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To help the process of healing, Jeannine Walston visits a craniosacral therapist in Winchester, Va. On the eve of her surgery, Miss Walston says, she developed trust in her doctors, trust in a higher power and trust in the curative effects of the operation.

By Jeannine Walston
SPECIAL TO THE WASHINGTON TIMES

"How old will I be when I die?"

That is the question I wanted to ask God. My religion teacher squinted her eyes, and my fellow classmates wondered about about such a bizarre inquiry. We were only 8. My peers were asking questions such as, "When will I get married?" or "What will I be when I grow up?"

Last March, I began to experience significant dizziness. I went to a general practitioner and then to an ear specialist, who ordered a precautionary MRI (magnetic resonance imaging) scan. I was annoyed with the inconvenience. On March 19, the day of the scan, I was planning to leave the District in four days to work on a political campaign. But after the test, I heard words that would change my life. I had a brain tumor. That is shocking news when you are 24 years old and feeling invincible.

As I struggled to comprehend this predicament, I continued my routine. I went to work and to my karate class and socialized with my friends. The days were sometimes awkward. People did not know what to say or do. To sustain myself, I created distance from my fear. It was my way of dealing.

The process of obtaining doctors' opinions and making a decision moved very quickly. Fortunately, most of the doctors offered similar opinions and courses of treatment. My friends went with me to visit doctors and helped me clarify my options. In Ringwood, N.J., my parents conducted research into the best medical treatment. Discussing the medical details with my mom and dad removed every ounce of energy from my body.

After conversing with several specialists, I decided to have brain surgery at the National Institutes of Health. NIH is one of the world's leading biomedical research facilities that accepts patients for clinical trials. The location of my tumor made me a candidate for treatment. My date was set for April 22.

Time became an intangible entity. Support from my family and friends kept me going. My friends from the D.C. Self-Defense Karate Association had a party for me a few days before the operation. More than 20 people crowded into Sharon Mendel and Will Campbell's kitchen late in the evening for a head-shaving ceremony. Those close enough touched my shoulder and grabbed my hands. There was a lot of love in that room. I could feel it.

My parents, John and Barbara, arrived a few days before the surgery. They brought me cards and gifts from Ringwood. My friend Christine Grimby made me "Jeannine's Hospital Comfort/Anti-Boredom Kit" filled with items such as crossword puzzles and nail polish. The care and concern often became unbearable. The conversations with my parents were stiff and restrained. They were as scared as I was.

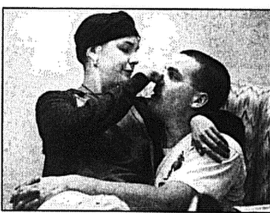
My only sibling, John, who is 21, joined us



Friends from her karate class give a party for Jeannine Walston and take turns shaving portions of her head.

Photos by Daniel Rosenbaum/The Washington Times

Brain surgery changes a young woman's outlook



Miss Walston shares a light moment with her brother, John. Doctors placed stickers on her head, and she attaches a few on her brother's head.

from Itasca College. I sometimes call him my angel of mercy.

The two days before the surgery were a blur of conversations, tests and meetings. The doctors and nurses answered all of my questions, but I could not process it all. When one of my neurosurgeons outlined the potentially debilitating risks of the surgery, I told him not to scare my family. He insisted that we all needed to know.

Less than 20 hours before my surgery, I had my last MRI scan. Lying in the MRI machine, peering out from my caged head, I felt two emotions pass through my mind: intense fear and an unshakable trust — trust in my doctors, trust in a higher power and trust in the process.

A few hours before my surgery, I sat at my hospital-room window, in the dark, looking at the sky. I was too numb to pray. When my parents and brother arrived, I battled to keep

myself composed. It was only after a morphine shot into my leg that I began to cry.

On the gurney to the operating room, my spirit seemed elsewhere. It was not the medication that overcame my body, but fear. My mom, dad and John were told they could go no farther. They kissed me, and I was wheeled to the operating room reception area. I returned to myself when I noticed parents holding their baby in his little hospital gown. I looked at them, and I knew my situation could have been much worse.

After a drug-induced sleep, I woke in the operating room for language-mapping testing. My tumor was located in my temporal lobe, the speech and memory center, and brain mapping was necessary to reduce the possibility of cognitive impairment. My doctors also were investigating the effectiveness of an

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Being truthful strengthens soul

It is sad how many folks seem to want to be trained chickens instead of human beings who can aspire toward the divine.

Case in point: A mother recently called my program concerned about the "lesson" her son was learning. She told me that she and her husband had discovered that their otherwise good 16-year-old son had broken a family rule. She said he accepted his punishment with class and seemed truly remorseful. For one month, he was not permitted any social life. Additionally, he was forbidden to play in the next three team games.

Of course, he had to explain to his coach why his parents had yanked him out of three games. The coach was respectful of his family's decision, although he was disappointed over the temporary loss of a good player. He asked the boy what the boy had done to warrant the punishment. The boy told the coach that he had drunk

alcohol with some of his buddies.

Here is where the athletic socks hit the fan. There are strict rules in the school and for the team against using drugs and alcohol. The coach informed the boy that the penalty for such a first-time offense was three weeks on the bench, which amounted to many more games missed. This is where I came in. The mother was worried that her son was learning the wrong lesson. I asked what wrong lesson that might be. She said, "That it is better to lie. Now he's got a double whammy: punishment from us and from the coach. Is that fair?"

Yes, it is fair. Unlike what we hear from liberal pundits and presidential supporters, there is very little that goes on in our private lives that doesn't affect others. They can be affected directly, as in losing a game, because a player's abilities and attitude are compromised by drugs and alcohol, or indirectly, as in

family, friends, community, school and team losing respect and support because of bad personal behavior of team members. And never mind the deaths due to overdoses and drunken driving.

It is a sad mentality that visualizes the individual as separate from everyone and everything else. This mentality has been glorified since the 1960s to excuse much bad behavior. ("What I do is my own business, and any problem you have with it is just that — your problem.") In reality, our choices have far-reaching impact in many directions.

I explained to the mother that her son has indeed learned a mighty lesson. What we do is meaningful not only to our parents and friends, who love us, but also to our teammates, who count on us, and our community, which wants to look up to us.

The son broke family rules and was punished for it by his family. He broke team rules and was punished for it by his team. He failed to live up to friends' expectations and likely will pay a price there, too, until he demonstrates he is back on track.

While that seems like bad news, it's



DR. LAURA SCHLESSINGER
Talking with Dr. Laura

Courtship can be best way to date

Q: My oldest son is approaching the age when we previously agreed to allow him to date.

The more I think about it, though, the more the whole idea concerns me. It seems that even in the best of dating situations, the negatives exceed the positives. I can't help but feel that I'm setting my son up for failure.

Several of my friends have adopted the concept of "courtship" rather than dating. Could you please explain this idea to me and suggest which of the two arrangements you favor?

As simply put, the "courtship" concept is a reaction to the dating model, which is thought by many to be unhealthy. Dating couples go through a series of short-term and often unsatisfying relationships over a period of five or 10 years or longer. They are being taught by their experiences to flit from one relationship to another like a honeybee buzzing from flower to flower.

Why would they not be inclined later to bail out on a marriage partner when bored or frustrated? Dating also encourages sexual familiarity and experimentation. It isn't difficult to understand why an increasing number of parents feel this traditional model undermines commitment, exclusivity and permanence in marriage.

The courtship model, by contrast, seeks to postpone emotional and physical entanglements until they occur with the probable husband or wife. The family is very supportive in helping to choose that special individual for a serious courtship when the time is right. Until then, relationships between the sexes are limited to group situations in carefully controlled settings.

Physical intimacy for the sake of titillation and experimentation is considered inappropriate. The ultimate goal is

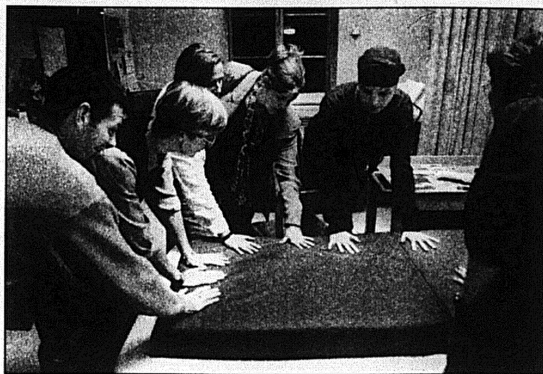


DR. JAMES DOBSON
Focus on the family

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see LAURA, page E2

The night before her surgery, Jeannine Walston and friends examine a mattress given to her by the hospital. It has a series of floating speakers inside to aid relaxation.



Barbara Walston, Jeannine's mother, practices tai chi at the hospital while her daughter undergoes a 12-hour brain operation to remove a tumor.



Barbara Walston kisses her daughter before she is wheeled away for surgery. Miss Walston's father, John, and brother, John Jr. (foreground), also are with them in the corridor.



Circular stickers that Miss Walston's doctor placed on her head before surgery show under her head wrap.

More info:

On line —

■ The Pediatric Neurology Association has a Web site with links to other sites to help parents of children with brain tumors: (<http://pediatricneurology.com/otherweb.htm>)

■ The Massachusetts General Hospital/Harvard Medical School has a Web site for its Brain Tumor Center, with excellent information on tumors, treatment and support groups: (<http://brain.mgh.harvard.edu>)

Organizations

■ The Brain Tumor Society provides research grants, educational information and support services. Telephone: 800/770-TBTS (8287) or 617/783-0340. Fax: 617/783-9112. Web site: www.tbts.org

■ The National Brain Tumor Foundation has a toll-free number that patients or families can call for support-group information: 800/934-CURE. Address: 785 Market St., Suite 1600, San Francisco, Calif. 94103. Web site: (www.brainumor.org)

■ The American Brain Tumor Association has information on tumor treatments. Telephone: 847/827-9910. Address: 2720 River Road, Suite 146, Des Plaines, Ill., 60018-4110. Web site: (www.abta.org)

TUMOR

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infrared camera to differentiate between my tumor and healthy brain tissue.

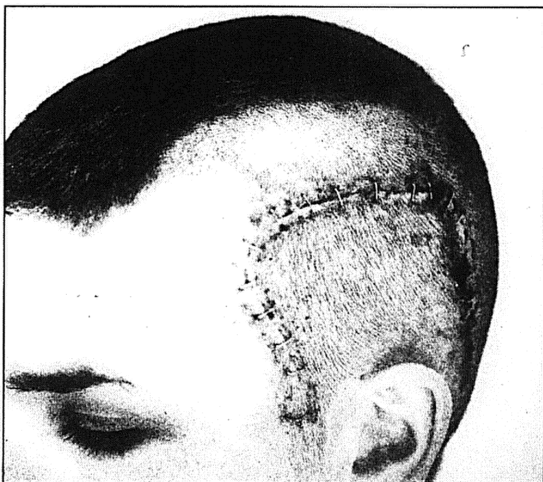
A blue sheet was draped over me. I could not feel my head. I watched a red television screen that provided the visual images for both verbal and memory testing. My role was to identify each object on the screen and also recall the previous image. I struggled to stay awake. I remember looking at the images but offering the verbal identification with my eyes closed.

During my surgery, I tried to recite a poem that I had written, titled "The Abyss." I began, "Stagnant on the surface, electrifying echoes of a dead calm." After completing the first few lines, I lost the words. I was not in pain, and I told that to my neurosurgeons while my brain was exposed to the air.

At one point, I did feel a sharp sensation in my head where doctors were working up against a large vein. As I cried out, I heard the doctors say they were finished. I quickly fell asleep.

The doctors had removed my tumor, which was the size of a thumb nail, along with one centimeter of surrounding brain tissue. It had taken 12 hours. As they wheeled my bed out of the room, one of my doctors stood at the door. I remember looking up and grabbing his hand. I don't remember if I said anything. I hope he could see the gratitude in my eyes. It was over.

In the Intensive Care Unit (ICU), I struggled for consciousness as doctors and nurses plugged me into a wall of machines. My mental and physical exhaustion only permitted a brief visit with my family. Alone, I lay in my hospital bed, my thoughts meandering. I only wanted to sleep, but my body would not allow it. I felt my shallow breathing and heard a clicking sound in my head. My entire right leg was numb.



After two nights in the ICU, I returned to my hospital room, which had accumulated more than 15 flower arrangements. Over the next week, I had a stream of visitors. Never before had I so appreciated the people in my life. I also let my family take care of me for the first time since I was a young child.

I was sent home after almost one week in the hospital. I was afraid to leave the 24-hour hospital care. Fortunately, my mom stayed in the area for two weeks to take care of me.

After less than one month, there were no obvious signs of what I had endured, other than the scar on my head. I returned

to work, and from the outside, I looked fully recovered. But I did not feel whole. I tired easily, and my brain was still in the process of rerouting. My universe had evolved with such intensity that I struggled to define the changes. I still do.

The pathology analysis labeled my tumor a low-grade glioma. I learned that the study and treatment of brain tumors is not an exact science. The diagnosis of tumor types is subjective, and there is no cure for most malignant brain tumors.

Each year, approximately 100,000 people are diagnosed with a primary or metastatic brain tumor. Brain tumors are

the second leading cause of cancer for children and young adults up to age 34. Many brain tumors, both benign and malignant, cannot be removed because of their location.

There are more than 100 different types of brain tumors. Because brain tissue is required for vital cognitive and motor skills, it is virtually impossible to remove each and every tumor cell from the brain. Unlike treatment in other parts of the body, standard radiation can be used only once on the brain, and chemotherapy has not been proved effective for most brain tumors. These treatments can have serious and permanent side effects.



A few months after surgery, Jeannine Walston (above) resumes her karate classes with optimism. A scar (left) is a reminder that surgeons removed a tumor from the temporal lobe, the part of the brain that controls speech and memory.

Four months after my surgery, I had a conversation with a neuropathologist. She reiterated what other doctors had told me: The statistics indicate that my tumor probably will return someday. But then this doctor said, "They removed your tumor and surrounding tissue. There is no evidence of further growth. To me, that means you are cured."

This was the first time I had heard such hope and optimism from a doctor. Her reassurance helped me develop the belief that my body is healthy. I remain determined to be an exception to the statistics and a survivor.

In my frailness, I discovered how to accept my vulnerabilities. To save myself, I summoned my strength to fight. To embrace the support of my family and friends, I acquired the ability to reach out. To heal, I also learned how to support myself. My brain tumor had initiated an awakening. It gave me new life.

Jeannine Walston, 25, resides in the District.

■ ■ ■ The Brain Tumor Society is sponsoring its second annual There Is Hope SK Run & Walk, to begin at 8:30 a.m. April 18 at West Potomac Park in Washington.

Former Redskins quarterback Mark Rypien will co-chair the event. His 3-year-old son, Andrew, died in August after fighting multiple brain tumors for 18 months. Brain tumors are the second-leading cause of cancer death in children and young adults, the society reports.

The society provides research grants, educational information and support services. Registration is \$15 before April 6, \$18 after and \$20 on race day. A Kids Quarter-Mile Fun Run, which is free, will take place after the main race begins. For information, call 301/871-0005 or visit the Web site (www.runwashington.com/brainumor.htm).