

K.C.'s Write For You

K.C.'s Write For You is a blog about the freelance writing life from the perspective of a stay at home "mom" of 3 dogs, 2 cats and a husband.

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This Author Hits Curveball Out of the Park

Today, I interviewed Liz Holzemer, author of "Curveball: When Life Throws You a Brain Tumor." Liz's humorous and thoughtful account of surviving a brain tumor is a lesson in life for all of us. As writers, she shows us how to write about a personal challenge with wit and wisdom and in this interview, tells how she built a platform and whether her husband's 'celebrity' as a former major league baseball player has helped her book:

Tell us about yourself.

I'm a freelance writer, mother of two miracle children, former baseball wife, and Southern California transplant who has called Colorado home for 14 years now. After surgery I let go of my Type-A personality. I love spontaneity and my favorite possessions are my Passport and well worn digital camera. Did I mention I also have a wacky sense of humor to boot?!

Tell us about your book.

Curveball: When Life Throws You a Brain Tumor is a candid account of my brain tumor journey. It's a screwball mix of everything—humor, agony, triumph as well as a one-stop shopping resource guide.

How difficult was it to make the decision to write about such a personal experience?

It was a no brainer! I'd always written about other people's stories, especially those with health challenges or illnesses so I felt I knew the right questions to ask of myself. A year after my surgery I wrote the Cliff Notes version of my story, entitled *Second Chance* I was shocked when it was turned down by every major women's magazine considering the type of tumor I had—meningioma—predominantly affects women. I finally convinced one of the local papers in Denver to publish it. I promised myself if I emerged from those double OR doors alive, I would share my story in an effort to raise awareness of this under funded and neglected devastating disease.

You were told at one point that you may never write again. Did this negative comment make you more resolved and did it factor into your decision to write the book?

Writing is who I am and to struggle the way I did with words after surgery truly frightened me. I liken it to telling an artist he or she could never create another drawing or painting. Nearly 15 years ago I made a New Year's resolution that I would write a book before my 40th birthday. I feel fortunate that not only did I finally fulfill this resolution, but saw it in print before my self-imposed deadline. I always knew I wanted to write a book, I just never thought it would be a brain tumor that would lead to my first book.

You also have a website dedicated to supporting people diagnosed with brain tumors. Did this come before the book idea and if so, did it help you establish your expertise in

the eyes of your publisher?

It wasn't until after my daughter's 1st birthday that I realized I had yet to process and digest the emotional impact of my brain tumor diagnosis, surgeries and recoveries. That's when I knew I truly needed support and decided to establish my non-profit, Meningioma Mommas (www.meningiomamommas.org) with its unique 24/7 online support group.

Of course having my foundation certainly played a role in convincing my publishers to take me on, but I was also fortunate to score quite a few major publicity appearances including the Today Show, Discovery Health Channel, not to mention being honored for my work by Woman's Day and the Tim Gullikson Foundation. All this most definitely helped in regards to building that authors' platform publishers are after.

How did you find your agent/publisher?

I queried agent after agent until I had several bites and was asked to send my proposal. From that the field of competition became increasingly narrowed. I signed with an agent who was initially very enthusiastic, but after a year's time we amicably split after she said she couldn't find a house with enough interest in my book. I knew the odds were stacked against me and I was about to go down the self-publishing route when a close friend encouraged me to query publishers directly. Thankfully I did and found one in my own backyard. And, as they say, the rest is history.

Your husband is a professional baseball player. Do you feel that being connected to a "celebrity" assisted you in getting your message out?

Actually my husband had retired years before I began writing Curveball. I certainly think the irony of being diagnosed with a baseball-sized meningioma brain tumor has helped to some degree. I have yet to come across another pitcher's wife with a baseball sized tumor. However, in the grand scheme

of professional athlete celebrity status, I have no doubt if I was married to a Derek Jeter or a Barry Bonds, I would have landed on Oprah by now.

How did humor play a role in your recovery and eventually find its way into your book?

Humor plays an integral role of my genetic makeup. There's no way around it! I've always prided myself on having a great sense of humor and there's no denying it became even more evident when my team of neurosurgeons tightened up the quirky bolts.

Making yourself the object of a joke or a good rib definitely opens up the door. It's why I've included a Tumor Humor section on Meningioma Mommas. Upon first hearing I'm a brain tumor survivor, a typical reaction is one of seriousness and unease. As soon as I crack the first joke, the guard is instantly let down and that's when the real dialogue begins. Humor is not only an ice breaker, but a reminder that sometimes you have no choice but to laugh. Judging by the feedback I've received so far, I think I've achieved that fine balance between a serious subject and using humor as a coping tool.

Tell us what is the most challenging aspect of writing about such a serious illness. It's also a fine balance between sharing my story without scaring the living daylight out of someone at the same time. However, I knew I had to tell my story. Not only was it cathartic to put those feelings on paper, I feel it's my responsibility to touch at least one life in a hopefully positive manner

What do you want your readers to take away from your book?

To soften the shock for anyone diagnosed with any type of brain tumor and to provide hope and practical advice. Curveball also delivers the message that you have to be your own advocate because

no one else will go to bat for you. We have to trust that inner voice each of us possesses. It's a lesson anyone can grasp and apply to his or her life regardless of the situation.

What's next for you?

I hope to celebrate my “second chance” anniversary for a long, long time. I'm a seven year survivor and I hope I never fall into that high meningioma reoccurrence rate of 15-20 percent. I have a yearly MRI to monitor a suspicious area that is either residual tumor or scar tissue. I also battle with epilepsy and constant fatigue, which isn't always easy to manage with two young energetic children. Launching my one-woman brain tumor shtick. I'm still on a mission to become the face of meningioma. My ultimate goal is to bring meningioma awareness to the forefront in the same vein that Michael J. Fox has done for Parkinson's and Christopher Reeves did for spinal cord research. I've also made a life time commitment to raise funding for meningioma specific research. So far my organization has raised \$25,000 toward my \$1 million goal. I'm donating a percentage of every sale of my book to research as well.

Writing wise, I'd like to publish my collection of life essays deeply embedded with my trademark sense of humor. And then of course, I'm still waiting for Oprah or Ellen to call!

Editor's Note: Liz's website is at: <http://www.lizholzemer.com/>