

Giving blood isn't so bad

By Sarah Sobanski

I've never given blood before, have you?

Canadian Blood Services hosted a blood donations clinic May 8 at Bancroft's legion. I attended. Now my blood is on a truck somewhere I'd imagine ? I don't know how OK with that I am. It's a little unsettling, though it shouldn't be. The value of the donation outweighs the procedure to give it. According to the organization, up to five donors can be needed for heart surgery or cancer treatments. As many as eight donors a week can be needed for a leukaemia patient and 50 for victims of a car crash. Considering a donation is only a pint of blood, which you can naturally replace, it seems only fair to give. One day you might end up in a hospital bed needing blood.

So there's the first step, finding out why it's important to give blood. The next is walking to Station Street to pass through the legion doors.

A selection of good-natured volunteers and nurses are going to get you prepped for a health examination. If you're a first time donor like me, they'll give you a sticker that says you're a first time donor, and to be nice to you. If you're also like me, with a stream of long hair that's always complicating everyday activities, don't move that sticker from over your heart when it gets tangled in your hair. I took mine off and stuck it elsewhere thinking it was a ?gold star? for giving blood. Turns out it actually warns the nurses that you're a first time donor. Why is it glares from nurses are so reminiscent of mother's scolding their children?

Next, you fill out a questionnaire that seems very obscure and scares you a little bit ? were you in this country during these years? My assumption is that's for disease outbreaks, and if you were in the vicinity of these outbreaks. Blood services says on their website, ?The screening process is lengthy and may seem intrusive, but it is absolutely necessary to safeguard the blood supply by screening out people who are at greater risk of transmitting infections through their blood. The criteria we use to determine donor eligibility are based on scientific knowledge of risk factors.?

Upside, they send you a donor card with your blood type on it. That's always fascinated me. You can check on the blood.ca website which blood types are in demand and what types your type can be donated to. According to blood services, about 100,000 new donors are needed every year to meet demand ? that's even though ?Canadians are some of the most loyal donors in the world, donating more than two times per year on average.? Men can donate blood every 56 days and women can donate every 84 days. After that the nurses prick your finger to test the iron in your blood. They also check your blood pressure.

I was speaking with a couple that had been donating together for years. The woman had given blood 30 times since she was legally allowed to give blood ? age 17. Her husband joined her in giving blood. She affectionately called it ?date night in Bancroft.? She argued the finger pricking hurt more than actually giving the blood. It happens about as quick as a stapler, so really how bad can any of it be? Convinced to become a donor yet?

While you're waiting for your number to be called you can talk to the nurses and volunteers. One told me this week's team was from Peterborough. They started at 11 a.m. and wouldn't be home until after 8 p.m.

These volunteers work long and hard for our blood. Much longer than the 10 minutes you're strapped up into a chair for. It's easy to tell why when blood donations can save a life.

I also asked my nurse if there were any health benefits to giving blood. She said, ?It's like getting an oil change.?

You should drink lots the day of a donation. Tea and coffee don't count ? there goes three of my six to eight glasses of fluids. You can't participate in strenuous activity for six to eight hours afterwards. Also, they have the good cookies and juice waiting for you. Peek Freans with the jam circles in the middle? The best.

There you go, easy as that. The next blood donation clinic is in Bancroft July 3. Be sure to sign up ? the clinic denies walk-ins if they get behind. See you at the one after that!