

Did you know that I Survived a Brain Tumour and that I hate my Birthday?

Here is why:

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On my 18th birthday I received a phone call from an Ear, Nose and Throat specialist that I had seen just a few days before. That call was absolutely life changing, heart breaking and terrifying. During that call the Doctor let me know the results of my MRI - I had a brain tumour. Due to the tumours size, location and the liquid that had built up in my brain over the years because of it - he was sure that it needed to be removed, and quickly. Just one month and two days later it was January 12th, 1999 and I was on an operating table having that tumour removed.

“My birthday has been overshadowed by this event ever since.”

Words usually come easily to me but I have never been able to find the words to explain how terrified I was back then or the feelings I still hold about that experience. After that phone call my life as I knew it as a young woman trying to gain her foothold in the world was turned upside down. I had to stop figure skating after over 10 years of actively participating in the sport, I had to make arrangements for missing school and exams which was hard for me because I was a perfectionist when it came to achieving good grades. I was not going to have my own hair for the Formal Dance or my Sister's Wedding.

I was given impossible choices: “Choose one parent to walk into the operating prep room with you.” (how do you choose just one!?) “Do you want to take an aptitude test before and after your surgery? (to determine any loss of mental capacity)” “No thanks!” I said back then, of course, now I regret that choice.

I was connected with the Make-A-Wish foundation where I attended events with other young women who had critical illnesses. That amazing foundation granted my wish for a wig which my family could not afford. That wig meant I could cover my shaved head and scar until my hair grew-in, if I survived the surgery.

I was sure that I was either not going to make it out of that surgery alive, or - what I thought was even worse at that time - that I would wake-up not remembering anyone in my life. I made a will and I said goodbyes thinking they would be my last. The night before my surgery I had what I thought was going to be my last family meal.



Thanks to an incredible Neurosurgeon who still follows up with me to this day, I survived. I woke up from that surgery, I was SO grateful and excited to be alive in that moment, but as time progressed, life was...different.

I desperately wanted to fit in and hide what I had just gone through. I rushed back to school two weeks after my surgery hiding my scar under a wig, and I went back to work three weeks after my surgery. It wasn't “normal” to have a brain tumour at such a young age and it was such an unusual tumour to have. I couldn't find anyone to relate to, I was the odd one out. I felt so alone, awkward, so ugly and like I had become much less intelligent overnight.

Science and math came easily to me before that surgery but after it I struggled to sit through math and science classes, or any classes that weren't hands-on for that matter. I never did get back to figure skating, I tried to in University but my spacial awareness had significantly decreased, I quit the synchro skating team one day after I joined it.

Fast forward 21 years later, today, I turn 40 and I am 21 years brain tumour free. I have been fortunate enough to survive that ordeal and even though it has not been an easy journey and I had to adjust my path forward a few times, I have thrived. I have gone on to be married to a really good man and have been fortunate enough to have two beautiful children and to lead a meaningful career.

I am committed to building a loving stable family, I am committed to contributing to saving our earth through my career and I am committed to being an empathetic and compassionate leader. I commit to all of this because I am still alive and because I can achieve what is meaningful to me.

“So this year, I'm going to try to learn to hate my birthday a little less.”

My birthday wish for this milestone day is that you help me celebrate whether you know me or not - do something that you find meaningful today - because you can.