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A Screw Loose



by Liz Holzemer

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Before The Sun Rises

It was six years ago this week, but it still feels like *that* morning. A damp, cold, gray, Colorado winter morning when the sun had yet to rise and peek through my shutters stirring me from sleep. Instead, the high pierced shrill of a phone performed the sun's daily ritual.

With receiver pressed firmly against my ear, an uneven, sterile voice greeted (if you could call it that) me. The unfamiliar, gravelly voice delivered a fate I still carry to this day and will until my last breath.

It only took four words.

"You have a meningioma," the hollow voice uttered.



“A whaaaat?!” I stuttered back.

“**A BRAIN TUMOR,**” the voice continued, sending chills down my spine.

How do you even spell that? I wanted to know as I desperately rifled through my nightstand drawer in search of a pen, a pencil—ah, heck my Mac Spice lip liner would do.

Men-in-gioma sounds more like a group of guys test-driving the latest foreign import, with all the bells and whistles, not to mention the 2.9% available financing option.

If only it could have been that simple.

The line went dead.

But surely it was me who was dead. I had become that damp, cold, gray Colorado winter morning.

Just hours later, I sat in horror as my newly appointed neurosurgeon explained the MRI I’d had the night before. Never-before-heard terms soared over my head.

Middle third sphenoid wing meningioma.

Cavernous sinus.

Lateral ventricular compression.

You’d have to be a brain surgeon to understand any of this stuff. Thankfully, the man in the overly starched, white lab coat standing in front of me was.

I forced myself to look at the snapshots of my illuminated brain. Images of a baseball-sized mass glared back at me in defiance. My husband was a major league ballplayer at the time, but I never imagined I’d be looking at the equivalent size of one in my head. Surely there had been a mix up. I was healthy, only 32 and trying to start a family. Maybe this explained my struggles to become pregnant the past year.

“You’ve probably had this tumor for over a decade,” my neurosurgeon solemnly announced.

“A decade!” I choked. I had had a “roommate” living

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*Comments From
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*Livin' In My Head

*Sigh, Moan &
Garbuckle

*Don't Get Me Started

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*Blissfully Numb

*Mommy Chronicles

*Domestic Engineering



inside of my head for 10 years? The only roommates I ever recalled having were back in college and graduate school, who shared their English Lit notes with you and gave you aspirin and a glass of water after a night of one too many beers.

I couldn't get out of my head the *Kindergarten Cop* scene in which Arnold Schwarzenegger shouted, "*It's not a tumor!*" I so wanted to believe this. But this wasn't a fictional movie.

It was real life and it was mine. Surgery would be long and risky, but I didn't have a choice. Just eight days later I underwent 9 hours of delicate surgery to remove the roommate that had invaded my brain and my life.

I was well on the path to recovery when another blow sucker punched me. An oozing orifice led to emergency surgery—my second in just four months. Would I ever heal or had a brain tumor diagnosis forever altered the Liz I once knew?

Despite my resolve it proved tough to heal once again and doctors remained skeptical I could become pregnant, save for adoption or IVF.

It was a miracle that I'd survived two brain surgeries, but my greatest miracle arrived Sept. 6, 2001, when my daughter, Hannah was born. And on April Fool's day 2004, my second miracle, Hunter, debuted a month early. Both naturally. I owe my life to them for had I not been trying to have Hannah and Hunter, you wouldn't be reading this today.

And I'm no longer afraid of phone calls before the sun rises.

***College Daze**

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Liz Holzemer is the founder of Meningioma Mommas.org, an online support group she founded after surviving a baseball-sized meningioma brain tumor. She is a freelance writer, LizHolzemer.com and is currently looking for a permanent home and cushy advance for her book; *I Have a What in My Head?!* Liz is a 2004 Woman's Day "Women Who Inspire Us" recipient. She lives in Colorado with her husband and their two miracle children. Liz also maintains her sense of humor on a daily basis and can



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be reached at lizholzemer@comcast.net if you have a plum writing assignment to offer her.

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