

# A Story About an Anteater and Momma

By Julie Littman

Staff Writer

Alumna Liz Holzemer never knew that life after UC Irvine would include neurosurgeons and brain tumors. After being diagnosed with meningioma, a common primary brain tumor, on Feb. 3, 2000, her life took a dramatic turn.

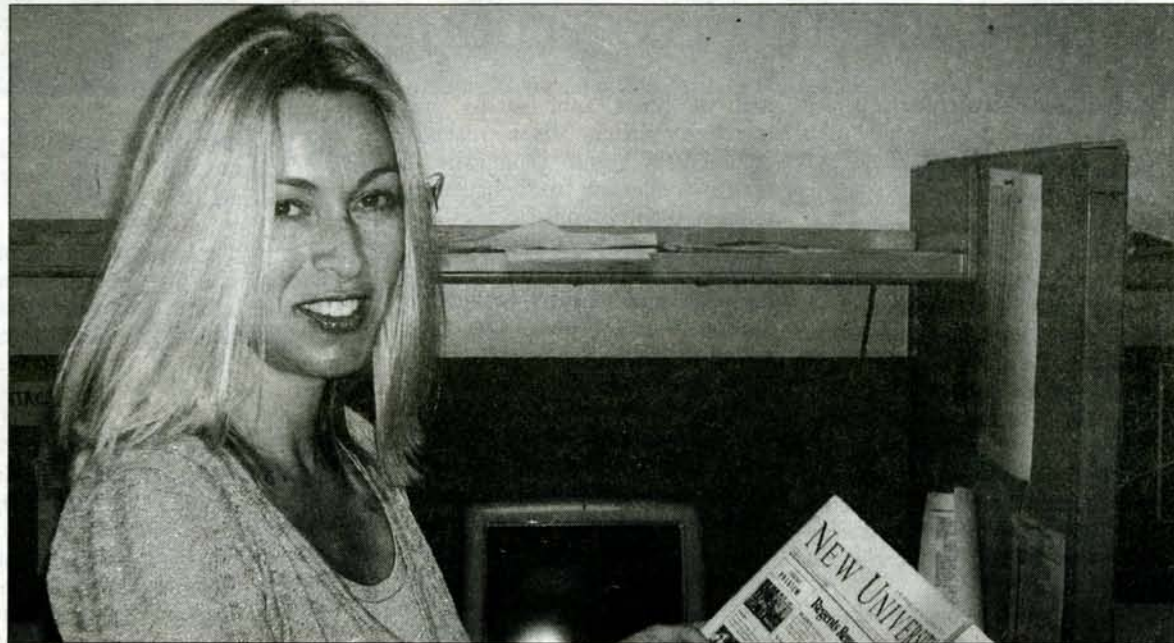
Holzemer, a former Features editor of the New University, graduated from UCI in 1991 with an English degree and went on to become a freelance journalist. When she and her husband wanted to start a family, she wondered why she wasn't able to get pregnant. After experiencing frequent migraines, déjà vu sensations and swooshing sounds in her ear, Holzemer started to put things together about her body using her skills as a journalist. Despite the fact that her doctors first thought she was depressed and gave her Prozac, she said that she pressured

her doctors to do an MRI.

The results of the MRI revealed that she had a baseball-sized tumor pushing up against her "right optical nerve, carotid artery and sinus cavity." She said that her doctor couldn't believe that she was able to walk into his office without already having slipped into a coma.

"This was life-altering news," Holzemer said. "At the time I thought it was a death sentence because here I'm trying to have children and I'm told instead that I have this baseball-sized brain tumor, which was life-threatening," Holzemer said.

Surgeons removed her tumor a week later. Although the tumor is gone and she may look healthy, Holzemer still feels the effects of this diagnosis. Holzemer takes medication to prevent seizures and goes to doctors appointments "every



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Liz Holzemer, a UC Irvine alumna and meningioma tumor survivor, started an online support group called "Meningioma Mommas" for women suffering with meningioma.

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other week.”

She finds many ironies within her experiences. She said that despite the first three letters of meningioma being “men,” this type of brain tumor affects mostly women. Even though meningiomas are the most common primary brain tumor, hardly anyone knows about them. And although her doctors said she might never write again and couldn’t have children naturally, she proved them wrong.

“It was my kick-ass way to say despite this meningioma, I became a mom and I can still continue to be a journalist,” Holzemer said.

Soon after her surgery, Holzemer started to meet many other people, including two of her neighbors, who had this tumor. After realizing how common this tumor is, she wanted to try and do something to help others.

About three years ago, Holzemer went out to lunch one day and started scribbling down ideas about how to create an online support group. Since she had recently become a mother, she called the group “Meningioma Mommas.”

She ended up creating an international support group where people with this tumor can talk to each other and share their experiences.

“[Members] feel like it’s a home

and they feel safe there. They can talk about it and have their bad days,” said Lindy Klarenbeek, executive director of Meningioma Mommas based in Australia. “I don’t think you can overstate how important [the support group] is.”

Meningioma Mommas has also worked hard toward creating better awareness about this disease.

“I want to become the face of meningioma brain tumor,” Holzemer said, “and hopefully do what Christopher Reeve did for spinal cord injuries and what Michael J. Fox did for Parkinson’s. That’s my legacy at UCI. That’s my lifetime goal in addition to raising much needed funding for research.”

So far, Meningioma Mommas has raised \$20,000.

“My lifetime goal is to raise a million, if not more,” Holzemer said.

Currently the organization has over 2,000 members. Each day they receive five to six member requests.

As for her ties to the O.C., Holzemer said that she tries to visit her family in Tustin a couple of times a year and often visits campus.

“I haven’t been on campus for a good year-and-a-half, two years, and wow, I almost got lost,” Holzemer said.

When Holzemer was a student at UCI, her experiences were positive even if many of her classes were

challenging.

“I enjoyed the fact that you could take critical analysis but then on Tuesday nights I’d have a creative poetry course with a distinguished professor. I really appreciated that they could bring in this worldwide talent,” Holzemer said.

Even though doctors said that her tumor started growing around the time she was a student at UCI, she had no symptoms then.

When asked what she would tell students who are experiencing a devastating illness or something difficult, she said, “Allow yourself to have a pity party. ... There’s days when you’re not going to feel like yourself. Embrace it, it’s all right.”

As advice to students who are graduating this June who might not know what to do with their lives, Holzemer said that even she wasn’t ready to start her writing career right away. She took some time off, worked at the registrar’s office for two years after graduation, interned at a local magazine, backpacked through Europe for a summer and then went to receive her master’s degree in journalism.

“Go off on your own’ is what I would tell people. Get outside your safety box,” she said.

Klarenbeek agreed with Holzemer’s sentiments and added, “Life has a way of steering you in the right direction one way or another.”



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Liz Holzemer, former Features editor of the New University, graduated with a degree in English in 1991 from UCI and is now a freelance writer.