



*The Julia Bird  
Leukemia Fund  
Benefit  
October 2nd, 1999*

*Gramercy Park Hotel*

# *Community rallies to raise funds to assist woman with leukemia*



Julia Bird's family is (l-r) Rich, Julia, Amanda and baby Alec. Photo at Epiphany Church at Alec's christening

By Todd Maisel

Fighting a killer disease can be a foreboding, lonely experience that tests the endurance of the human body and the existing technological breakthroughs. It wasn't long ago that leukemia was untreatable and those afflicted with it were doomed to early death.

Julia Natale Bird, a former resident of Stuy Town whose father-in-law is a Peter Cooper resident, is preparing to undergo a life-saving bone marrow transplant in Seattle, WA, that doctors now say gives her a good chance of eradicating the

leukemia that threatens to envelop her at the age of 32. Stretched to their financial limits, the mother of two and her husband, Robert, are preparing for the transplant that will keep them on the edge for more than a year of intensive treatment.

Dick Bird, her father-in-law, a resident of Peter Cooper and a long-time Gramercy Park business owner, is already marshaling forces to help the young family pay for her medical treatment and to keep them financially afloat during the upcoming difficult days.



# Leukemia

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And in the proud fashion of this community, numerous activists and residents have responded to the call for help by forming a committee for the Julia Bird Leukemia Fund.

To help Julia and to fund leukemia research, area residents will be holding a benefit party at the Gramercy Park Hotel on Oct. 2.

Bird, who is leading the effort on behalf of his daughter-in-law, said numerous area leaders have come to his aid including Jane Crotty of Stuy Town, Arlene Harrison of the Gramercy Park Block Association and Tom O'Brien of the Gramercy Park Hotel.

"This is going to help tremendously and the neighborhood has been real super," Bird said of his Gramercy neighbors. "We set up this foundation for Julia's treatment, but also to help others with similar conditions. People are donating items for a silent auction including paintings and other items. This will go a long way to helping her."

## The life and the leukemia

Julia and Rich Bird were Stuy Town residents for several years before moving to Hamburg, New Jersey. Rich operated a graphics design business with his dad in Gramercy Park before moving out of state.

Julia, who has two children, Amanda, 5, and Alec, 3, was diagnosed with Chronic Myelogenous Leukemia in January. The bone marrow of those stricken with CML produces abnormal white blood cells which

interfere with blood and immune functions. The only known cure for this is a bone marrow transplant - without which she could die within three years.

Julia, a licensed practical nurse, had few symptoms of the disease and went for a blood test after feeling tired. It was her first visit to a doctor in two years.

"I went to the doctor and they had blood drawn and then I was called back to give more blood because they thought the lab had made a mistake," Julia said. "The doctor called me at 5 p.m. that night and told me over the phone. I was alone with the two kids and was making dinner. I told him I had to hang up the phone because I had to take care of the kids."

She said the news was shocking as she had seen the results of other people who had the disease. While she was a nurse, she had much to learn about the disease and the toll it would take on her life.

A search began immediately for a bone marrow donor, during which she started chemotherapy to keep the leukemia in check. Her sister, Katherine, was unacceptable as a donor. Her children were not candidates for transfusion use. But miraculously, a donor was found in Germany, who, she said, "was so perfect, he could have been my brother."

It took several days before the potential donor gave approval for the transplant. Julia said there have been instances when potential donors backed out of giving bone marrow out of fear which is heart wrenching for those waiting for the life saving transfusions. Julia noted that transfusions are



Julia, daughter Amanda, with sister Catherine and niece Samantha at Catherine's wedding day at the Gramercy Park Hotel in 1995.

safe and are done under anesthesia, therefore there is little pain except for minor bruising to the donor.

In the meantime, Julia was also waiting for other test results to make sure she had no other complicating ailments.

She hopes to meet the donor, who medical officials keep secret for one year after the transfusion.

After the miracle bone marrow match was found, she was informed that she must move to Seattle where she would under go the transplant and specialized treatment at the Fred Hutchinson Center for Cancer Research, one of the most

advanced in the nation. She is now on the West Coast where she has had to change her diet and stay in sterile environments to prevent infection or any other ailments that could attack her immune system. Before undergoing the transplant existing marrow has to be cleansed from her body.

Because the leukemia was caught in an early stage, her doctors give her an 85 percent chance of survival. She said that had she waited longer for a doctor's visit, her chances might have been far less.

Most difficult for her will be dealing with her children, who don't fully understand the dangers she faces in the future because of the marrow transplant. Her husband said that his youngest son doesn't understand that his mother is very sick, but "he became very quiet when we told him the catheter that his mother has in her chest." His daughter, he said, knows that "her mommy is sick, and that mommy won't feel good for a while."

Luckily, they will have a nanny to assist at home during her recuperation. They will also have to be kept away from their mother for a while as her immune system becomes stronger.

In addition, the Hutchinson center provides tickets to ball games, van service, and numerous other support services to help Julia and her family cope with the difficulty of her recovery.

While she actually feels

lucky to have found a donor, she mourns that many other people have to wait years to find a suitable transfusion donor.

The most difficult are those from minorities as she said there are very few donors from the minority community available.

She also stresses that leukemia strikes all types of people of all walks of life. She said there is no real reason why leukemia occurs, only that it strikes randomly through society.

"At the clinic, I've seen a lot of children, and people of all backgrounds and nobody really knows why people get it," she said.

She said she is overwhelmed by the support she has received from people in her communities, including that of her father-in-law. But what gives her strength is her children, who she said have been practically "joined at the hip" to her since birth.

"They are the reason I get up in the morning, and they give me the strength to continue to the reason to go through what ever it takes to get well," she said.

The bone marrow transplant is now slated for Aug. 17 and T&V will be keeping track of her progress.

Residents and supporters are invited to take part in the Julia Bird Leukemia Fund and fundraiser. The fundraiser is Saturday, Oct. 2, 7-11 p.m. at the Gramercy Park Hotel.

Tickets are \$80 per person and include food, open bar, entertainment and a silent auction. Donations for the silent auction are being sought.

For tickets, or to contribute to the journal ad or prize items, call Rita or Dick Bird at 505-6035. Donations can be made to the Julia Bird Leukemia Fund, 42 East 20th Street, 2nd floor, NY NY, 10003.



Julia, Alec, Amanda, Rich, niece Samantha, and Rich's dad, Dick, at a family picnic before she discovered the leukemia.



Julia Bird (right) with her sister Catherine and daughter Amanda.



# Leukemia girl fundraiser successful in Gramercy Park

By Todd Maisel

More than 200 people recently attended a fundraiser at the Gramercy Park Hotel for Julia Bird, who is now recovering from a bone marrow transplant at the Fred Hutchinson Center for Cancer Research in Seattle. The fundraiser was put together by her in-laws from Peter Cooper Village and numerous community leaders who came to their aid.

Thousands of dollars were

raised at the fundraiser and through donations from local businesses to help the young mother of two children.

Bird, a resident of New Jersey, was diagnosed with leukemia earlier this year and was lucky enough to find a bone marrow donor from Germany - the necessary ingredient for her and other leukemia sufferers to beat the deadly disease.

She is now an outpatient at

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Photos by Todd Maisel



Many area residents, friends and relatives took part in the Julia Bird Leukemia fundraiser at the Gramercy Park Hotel recently where thousands of dollars were raised.



# Leukemia

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the Seattle center where according to her mother-in-law, Rita Bird a Gramercy Park business owner, is fighting off a cold, which for most people is common, but can be life threatening for a leukemia patient.

"At this point, Julia is doing very well and she is fighting off a cold and that is always a concern," Rita said. "We don't quite know yet how she will fight off infections, but so far she is handling it very well."

Julia Bird passed the 50-day mark since the marrow transplant and according to her family, she is nearly a 100 percent grafted donor, meaning her body is not

rejecting the bone marrow, one of the most critical parts of the transplant process. In addition, test results reveal no sign of leukemia cells.

Bird is expected to return home from Seattle in December if all continues well.

Dick Bird, Julia's father-in-law, expressed appreciation to the many people who helped make the fundraiser a success. "It was absolutely phenomenal and people really responded," he said.

Arlene Harrison, president of the Gramercy Park Block Association, applauded the community for coming together for a worthy event. The community committee, organized by Jane Crotty of Stuy Town and Harrison, Thomas Arbuckle and Sharon Ullman of the 23rd Street Association, Jack Bringmann of Concerned

Citizens Speak, Louise Dankberg of the Tilden Midtown Democrats, Al Doye and his wife Pat Salin of the Stuy Town Tenants Association, Bill Fling Michael Karpoff of the Gramercy Park Republican Club; Tom O'Brien of the Gramercy Park Hotel and Stuart Ostrow of Roschill Community Association, Gerard Schriffes of Manhattan Neighborhood Council; Steven Smolens of Waterside Plaza Tenants Association.

To contribute to the fund, call Rita or Dick Bird at 505-6035. Donations can be made to the Julia Bird Leukemia Fund at 42 East 20th Street, second floor, NY, NY 10003. Any funds not used for Julia Bird will be donated to the Leukemia Foundation.



The Committee members included Tom O'Brien of the Hotel, Arlene Harrison, Jack Bringmann, Al Doyle and his wife Pat Salin, and Lillian Tompkins.



Photos by Todd Haisel





# TO LOCAL GIRL'S PLIGHT

Hotel, Rita told us how her family's life was shattered when Julia was diagnosed with Chronic Myelogenous Leukemia.

She explained how Julia's only chance for survival was a bone marrow transplant which would be carried out in Seattle. "We set up the fund to help her with her expenses," explained Rita. "She had to relocate with her family to Seattle and there were other aspects of her condition that insurance doesn't pay for -- she needed a nurse when she came out of hospital and all those kinds of things -- and, thanks to this community, we were able to help with everything."

Julia underwent a successful bone marrow transplant last July after a donor was discovered in Germany.

Rita said, "Finding a perfect bone marrow match is very difficult. [Julia's sister Katherine and her two children were all ruled out as candidates.] We felt very fortunate when they found a donor who was a perfect match."

Even after the donor was found and the transplant carried out, Julia spent months undergoing treatment in Seattle and playing a waiting game while doctors waited to see whether her body would reject the bone marrow.

While Julia and her family prayed for her recovery, the local community was getting busy organizing the fundraiser at the Gramercy Park Hotel. Rita recalled, "We had such a lot of community support. Jane Crotty of Stuy Town, Arlene Harrison of the Gramercy Block Association, Tom O'Brien at the Gramercy Park Hotel, everyone pitched in organizing everything from raffles to silent auctions. They



QUIET CONCERN — a silent auction held during last year's dance helped boost the fund to \$93,000

raised a lot of money and enabled us to help Julia pay for just about everything she needed and help other children and adults suffering leukemia."

As the community once again rallies to raise money for the Fund, Rita said Julia has suffered a minor setback and was recently ad-

*"It's not over for her yet. She has a lot of recovery to do."*

— RITA BIRD

mitted to Chilton Memorial Hospital in New Jersey, where she and her family now live.

Rita explained, "Julia has a little problem with her lungs and is experiencing a 'graft versus host' disease, which is something that can happen to bone marrow patients. The new bone marrow given to her can start attacking her body and she may have to go back on steroids. It's not over for her yet. She has a lot of recov-

ery to do and will have to go back to Seattle in September.

"It is a real battle. They will consider her out of the woods in September when they will assess her then, in five years time, if all is still going well, they will consider it a cure.

"So far, though, it all looks very good for her."

Rita admitted she was overwhelmed by the reaction she and Dick -- a Gramercy Park business owner -- received from their friends and neighbors of nearly 20 years.

"It is truly wonderful," she said. "So far we have raised over \$93,000. This year's main event will be a slightly smaller, more intimate affair. We are going to be raising money by admission to the dance and we'll have raffles. This is an ongoing effort for us. We still need money for Julia who still faces another visit to Seattle. At any time things can happen and the money we collect will be for whatever she needs as well as the other children and adults

we have been helping." Among the recipients of some of the money raised are 11-year-olds Katie Cunningham and Adrienne D'Angelo, who have lymphoma, Alec Kalla, a 50-

year-old lymphoma patient and Morgan Joyner, a young father-of-two currently awaiting a bone marrow transplant. They were all referred to the Julia Bird Leukemia Fund by national leukemia charities.

A spokeswoman for the Funda committee said the goal is to continue assisting leukemia and lymphoma patients through treatments and recovery. Each donation helps the foundation continue its mission and, unlike many larger affiliations, all funds received -- apart from small organizational and benefit evening expenses -- directly benefit patients.

This year's Spring Dance will be held in the Gramercy Park Hotel Roof Garden on Saturday, June 10 from 7-11 p.m. There will be a buffet dinner, open bar, DJ and dancing, 50-50 chances, raffles and a door prize.

The spokeswoman said

the event will also be a celebration of Julia's recovery and an opportunity for her husband, Rich, to express his thanks to "this community whose generosity has helped so many."

She added that the Fund committee "hopes to see old and new friends and neighbors come together to support this worthy cause."

Admittance to what promises to be a fun night out in the neighborhood as well as a chance to make a real difference in a leukemia or lymphoma patient's life, is \$85 per person. Anyone who would like to find out more should call 505-6035 or e-mail [BirdPrints@aol.com](mailto:BirdPrints@aol.com).

Tax deductible donations may be sent to The Julia Bird Leukemia Fund, 42 East 20th Street, New York, NY 10003.



# COMMUNITY RESPONDS

*As the Julia Bird Leukemia Fund prepares for its second annual fundraiser, PCV resident, Rita Bird, talks to Linda Barr about how her daughter-in-law's plight touched the heart of the community, which rallied to help her and other victims of leukemia ...*

A former Stuyvesant Town resident is relishing a second chance at a life she owes, in part, to the generosity and care of her former neighbors and friends.

In the proud fashion of this community, dozens of local people and businesses rallied to help Julia Bird when she was diagnosed with Leukemia last spring.

In a flurry of activity, they raised thousands of dollars to help pay expenses to send Julia, her husband, Rich, and two young children, Amanda, six, and Alec, three, to Seattle, WA, where she would undergo a life-saving bone marrow transplant and the Hutchinson Center for Cancer Research.

In fact, the outpouring of support was such that the Julia Bird Leukemia Fund was able to help other leukemia patients and today, Julia is not only making a remarkable recovery, she is counseling other leu-



**CELEBRATION OF LIFE** - Julia's 33rd birthday fell on the same day as her life-saving bone marrow transplant. Her nurses in Seattle bought her a cake to celebrate. They were later delighted to wave goodbye to Julia when she returned to her husband Rich and her children Amanda and Alec. Her mother-in-law, Rita, said, "Julia's husband and the nurses bought the cake because it was her brand new birthday — thanks to the bone marrow transplant, she was getting a brand new life.

kemia patients who are traumatized by their diagnoses and upcoming treatments.

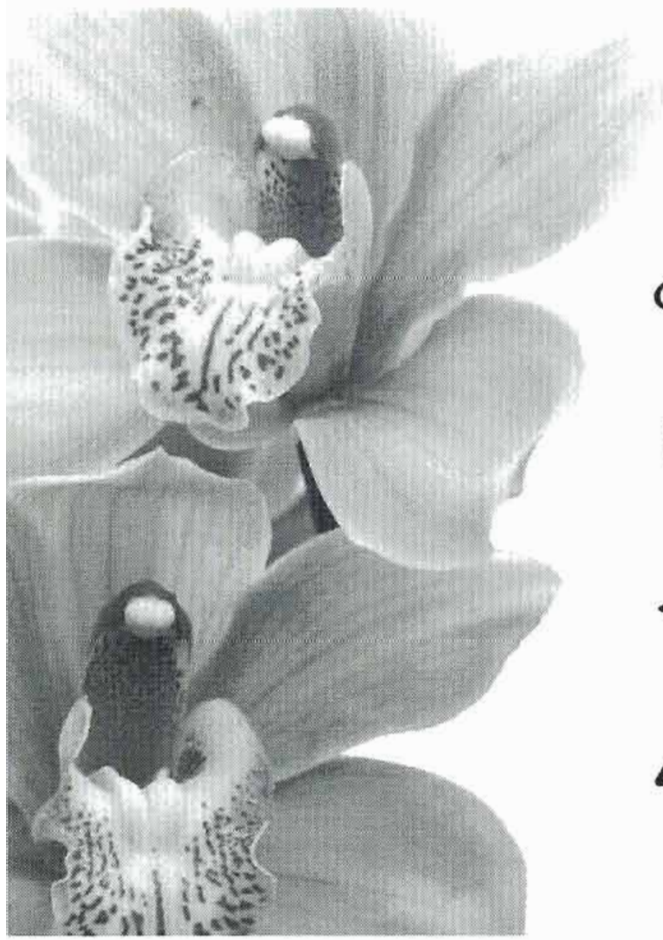
"I think that giving en-

couragement to these people by sharing my own experiences will be my life's work," said Julia, a former Stuy Town resident who now lives in New Jersey.

The Fund was initially set up last August when local individuals and businesses responded to a call for help from Julia's parents-in-law, Dick and Rita Bird, who live in Peter Cooper Village. They organized a whole se-

ries of fundraisers, not least of which was a benefit party in the Gramercy Park Hotel.

The party helped boost the Fund to a staggering \$93,000 which helped Julia and her family get through her successful bone marrow transplant and also helped several other leukemia patients. As the Fund prepares for its second annual fundraiser, again being held at the Gramercy Park



# *In Support of the Julia Bird Leukemia Fund.*

**△NewYork Blood Center**  
Managing Gifts – Saving Lives  
[www.nybloodcenter.org](http://www.nybloodcenter.org)

## **You Can Give Someone the Chance of a Lifetime**

If you've read Julia's letter to her anonymous bone marrow donor on the facing page, then you can realize the value of becoming a bone marrow donor.

A simple blood test will reveal if you are a tissue match for someone whose life depends on a lifesaving transplant.

*Julia has her chance for a cure because a young man in Germany joined his local bone marrow registry. You could be the very person that a child or adult in need of a transplant is desperately awaiting.*

One of the many missions of The Julia Bird Leukemia Fund is to help other leukemia patients get the same chance for a cure that Julia's bone marrow donor provided for her. It is her wish that all able persons consider becoming a bone marrow donor.

*THE JULIA BIRD LEUKEMIA FUND ANNOUNCES THAT YOU CAN JOIN THE NATIONAL MARROW DONOR PROGRAM AT A WHOLE BLOOD DRIVE ON:*

**SUNDAY, OCTOBER 17, 1999 FROM 10AM TO 3PM  
AT CENTRAL SYNAGOGUE, 123 EAST 55TH STREET**

*For more information, please call 1-800-NY-BLOOD, Extension 2*

