

## Success of *Modern Medicine*

**R**ochelle Santiago forced her eyes open. She could see a man standing over her bed, but in the glare of the fluorescent hospital lights . . .

Who is it? she squinted. And what's he saying? Then, blinking away her grogginess, Rochelle saw him clearly: her parish priest, his head bowed in prayer.

Oh God, they think I'm going to die! the 43-year-old Nacogdoches, Texas, mother of two shuddered.

Rochelle hadn't worried when, a few days earlier, she got a pounding headache. After the weekend she'd just had . . .

A college football coach's

In football, it's called a Hail Mary pass. With just seconds on the clock, it's one desperate, last-ditch effort to pull off a seemingly impossible win. That's what Rochelle Santiago was going for. And as a football coach's wife, she knew her chances were slim. But she had to go for it. Rochelle was playing for her life . . .

# Rochelle's incredible victory

wife and the mother of a high school quarterback, Rochelle had spent the weekend cheering at back-to-back football games.

In between, she'd prepared a lecture for the health class she taught at the local university and knocked out all the household chores.

This is what I get for trying to be superwoman, she shrugged, popping some pain relievers and

## There was only a 50-50 chance it would work, the doctor said

crawling into bed.

But even after a few days of rest, Rochelle felt like she had a jackhammer behind her eyes. "I'm sure it's just a bad migraine, but I need to go to the hospital," she told her husband, Michael, assuming she needed prescription medication.

"I'll be back in no time," she told her 17-year-old son, Dallas, and his 13-year-old brother, Tyler.

But by the time they got to the hospital, Michael had to carry Rochelle into the ER.

And after a CAT scan, "You have an aneurysm behind your left eye, and it's leaking," neurosurgeon Dr.

Mike Randle told Rochelle. "But she's so healthy and active!" Michael blurted.

"My guess is that Rochelle was born with a weak artery wall that, with time, thinned and created the aneurysm," Dr. Randle explained. Fortunately, it hadn't burst . . .

"Yet," the doctor continued. "If it ruptures, you'll hemorrhage to death."

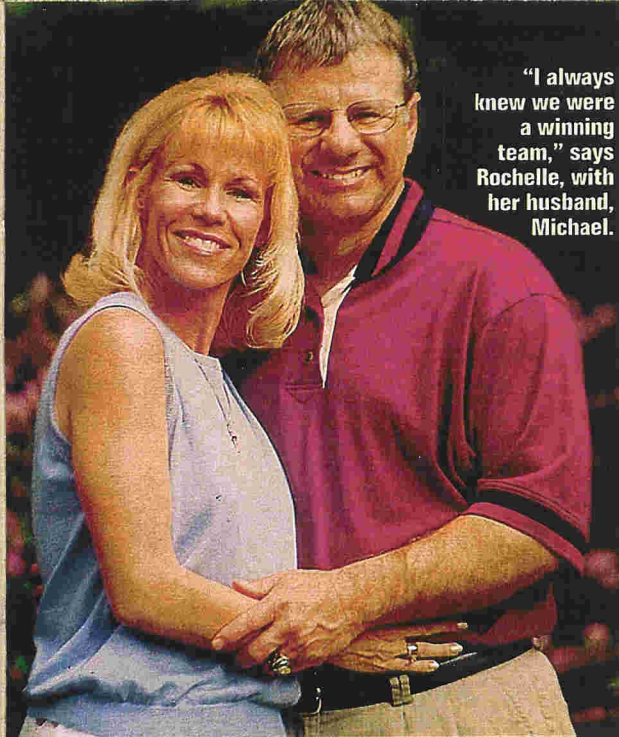
Rochelle began sobbing. Michael felt a lump forming in his throat, too. But I have to be strong for Rochelle, he told himself. And just like when he faced off on the football field . . .

"So what do we do to tackle this?" Michael asked.

"The standard treatment is brain surgery," Dr. Randle said, explaining that they'd open Rochelle's skull, go into her brain and clamp off the aneurysm.

"No!" Rochelle gasped. "I know, it's scary," Dr. Randle said. And risky.

There was only a 50-50 chance it would work, and even if it did, "There can be permanent damage to motor skills and speech," he explained. "But there is a new procedure that's less invasive. In fact, it doesn't involve cutting into the brain at all." Endovascular treatment,



"I always knew we were a winning team," says Rochelle, with her husband, Michael.

he explained, involves threading what's best described as a microscopic "slinky" up through the leg artery and into the aneurysm. Once there, the tiny platinum coils are inserted to fill the aneurysm, stopping the bleeding and stabilizing the artery walls.

There was still the chance that Rochelle could suffer a stroke during the procedure, Dr. Randle cautioned, but "It's so precise, there's no risk of brain damage."

"Do it!" Rochelle blurted. "I'm afraid I can't," Dr. Randle said. "There are only about 10 neurosurgeons in the world who can."

Rochelle would have to be moved to another facility. "But it's the way I'd go if this were my wife," Dr. Randle said.

"That's good enough for me," Michael said.

While Dr. Randle made arrangements to have her airlifted to Methodist Hospital in Houston, Rochelle was moved into the ICU. Weak and sedated, she slipped in and out of consciousness.

Each time her eyelids fluttered open, Michael would be there, holding her hand. But now, as she came to, someone had joined him.

"Your doctor called me," the priest said gently.

Rochelle looked at Michael, and he couldn't hide his fear any longer—or the

tears in his eyes.

I don't want to lose you, either, Rochelle swallowed. Squeezing his hand, she whispered, "I'm not giving up without a fight."

But then . . . "Her vital signs are dropping!" a nurse cried. "We have to move her now!" Dr. Randle shouted.

Michael's heart thumped wildly. He'd seen his share of last-ditch "Hail Mary" passes thrown at the whistle in football games, and he knew that more often than not, the game was lost anyway.

Please, God, let her live, Michael prayed as Rochelle was readied for the life-flight. But with all the medical personnel, there wasn't room for him to accompany his wife; he had to drive the two hours to Houston.

When he arrived, Rochelle

was already in the operating room, but the neurosurgeon took a moment to talk to him. "Are you sure you can do this?" Michael asked.

"Yes, but it's going to take time," Dr. Richard Klusnick said. "About six hours."

But just two hours later, Dr. Klusnick was back.

"Oh, God, she's gone!" Michael blurted.

Dr. Klusnick rushed to him. "No, relax. Everything's fine," he said. In fact, he'd never had the procedure go so smoothly!

And the tough football coach with a will of steel broke down. "Thank you," Michael wept. "You saved my wife!"

When Rochelle came to, Michael was sitting beside her, a big smile on his face. "It worked!" he beamed.

"You're going to be fine," Dr. Klusnick echoed. "A few

weeks in the hospital . . ."

"Oh, no," Rochelle interrupted. "I have my sons to raise, football games to

## "I'm not giving up without a fight," she told Michael

watch, marathons to run."

And, to Dr. Klusnick's amazement, just eight days later, she went home!

Today, a year later, Rochelle is back to teaching and, with football season back in full swing, she's once again squeezing full weeks into just days.

"It's incredible," she says. "The doctors were amazing. I feel like I've made the winning touchdown in a close game . . . thrilled, excited and very grateful!"

—Elizabeth Holzemer  
with Kathy Fitzpatrick

## Foods that keep your brain healthy

**W**ant to be more mentally alert and boost brain health? According to Gary Small, M.D., author of *The Memory Bible*, you may want to start consuming:

- **Omega-3s**, the "good" fat found in olive oil, walnuts, lean meats, green leafy vegetables and ocean-caught fish such as mackerel, salmon, sardines and trout.
- **Blueberries and tea**—both are loaded with brain-healthy antioxidants.
- **Dishes seasoned with curry or mustard**, or anything flavored with turmeric, which has powerful antioxidant and inflammatory properties.

