Richard Freund—not one to back away from a challenge

BY JUDIE JACOBSON

A renowned archeologist and director of the University of Hartford’s Maurice Greenberg Center for Judaic Studies, Richard Freund has led countless excavations over the years in the volatile Middle East. While there, he has unearthed antiquities in the caves of Qumran, site of the Dead Sea Scrolls; uncovered a treasure trove of ancient “secrets” at the nearby Cave of Letters; and discovered awe-inspiring artifacts in the town of Yavne, the spiritual center of rabbinic Judaism.

Because Freund is accustomed to venturing into perilous places, it was no surprise that, upon being diagnosed with late-stage acute myelogenous leukemia in early 2004, he approached it as simply one more dangerous road to be traveled.

“I was in Israel with students excavating and I could barely move,” recalls Freund. “By the time I got to the hospital at the end of January 2004, they were surprised I was still walking around.”

And so began Freund’s race against time. Doctors told him his only hope of survival was a bone marrow transplant, but no family members were a good match. Freund began to get his affairs in order.

Then, on March 24, 2004, an e-mail from the Dana Farber Cancer Center popped up on the professor’s computer. A perfect match had been found through the national donor registry, Gift of Life. On July 4, 2004, Richard Freund received the transplant that would literally save his life.

In May 2007, Freund was guest speaker at the Seventh Annual Partners for Life Gala of the Gift of Life Bone Marrow Foundation in New York. In 2008 he plans to continue excavating in Egypt. Best of all, in 2009 he will celebrate with family and friends when the youngest of his three sons marks his bar mitzvah at an archeological site in Israel. Among those on hand to join in the celebration will be someone very important to Freund and his family—the young man who made it all possible.

To learn more about the Gift of Life Bone Marrow Registry, visit www.giftoflife.org.
I stood on top of a mountain in the southern Negev that I think is the true Mount Sinai. . . . I had to think to myself, as I have every day, “What would have happened if a donor had not been found?”

— RICHARD FREUND