

A Slow-Growing Brain Tumor Changed the Life of a Seattle Artist

After surgery and proton therapy to treat a non-cancerous meningioma, Liz Rudisill learned a powerful lesson about priorities

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Interior designer and multimedia artist Liz Rudisill, age 39, and her partner Jeff, live in Seattle with their two Maltese-poodle mixes. Reluctant to see doctors, Rudisill procrastinated for an entire year while suffering multiple symptoms: unusual fatigue, a slow deterioration of her eyesight (“I just need glasses,” she thought), and even sharp but temporary pain in her eyes upon waking.

Diagnosis

She finally turned to the internet to diagnose herself, which informed her she most likely had a chronic nerve condition caused by either multiple sclerosis or a brain tumor. She decided it must be the former.

The thought of having a brain tumor started “freaking me out,” Rudisill said, so in early 2024 she first went to see her primary care physician, and then a neurologist. The neurologist was convinced it was migraines, but Rudisill disagreed. She’d had migraines before, and this was not the same. She insisted on an MRI, even while agreeing to try a migraine medication.

The same day she had the MRI, she and her partner went to pick up the prescription. She got a call while waiting in line.

“They said, ‘We found a massive tumor in your brain,’” Rudisill said. “I left the line and told Jeff, ‘I don’t think migraine meds will work.’”

Though Rudisill tries to always stay positive — joking about her situation is a common coping mechanism — she said it took a lot of support to stay positive after she learned the tumor was a meningioma. It had wrapped around her right eye socket, extending into her sinuses, prefrontal cortex and her pituitary gland, and was now encroaching on her brainstem, critical to survival.

A slow-growing non-cancerous tumor, meningioma is tied to certain hormones and is more common in women. Her doctors believed the tumor had been growing in Rudisill’s brain for many

years.

Surgery

[Manuel Ferreira, MD, PhD](#), a top expert in meningiomas, performed her surgery in May 2024 at UW Medicine's Alvord Brain Tumor Center. He was able to remove about 60% of the tumor, but the rest was too entwined with critical structures of her brain — such as the brainstem — to risk surgical removal.

"Meningiomas have the reputation of being benign, causing minimal harm," Ferreira said. "However, they can uniquely invade critical parts of the brain, the cranial nerves and the arteries that supply blood to the brain. For those tumors, surgery is more of an art form: how much of the tumor can I remove without harming the patient? It's a delicate procedure."

Unfortunately, Rudisill now experiences occasional seizures as a side effect of her surgery — the first one happened at her friend's wedding. Still, she remains positive.

After the surgery, Rudisill needed time to heal before her next phase of treatment: radiation. During this time, Rudisill and her boyfriend Jeff got married and she redesigned her whole house — Rudisill does not like to sit still. She and Jeff also decided to freeze an embryo before further treatment to try to ensure they could eventually have a baby, a common decision among patients undergoing treatment. Read more about Fred Hutch's [oncoreproduction clinic](#).

Proton therapy

A few months after surgery, Rudisill met with Fred Hutch radiation oncologist [Simon Lo, MB, ChB](#), who specializes in treating brain tumors.

"Given the location of her tumor and her young age, proton therapy can achieve optimal treatment of the tumor while minimizing radiation to her uninvolved brain and other critical structures," he said.

Rudisill was "beyond grateful."

"Between my doctors at UW Medicine and Fred Hutch, they're the most incredible care team I've ever had," she said.

Rudisill said she appreciated the proton therapy facility's peaceful environment, where she was able to meet other patients and forge some lasting friendships. And despite receiving radiation to three different spots on her brain each weekday for six weeks, Rudisill said she wasn't in the treatment room for long periods.

"For someone who doesn't like to sit still, that made a big difference," she said.

But proton therapy was not the easiest experience; she sensed a rare phenomenon while being

treated — the smell of ozone — which made her anxious.

“I couldn’t stop thinking I was being poisoned by it,” she said. “But the staff was phenomenal. The radiation therapists played calming music and chatted with me, and over time I got used to it. Their support helped me combat the negative thoughts.”

Rudisill also experienced some hair loss, nausea and fatigue. A year later, though, she said she feels “almost back to normal” except for some sensitivity to light and low energy, which keeps her from going back to work. Follow-up scans have shown no growth, and the last one even indicated that the remaining tumor had shrunk.

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<http://beta.docker.cancerhealth.com/article/slowgrowing-brain-tumor-changed-life-seattle-artist>