

A brain tumour shaped our lives

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Meet Rick – Husband, father, grandpa and brain tumour survivor

There they sat, father and daughter, on a small gurney in a pre-op room of Windsor's hospital. Him in his tie up gown, and her with tears streaming down her cheeks kissing him goodbye before he was wheeled into the operating room.

Rick Bradt was having brain surgery. Just two weeks earlier a brain tumour was found pushing against his optic nerve.

"I remember her sitting at the end of my bed. She really wanted to be with me that day," said Rick of his then 11-year-old daughter, Elise. "I will never forget that."

And neither will she. Now 18 years later, Elise, 29, still finds it difficult to think back on that day.

"I didn't know if I would ever see him again," said Elise, "it was terrifying."

She remembers the stickers all over her dad's recently shaved head. He was joking with her about how he wouldn't let them shave his moustache (and still hasn't). But, all she could think of was the torture he was about to go through.

Rick hugged his little girl and told her, "it's going to be ok."

When someone is diagnosed with a brain tumour it doesn't just affect one person, it affects the whole family. That brain tumour sculpted the lives that Rick, his wife and their two children live today. And for all the struggles it brought to his family's life, Rick sees his journey as a gift.

"It was positive. I have a different view of things, my faith has grown, my sense of family... I am closer to

family, it's stronger than it ever was," said the now proud grandpa to a grandson.

In 2000, Rick was diagnosed with a **pituitary macroadenoma**. He underwent three surgeries to completely remove the non-malignant, yet life-altering brain tumour.

It all started when Rick's computer screen started bouncing. He was experiencing strong headaches and blurred vision and passed it off as migraines. But his vision deteriorated.

"I had just got new eye glasses and thought the doctor must have mixed up the lenses because I couldn't see," he recalled. "I couldn't drive anymore."

After several months of intermittent **vision problems**, Rick completely lost the centre of his sight in his left eye. He couldn't see anything directly in front of him, like someone's face, but could see the room around him.

Rick was referred by his optometrist to a retina specialist and then an ophthalmologist who ordered an MRI. It was then, after four to five different doctors' appointments months apart, that things really accelerated.

Within 24 hours of his MRI, the doctor called.

"It came as a shock," said Rick. He had never even thought about a brain tumour. Nonetheless, he sat down with his family to share the news.

He wrote letters to his wife, daughter and son, telling them not to open them until after his surgery.

"They were essentially goodbye letters in case he didn't make it," Elise said. "I remember feeling that, at the time, there was a real sense he wasn't going to come out of it."

But Rick was confident and said he had made peace with his situation.

He had a partial resection within two weeks of diagnosis, followed by another partial resection two years later. In 2004, he was sent to see Mr. Pituitary Tumour, a nickname given to a highly-acclaimed surgeon at Toronto Western.

“They wanted to take one more crack at it and said they would never do surgery again after this...,” said Rick, who is now tumour-free.

Elise said the subsequent surgeries weren’t as scary, given medical advancements in how the surgery is now performed.

“It went from seeming almost primitive, to today... it’s like watching an episode of Star Trek,” said Elise, who works in communications promoting medical advancements for 23 research hospitals in Ontario.

“To see the way care can be improved is almost magical,” she said. “I can only imagine what it might look like in another 18 years from now.”

Elise added, she likely never would have taken the leap into medical communications had it not been for her experience with her dad.

“I now have a deep well I can draw from on how research has changed my own life.”

Despite needing lifelong testosterone shots and instances of poor memory since his surgeries, Rick also chooses to use his experience to help others.

“I don’t worry about it coming back. I am not afraid of it anymore. What will be will be and that part is not up to me. But, if I can help alleviate others fears by talking about it, that’s what matters to me.”

Rick is an active member of the fundraising committee at Brain Tumour Foundation of Canada. He stumbled upon the foundation [website](#) in his exhaustive search for information about his tumour when he recognized a lack of awareness of brain tumours. In 2002, as managing director of A.M.A. Plastics Ltd., Rick developed a cause marketing program, raising almost \$100,000 to support brain tumour research and the foundation’s patient services.

“It’s so important to encourage people who are going through this.”

Brain Tumour Support Groups are a valuable opportunity for people with a brain tumour and their loved ones to share experiences and gain peer support in a safe and relaxed atmosphere.