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### Twins born with deadly disorder meet woman who gave them life-saving bone marrow transplant



A pair of 3-year-old identical twin sisters in Canada on Wednesday got the chance to meet the woman who saved their lives with a bone marrow transplant after the girls were born with a life-threatening genetic blood disorder.

Zoey and Zayne Espayos were born with alpha thalassemia (hydrops fetalis), which renders red blood cells incapable of producing hemoglobin, a protein that carries oxygen to cells throughout the body, according to a news release.

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The Espayos twins underwent a blood transfusion in utero as well as after birth, and received a bone marrow transplant from their older sister Zoey— a donation their bodies rejected.

The twins' parents, Reina and Mark Espayos, found a match for the girls through DKMS, a nonprofit that recruits bone marrow donors and raises funds to match donor registration costs.

DKMS identified Orange, County, California, resident Judiel Ennis as a perfect bone marrow match for the twins. She hopped on a plane to Pennsylvania, where her bone marrow was extracted in a surgery that lasted less than one hour.

Ennis helped save their lives, and the feat marked the first time identical twins were cured of alpha thalassemia through a bone marrow transplant, according to the release.

On Wednesday, the Espayos family flew to Lake Forest, California, to meet Ennis in person.

“I don't feel like anyone should be thanking me,” Ennis told the Orange County Register. “What I did was what I hope anyone else would do. All it takes is a swab to save a life, and in my case I got to save two.”

But Reina insisted her gift was important.

“She's the second mom now,” said Reina, according to the release. “She gave life to my daughters.”

According to DKMS, 30 percent of patients with blood disorders are able to find a matching donor in their families, but 70 percent must rely on donations from strangers.

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