutoring and visits from her best friend.

"She keeps asking why this is happening," her mother, Kristi Groothuis, said. "The Lord is telling us something, but I don't know what."

In December, Groothuis noticed that her daughter's entire arm was bruised from a near fall at work.

While working at Kentucky Fried Chicken, Kellogg slipped but caught herself before she fell, bruising her arm when she grabbed a pole to steady herself.

Groothuis had noticed the bruising before, but she thought Kellogg had just been rough-housing with her friends.

"She likes to be one of the guys," Groothuis said. "She hits them back, but she just kept bruising."

On Dec. 22, Kellogg's bruises and tiredness alarmed her mother enough to take her to the hospital. Doctors did an array of blood tests and sent her home.

But when doctors got the results of the tests that afternoon, they called Groothuis and said that Kellogg had to be hospitalized.

"I went to KFC to pick her up," Groothuis said, "and when I told her she had to be admitted, she freaked."

Kellogg's platelet count had



MINDY KELLOGG HOLDS the bone marrow sample that was taken from her pelvis bone.

dropped to 7,000, and doctors thought she might have had leukemia.

By the time she left the hospital on Christmas Eve, doctors had ruled out leukemia and were looking for another cause of Kellogg's symptoms.

Since then Kellogg has had two biopsies and she gets platelet transfusions every week.

And two weeks ago, Kellogg went to a specialist in Omaha for an immune globulin treatment that may help her bone marrow recover, but doctors are not sure if it will work.

After the treatment, Kellogg's blood platelet count recovered slightly, but not as much as doctors had hoped.

"We are up at the hospital for five hours to talk to the doctor for 10 minutes, and he still doesn't know what is going on," Kellogg said.

Doctors and the family are still waiting to see if the treatment will take hold and avert a bone marrow transplant that would require a 100-day hospital stay.

Parvovirus first appears as a rash that will not go away, which Kellogg had two years ago.

Then it starts to attack the elements of blood, which leads to bruising and chronic fatigue.

Unless Kellogg's bone marrow recovers, a slight injury could be fatal.

Kellogg said that last semester she had to schedule time for a three-hour nap between school and work. Even with the chronic fatigue she was plagued with, Kellogg was still

able to work 35 hours a week to help out with the bills. "All I ever used to do was go to school and work, but now I can't," Kellogg said. "Everybody treats me like I am sick."

Kellogg said the worst part is that she doesn't feel any different than before she was diagnosed, but now doctors want her to stay around the house.

"I was sick for so long, but I still did everything and I could handle it," Kellogg said.

She also has to be careful about germs. Doctors don't want her to eat fast food — one of her favorite things — though she said she still occasionally goes to Burger King right after it opens.

Now Kellogg spends her days around the house with her dog, Sadie, her cat, Salmont, and some fish and a box turtle, which she said didn't have names.

In the afternoons, she meets with a tutor to keep up with her studies at Northeast High School.

Then her best friend, Mandy Craig, comes over to hang out for a few hours before going to work.

"Mandy is the only one who doesn't make me feel like I am sick," Kellogg said.

Craig said she started to worry about Kellogg last summer when she was too tired to go out on the weekends.

The two girls have been best friends since their freshman year in high school, and now Craig tries to make sure it is not any different between them.

"I don't know why, but I just can't get sick of that girl," Craig said. "But I am so scared this girl is going to die on me."

For friends and family, Kellogg's illness has been difficult to deal with.

Groothuis works two jobs, one at the state retirement office, the other at CableVision, and has already used up her sick and vacation leave at both jobs to be with her daughter. Fortunately Groothuis' medical insurance has paid 100 percent of Kellogg's medical costs so far, and the company has said it would pay for a transplant if it is necessary.

But other bills are accumulating. Groothuis said a fund had been set up with Union Bank to accept donations for the family.

Kellogg and Groothuis have always been close, they said, but this illness has made them depend on each other more.

"We are closer than mother and daughter," Groothuis said. "We are best friends."

Groothuis said that because she had Mindy when she was 19, the two of them really grew up together.

Many of Groothuis' family members live in Lincoln and have offered support, but it has been difficult.

"I cry at least once a day to relieve stress," Groothuis said. "But I think Mindy is trying to stay strong for me."

Right now Kellogg would like nothing more than to be able to go back to school and her fast-food job.

"Even though I hated school before, I would really like to go now," she said.

Kellogg worries that she will not be able to walk across the stage at graduation if she has to have a transplant.

And for the time being, Kellogg's dreams of college have been put on the back burner.

Kellogg and her mother will know within the next few weeks if the transplant is necessary.

But for now they have both learned to appreciate every day.

"Life can be gone just like that," Groothuis said. "I have learned to love Mindy more. She has always been No. 1 in my life, and she always will be."

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MINDY KELLOGG
parvovirus sufferer