

Happy Ending

The ball shall weigh no less than five, nor more than 5 1/2 ounces and measure no less than nine or more than 9 1/4 inches in circumference.

—Official Rules of Major League Baseball

As the wife of a professional baseball player, I was familiar with the rule. After five years watching my husband, Mark Holzemer, a pitcher, send the five-ounce white sphere over the plate, I'd recognize the familiar size and shape anywhere—whether in a ballpark or on a shelf in our Highlands Ranch, Colorado, home.

A home run for Liz

Yet I couldn't believe the irony as the doctor showed me the MRI films of my own brain. Right there, compressing my thalamus and my brain stem, was a perfect, round sphere. But little did I imagine as I stared in horror at the baseball-sized tumor on my brain, that this nightmare would turn out to be the beginning of all my dreams coming true . . .

Like most girls, I longed to be a mommy one day. When I met Mark in my 20's, that dream took on a whole new meaning. "I can see you teaching our little boy how to throw a curve ball someday," I mused. "Girls can play baseball, too,"

I needed surgery—and soon. "It'll be okay," Mark said softly

he grinned.

As much as we both wanted children, we agreed to wait a few years. Five years after our wedding, when we threw away my birth control pills, I was beside myself with excitement. I wasn't concerned when I didn't start having periods again right away. My doctor had warned me that after so long on the Pill, it could take a while for my cycles to regulate. But after six months, I began to worry. "Your ovaries have shut down," my gynecologist told me.

"But I'm only 32!" I gulped. Still, I was hopeful when the doctor said the fertility drug Clomid might stimulate my ovaries. But it didn't work. Soon after, I was devastated when an infertility specialist told me that in vitro fertilization was my only hope of getting pregnant. Mark and I never imagined our

Staring at the baseball-sized tumor, Liz Holzemer's life—and dreams—seemed to fade before her very eyes. Little did she imagine that one day this curve ball life had thrown her would turn out to be a grand slam . . .

baby would be conceived in a test-tube. But we still agreed that when he returned from playing winter baseball in Mexico, we'd try in vitro.

When I began having headaches a few weeks later, I chalked it up to the stress of being apart. But they grew worse. By the time Mark came home that January, I began having other symptoms, too—a swishing sound in my ears and times when I'd go blank without warning.

My doctor ordered an MRI, worried I might have a tumor on my pituitary gland. "Your pituitary gland is fine," he called to tell me. "But we found a meningioma—a tumor on your brain. You need to see a neurologist immediately."

At the time, I was so stunned, I didn't ask any questions. But when Mark and I arrived at the neurologist's office, my mind was racing with fear—and questions.

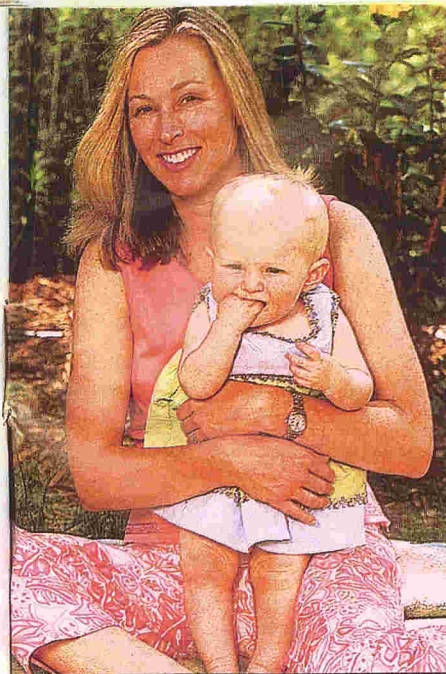
But before I could ask anything, Dr. Timothy Fullagar put my MRI film up on the screen and turned on the light. And then I saw it: a white sphere, exactly the size of a baseball, growing in the middle of my brain.

"Is it cancer?" I forced the words. "No," Dr. Fullagar said. "But that doesn't mean it's not serious." The tumor was so large, it had caused my whole brain to shift. "It's a miracle you never slipped into a coma."

The bottom line was I needed surgery—and soon. "It'll be okay," Mark said softly as we drove home.

Numbly, I nodded. Please, let him be right! I prayed.

Back home, I headed straight for the basement, where Mark kept a collection of autographed baseballs. Holding one in my hand, tears welled in my eyes. How could I ever survive



"Every time I hold Hannah, I feel so blessed," says Liz.

of having a baby.

Then one morning, six months after the surgery, I woke up having cramps. Thrilled, I called my infertility specialist right away. "I'm having a period!" I reported.

But he wasn't impressed. "Don't get your hopes up," he told me. "Having one period doesn't necessarily mean you're ovulating."

I knew he was right. But I couldn't help feeling hopeful—especially, when I had another period a month later. "This has to be a good sign!" I told Mark.

I didn't realize how right I was until . . . "I'm not feeling like myself," I told my gynecologist 11 months after my surgery.

"I'll order blood tests," she said. Just a few hours later . . . "Liz? she called. "You're pregnant!"

"Are you sure?" I gasped. "Blood tests are pretty accurate," she laughed.

Hanging up the phone, I cried tears of joy. I couldn't wait to tell

Mark. But the news threw me for such a loop that I decided to wait until I could talk to the doctor again.

"Are you sure you're looking at my test results?" I asked the next day.

"Elizabeth Holzemer," she read

"Are you sure you're looking at my test?" I asked the next day

aloud, "you're definitely pregnant!"

"I'm going to be a dad!" Mark beamed when I broke the news. Neither of us could imagine ever feeling happier! Until eight months later . . .

"She's beautiful!" Mark and I wept tears of joy as we held little Hannah. One and a half years after the miraculous surgery that saved my life, we'd been given a second miracle.

Today, I know I'm blessed. After two and a half years, there's no sign of my tumor returning. And as I watch Hannah, now one, holding one of her daddy's baseballs, I have to smile. My quest to become a mom, which led to the discovery of my tumor in the first place, has come full circle. If you ask me, this must be what it feels like to hit the winning run in the World Series!

—Elizabeth Holzemer

Have your periods stopped?

Every woman occasionally skips a period, says Elizabeth Gunther Stewart, M.D., coauthor of *The V Book: A Doctor's Guide to Complete Vulvovaginal Health*. But if you go longer than three months without one, and you're not pregnant, ask your doctor about:

- Polycystic ovarian syndrome (PCOS) if you've had trouble with weight gain.
- Early menopause if you're under 40.
- Underactive thyroid or hormone imbalances.

For more info, log onto www.thevbook.com.