

### Feature Story Miss Alissa's Journey

Alissa Thomas, the daughter of Melissa and Kevin Thomas was diagnosed in 2011 at the age of 5 with acute promyelocytic leukemia at the Connecticut Children's Medical Center.

Promyelocytic leukemia is a sub type of acute myelogenous leukemia and is an extremely difficult disease to treat since it is generally diagnosed in adults. This is Alissa's story in her mother's own words.

On Friday, December 16, 2011, Alissa woke up with a fever and complaints of stomach pain and said "Mommy, can you take me to the doctor's?". Knowing Alissa, this was very unusual so I knew something wasn't right. When we got to the Dr's office, Dr Porter quickly examined Alissa and told me "get over to CCMC now, do not stop, go straight there as I am letting them know you are on your way...". Off we went! On the drive to the hospital Alissa said "Mommy, why does it feel like my body is fighting me?". I was confused, scared, nervous, afraid, and hoped for the best. I told Alissa it was probably because she wasn't feeling good.

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We arrived at CCMC and they quickly put her into a room where many tests began. After a few hours, the head Oncologist came into the room and asked Alissa how she was feeling. Holding her stomach, she told the doctor "my tummy hurts". The doctor replied, "I know", he looked up at me and said "your daughter has Leukemia". Those words changed our life. By that following Monday we learned Alissa had a rare form of leukemia called APML (subtype of AML) - Acute Promyelocytic Leukemia. She started treatment immediately as she came in as a high-risk patient with her white counts being 21,000 and her hemoglobin only 5. She received several blood transfusions her first night at the hospital followed by a spinal tap and bone marrow aspiration. She had a central line placed in her chest (broviac) with double tubing so that meds could be administered easily. Her treatment consisted of several month in-patient isolation stays where she received high doses of chemotherapy, blood, platelet and plasma transfusions, strong antibiotics and at one point pneumonia that in turn caused endocarditis (infection of the heart). Alissa was unable to attend school at that time.



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Today, Alissa is doing well and currently in maintenance which entails daily oral chemotherapy medicine given at home with monthly count checks at CCMC. She also goes for bone marrow aspirations every twelve weeks. Because Alissa has a port, our protocol is to head to CCMC should Alissa have any illness symptoms. We've had a few bumps along the way with unplanned ER visits and hospital stays but we continue to stay positive. Alissa's maintenance is scheduled to last until December 2014, which after that point, Alissa would only need to come in for count checks and specialist follow-ups. Alissa is happy to be back in school and spending time with her friends and family. She enjoys playing outside, swimming, and reading.



*We appreciate the financial support that Lea's Foundation has provided to us. It has lessened the stress from all other things we need to focus on. Our goal is to one day give back to this wonderful organization.*

## Research

Paul Epstein, PhD, of UConn Health Center, received two very large grants in 2014 from Lea's Foundation to complete his studies, using mouse models, on the effect of two anti-depressant drugs, Paxil and Zoloft to treat leukemia. He is close to finalizing his investigation with his associate Holly Dong, MD, will be summarizing the results of their findings very soon and, hopefully, another weapon in the fight against leukemia.

Clinical trials funded by Lea's Foundation for Leukemia are taking place at both ST Francis/Mount Sinai Cancer Center and the CT Children's Medical Center.

At the Connecticut Children's Medical Center, newly discovered drugs and improved old drugs are basically supplied by the Children's Oncology Group and are being administered on leukemia, lymphoma and Hodgkin's lymphoma to patients at risk.

At ST Francis/Mount Sinai Cancer Center, working arrangements with Dana Farber in Boston and Yale New Haven Hospital to conduct clinical trials are taking place utilizing new drugs and improved old drugs on patients suffering from leukemia, lymphoma, Hodgkin's lymphoma and multiple myeloma that have no other options left.

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*Pictured above is a photograph of Bess Economos, mother of Lea Economos admiring the plaque installed, to honor the establishment of The Lea Economos Center for Clinical Research at the St. Francis/Mount Sinai Cancer center.*

## The 2015 Valentine's Day Ball

The annual Valentine's Day Ball is scheduled for Saturday, February 14, 2015 in the Grand Ballroom of the Marriott in Hartford and a very large crowd is expected to celebrate this event in a tribute Mike Economos, our founder, who passed away in March 2014.

It is the signature event of Lea's Foundation that raises the most funds for our community based programs that includes both translational and pure research.

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There will be good food, drink, hors d'oeuvres the well-known piano player, Bruno Cerati and dance music provided by Soul Sound.

Our celebrity host will be Irene O'Connor of Channel 3 with Brad Davis of WDRC serving as our honorary host greeting guests.

## Financial Aid

Patients undergoing treatment for leukemia, lymphoma, Hodgkin's lymphoma, multiple myeloma and myelodysplastic syndrome may apply for financial aid to help cover the cost of their treatment over and above insurance coverage. It is restricted to patients using Connecticut Hospitals for treatment of their blood related cancers.

## Up-Coming Events

Valentine's Day Ball (Marriot-Hartford)  
February 14, 2015

Golf Tournament (Glastonbury Hills) June 2,  
2015

Coast 2 Coast (Cross Country) June 15, 2015

## The Philoptochos Society

The Philoptochos Society of ST George's Greek Orthodox held a fashion show on Thursday, October 23, 2014 to benefit Lea's Foundation for Leukemia Research, Inc.

A well-attended event co-chaired by Staci Lynch and Persefone Sticka with fashions by Stackpole, Moore, Tryon and Tuesdays, more than \$7000.00 was raised and donated to our Foundation.

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