

OVERCOMING CHALLENGES AFTER BRAIN OPERATION

Stacie Feldhusen

Age: 28

Residence:

Rancho Bernardo

Background: It has been about eight years since Feldhusen was diagnosed with a meningioma — a tumor starting from the meninges, which are three protective layers of tissue between the skull and brain.

Feldhusen — the mother of a 2½-year-old son, Cooper — updated for The San Diego Union-Tribune an essay she wrote in May for the [National Brain Tumor Society's annual fundraising walk](#) in this region.

My meningioma diagnosis was an incidental finding, luck.

I was 20 years old, working for one of the local doctor's offices, which just so happened to be my primary care provider's. I had him pull up my MRI (magnetic resonance imaging) results for an unrelated illness, and just for fun, we decided to look at the brain MRI.

Halfway down the radiology report, we all stopped reading as we gasped. I sat for a while taking it all in. I had headaches often, but a brain tumor? No way! I was too young for this.

I was faced initially with the standard "Why me?" reaction.

The next few weeks were a whirlwind of emotions and events. I met with my neurosurgeon, who assured me it would be an easy case. An hour-and-a-half surgery, open to close, he promised.

On the morning of June 25, 2007, I kept reminding myself as they pushed me into the stark white room covered in plastic: an hour and a half, tops, and it would all be over. Many hours later, my neurosurgeon came out to tell my family that he was finished, that I was out of surgery but the tumor was much more involved than he anticipated.

I woke up, feeling as though the worst part was over, until we discovered I couldn't move my lower extremities. I spent the next few months relearning to walk and trying to accept my new life.

Three weeks before my 21st birthday and I couldn't walk, my head was shaved bald and my face was round from the steroids. The person staring back at me in the mirror was unrecognizable.

My biggest challenge was not letting the tumor

take anything more from me.

Luckily, aside from my chronic headaches, my challenges are now almost entirely behind me. I still have some weakness in my right leg, but my body and mind have adjusted to this.

During this entire medical process, I was astonished by the amount of support I was showered with. From my family and friends to my coworkers and the surgeons, they all really accepted me at my lowest of lows and never let me give up on myself.

It was surprising to see the overall reaction from people when they saw me out in public. It was a mix between curiosity and pity, none of which I knew how to handle.

As a whole, my tumor taught me more about myself than I ever thought possible. Most important, I think it taught me to trust my perseverance amid struggles and to keep moving even when things seem hopeless.

I want the public to know that like me, brain tumor patients are not fragile creatures. We are fighters. And I want them to know that a little support goes a long way.





Stacie Feldhusen, who had surgery to have a brain tumor removed in 2007, and her son Cooper near their Rancho Bernardo home. HAYNE PALMOUR IV • U-T