

September 10<sup>th</sup>, 2016

### **Cancer-stricken 9/11 hero Jimmy Martinez beating the odds with signs of remission — but taking nothing for granted**

By Ginger Adams Otis



Jimmy Martinez, with wife Maria, at the couple's Staten Island home. (TODD MAISEL/NEW YORK DAILY NEWS)

He survived two terror attacks at the World Trade Center, stared down Hurricane Sandy from his Staten Island home, and now retired firefighter Jimmy Martinez is about to vanquish his biggest foe yet — bone marrow cancer.

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The 56-year-old survived a grueling six months of chemotherapy treatments, recuperated from brain lesions and received a miracle donation in April of new stem cells.

The surgery was declared a success, and while the retired firefighter is still in the recovery stage, he's showing signs of having kicked his cancer into remission — including regaining some much-needed weight.

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“I'm doing okay, I take nothing for granted. There is no cure for my cancer, multiple myeloma, but it can go into remission. Nobody knows how long it will last — it could be five years, 10 years, or two years, but whatever it is, I'll take it,” Martinez told the Daily News from his Staten Island home

Despite the harrowing preparations required for his bone marrow transplant, Martinez said he had eagerly anticipated the procedure — and he desperately hopes to one day meet the person who gave him more time with his family.

“My donor was an international one, so by law I have to wait two years until I can meet him or her,” he explained.

“All I can say is that I'm here today because one person cared enough to give a little piece of themselves, and save a stranger's life,” he said.

Martinez's future looked bleak before he got his lucky break in April.

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Martinez (far l.) with other firefighters during the Ground Zero recovery process. (TODD MAISEL/NEW YORK DAILY NEWS)

A proud dad of three and grandfather to two, Martinez had been fighting his multiple myeloma cancer tooth-and-nail since getting his diagnosis three years ago.

The 26-year veteran, who was on the job in 1993 when terrorists bombed the World Trade Center and returned there again on 9/11 and for weeks after, launched an all-out campaign to find a stem cell donor match.

But as a first responder, he couldn't help but save a few other people along the way.

During his tireless efforts to get people to sign up to DKMS.org, the world's bone marrow center, Martinez registered more than 2,000 new names.

He paid particular attention to recruiting in Hispanic communities, in part because that was likely to yield the best match for him, but also because only 7 to 10% of all donors are Hispanic, he said.

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“My match could have come from anybody, but my chances were higher among Hispanics, given my Puerto Rican heritage. But not many Hispanics register, and there are a lot of sick people that could use the same help I got,” he said.

Of the roughly 2,000 people Martinez signed up, 16 have already been matched to other patients and given life-saving donations, said DKMS co-founder Katharina Harf.

“Obviously Jimmy’s story has really touched my heart, he’s been ill for several years and he’s what we always hope for — a happy ending,” Harf said.



Martinez has battled bone marrow cancer for years, likely as a result of his exposure to Ground Zero debris. (HANDOUT)

Martinez’s efforts — backed by his family in New York and Mayaguez, Puerto Rico, plus the Bravest in his firehouses and the FDNY top brass — helped raise awareness among the public that stem cell donation doesn’t hurt, Harf said.

“The test is just a simple swab, and if you are a match to someone, the process is very similar to donating blood. It’s so simple now,” Harf said. “We just want people to know it’s an act of kindness that can have a huge impact. It’s a beautiful thing.”

As Martinez likes to say when he makes his donor pitch, “You don’t have to be a firefighter to save someone’s life.”

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For more information on becoming a donor go to [www.dkms.org](http://www.dkms.org).

