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Remembering Bill Blair
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“I just figured you could die doing what you love or die sitting on a couch.” – Matthew Fioretti



Matthew Fioretti stands at the 17,000-foot mark on the Pumori range of the Himalayas in Nepal. His climbing days nearly ended when he was diagnosed with rare cancer.

A different kind of mountain

Cancer survivor likens recovery to mountain expedition

By Russ Zabel

Queen Anne/Magnolia News

Matthew Fioretti had it all going for him. His business, Four Winds Imports on Queen Anne Hill, was doing well, and so was his Four Winds Himalaya Guide Service, which had been mounting two climbing expeditions a year to the world's tallest mountain range.

But fate took a potentially deadly turn in August 2004 when he was diagnosed with aplastic anemia, a form of cancer that shut down his blood production. That meant his

oxygen levels were also shot, a condition he compared to being at a 23,500-foot level on a climb.

“At first, I couldn't believe it because I was in really good shape,” he said. Fioretti's state of mind suffered, as well. “I had the poor-me attitude.”

Figuring that he probably wouldn't survive the disease with that kind of thinking, Fioretti said he developed a positive attitude and started meditating.

He was also getting blood transfusions as part of his treatment. “I went a year liv-

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News

Survivor: 'Hardest climb of my life'

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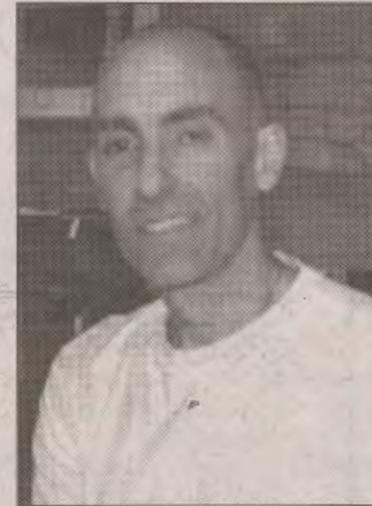
ing off blood transfusions because I really wasn't ready for a bone-marrow transplant," Fioretti said of the main treatment for the condition. "I thought I could beat it with my good attitude and meditating."

It was during the early stages of the disease when the future didn't look so bright that Fioretti went rock-climbing in Thailand. "I just figured you could die doing what you love or die sitting on a couch," he explained.

But 87 transfusions later, his doctor started pushing for him to get a bone-marrow transplant. There was a problem.

None of his family members was a match, and there were no matches in the national registry of bone-marrow donors, Fioretti said.

Realizing he came from an



Russ Zabel-Queen Anne/Magnolia News

Matthew Fioretti owns Four Winds in Queen Anne.

Italian family background, someone at the Seattle Cancer Care Alliance got the bright idea of checking the registry in Italy and found two matches for him. Fioretti smiled.

The bone marrow was harvested in Italy and flown to the University of Washington Medical Center, where Fioretti was already receiving chemo treatments in preparation for the transplant, he

said.

Fioretti got the bone-marrow transplant on Oct. 4, 2005. "Within five days I was producing my own blood again," he said. His prognosis is good. The disease stays in remission for 99 percent of those who receive the transplant, Fioretti said.

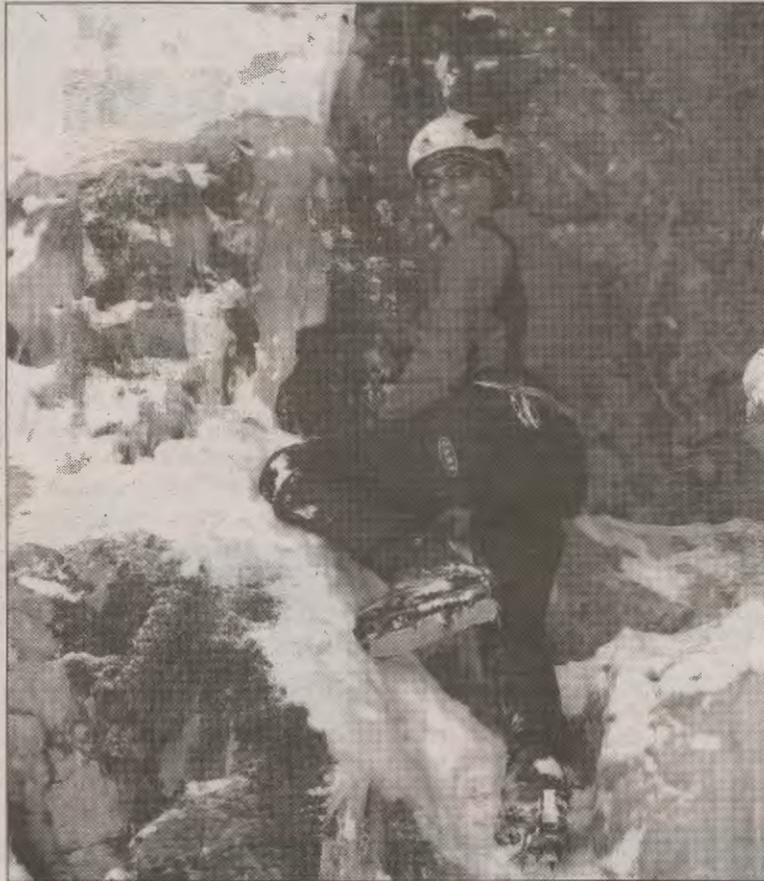
Still, it was a tough go. Fioretti likened his battle against aplastic anemia to a mountain-climbing expedition.

"It was the hardest climb of my life." It was also one of the most expensive.

Even with insurance, Fioretti was saddled with \$90,000 in medical bills, he said.

Fioretti is helping spread the work about donor registries, too. He gave a talk about that and presented a slide show of his Himalayan tours at REI's flagship store on June 19.

Two people signed up for a trek; but 28 signed up to be on the bone-marrow register, the cancer survivor said. All it takes to be on the register is a cheek swab, he added.



Courtesy

Matthew Fioretti digs into the side of a mountain on one of his Four Winds expeditions. Fioretti survived a bout with cancer thanks to a marrow donor in Italy.

Mural: 400 signatures gathered

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But one thing he didn't change was a mural of a 1954 Texaco station artist Jack Vestal painted on a wall at the business in 1994. Kastner didn't

that was the key, he said.

The use of logos and trademarks is allowed if they're in a piece of art, he explained. "It's a fair-use exception, and that's a work of art," Vestal said of

this site. The business now operating on this site is not associated with Texaco or its successors."

The letter also indicates the

