

# STRIKING OUT Meningioma

by Pamela McCreary

For Liz Holzemer, baseball has been a large part of her adult life. Husband, Mark, is a pitcher who spent sixteen years playing professional baseball. For much of their married life, Liz and Mark lived and breathed baseball.

One morning six years ago, before the sun had even risen, the phone rang in their Highlands Ranch home. Liz had undergone a series of medical tests to determine the cause of her infertility. The news that the doctor delivered in the early morning hours was what they least expected. Liz was told she had a baseball-sized brain tumor, a meningioma that had gone undetected for at least ten years. Had she not been trying, unsuccessfully, to get pregnant it would have remained undetected until it manifested itself in a life-threatening way. As it was, the doctors were surprised she had not already slipped into a coma. "The neurosurgeon told Mark that it was only a matter of days before he would desperately try to shake me from sleep, but it would have been too late," Liz told me when we met for coffee.

Despite two brain surgeries and years of living with seizures and partial facial paralysis, Liz Holzemer is a cheerful, optimistic woman. Her sense of humor has remained firmly intact throughout her ordeal, which could be why she looks much younger than her 38 years. "Surviving my brain tumor enabled me to reinvent myself and my writing career," she said. A freelance writer, her agent is shopping her manuscript, *I Have a What in My Head?*, to publishers. In addition to writing serious health articles, her quirky sense of humor shines through in her weekly column, *A Screw Loose*, on her website, [www.lizholzemer.com](http://www.lizholzemer.com).



Liz with Lionel Blyden

"I struggled with words after my surgeries and I didn't know if I would be able to continue writing," she said. "But for me, becoming a brain tumor survivor has brought numerous blessings," she added with her characteristic good cheer. Not the least of which are her two miracle children.

After the surgery to remove her tumor, doctors told her that her best and only chance of ever becoming pregnant would be through in-vitro fertilization. "Nine months after my surgery I became pregnant, au naturel," she laughed. Daughter, Hannah, was born in 2001 and son, Hunter, arrived on April Fool's Day, 2004.

Liz, like many people in our community, had a life-threatening illness and battled back to good health. That alone would seem reason enough to relax. Not for Liz. Having won one battle, she has taken on another and has made it her life's mission to educate the public about the insidiousness of benign brain tumors. To that end, she began an online forum to raise awareness and funds for meningioma research. "I wish I had known what to expect before and after my surgery," she said. "I decided I wanted to create a forum where I could tell others that a brain tumor doesn't have to be a death sentence." She did just that with Meningioma Mommas, [www.meningiomamommas.org](http://www.meningiomamommas.org), a non-profit foundation with a website that is a source of comfort, information and understanding to an international community of over 1,000 "mommas and poppas" reaching Japan, Sweden, Australia, Turkey and the Ukraine, just to name a few.



Liz with her family

Since its inception in 2003, in addition to connecting people all over the world, Meningioma Mommas, has raised over \$15,000 towards meningioma-specific research. Liz has been honored with a 2004 Woman's Day "Women Who Inspire Us" award, has received Denver's NBC "9Who Care" and ABC's "7Everyday Hero" awards and has appeared on local and national television to share her story. In January she was profiled on the Discovery Health Channel's series, *Mystery Diagnosis*.

Liz Holzemer refuses to just survive, she is determined to thrive. With the ambitious goal of raising at least \$1 million for research and education, Liz shows no sign of stopping, or even slowing down. "I want to do for meningioma research what Christopher Reeves did for spinal chord injuries," she declared. And after meeting her, I have no doubt she will. ■