

Medical and Health Sciences Foundation

Your Donations Can Help Gamma Knife Patients Like Betsy

The Challenge: At her daughter's 12th birthday party at an ice skating rink, 45-year-old **Betsy Alberts** was looking after her daughter and her friends as they enjoyed maneuvering on the ice. All seemed normal, until Betsy observed an aura that she had never previously experienced. Simultaneously, she lost her ability to hear, and the world around her seemed to move in slow motion.

"I felt like I was in a tunnel, even though I was in an ice skating rink," Betsy explains. "It came on very quickly. When I tried to talk to one of my daughter's friends, I spoke like I was having a stroke."

However, the symptoms subsided as quickly as they came on, and Betsy pushed the episode out of her thoughts so she could focus on chaperoning the party. After several months, the symptoms returned. Because Betsy was otherwise a healthy, active and athletic woman, she remained unconcerned and decided to postpone seeing a doctor. It was not until she suffered a seizure in front of her husband six months after her first episode that she was finally persuaded to see a physician.

Betsy's doctor ordered an MRI, which revealed a large benign meningioma, or a tumor of the protective linings of the brain. She was advised to undergo surgery as soon as possible.

UPMC Physicians Offer a Solution

After she received her diagnosis, Betsy began researching local neurosurgeons to determine where she should get her treatment. She ultimately decided to undergo brain surgery at UPMC due to the institution's expertise in the area.

Three weeks after receiving her diagnosis, Betsy underwent a craniotomy to remove the tumor. But, because of the tumor's size and location — atop Betsy's superior sagittal sinus, the main blood vessel in the brain — doctors could remove only part of the tumor.

To further shrink the tumor, her surgeons recommended Gamma Knife® radiosurgery. The Gamma Knife is a nonsurgical device that directs gamma radiation to a precise area of the brain without damaging surrounding tissue. It is used to treat brain tumors and other neurological conditions.

"Gamma Knife has been a revolutionary technology, which has changed outcomes for patients," says Dr. L. Dade Lunsford, director of UPMC's Center for Image-Guided



Neurosurgery. "The patient has the entire procedure done in a single day as an outpatient and can return to work the following day."

Betsy opted to undergo this procedure at UPMC, as well.

"I did my research before having the Gamma Knife surgery," she says. "I got information about various hospitals and their procedures. Knowing that Dr. Lunsford brought the Gamma Knife to North America and seeing UPMC's statistics — that sold me."

Eight weeks after her craniotomy, Betsy had Gamma Knife radiosurgery to further shrink the tumor and stop regrowth. She was nervous about going

through another procedure, but the team at UPMC set her mind at ease.

"The staff's reassurance took 50 percent of my nervousness away. You do everything they tell you to do, and you get through it in one day. I had my procedure on a Thursday, and by Sunday, I was walking with my daughter through the neighborhood," Betsy says.

The Results

Ten years have passed since Betsy's diagnosis, craniotomy, and radiosurgery. Because her tumor was not fully removed, she takes anti-seizure medication to ensure she does not suffer any additional episodes.

Following her diagnosis, Betsy's priority became leading an authentic life, spurring her to make major life changes. She moved on from her prior career in sales and now works as a freelance writer. Betsy has also discovered yoga, stays actively involved in family life, and volunteers at Family House, a "home away from home" for patients and their families who are seeking medical treatment at Pittsburgh-area hospitals.

"I felt reborn," Betsy says, reflecting on her experience. "The worst thing that happened became the best thing. After my surgeries, I had more courage than ever before, and that courage only continues to grow."

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Philanthropy Accelerates Medical Innovation and Improves Patient Care

Philanthropy played an important role in both bringing the first Gamma Knife® to North America 29 years ago and supporting UPMC's initial research that demonstrated the technology's safety and effectiveness. As support for the Gamma Knife grew, doctors and scientists used these funds to refine their techniques and develop treatments for a broader range of conditions. Donations from generous donors have also enabled UPMC to train hundreds of other neurosurgeons, making the technology accessible to patients throughout the United States and around the world.

As we celebrate the arrival of the newest, most advanced Gamma Knife, we gratefully acknowledge our partnership with all those who, with gifts large and small, have helped us to advance the field of image-guided neurosurgery. Even as we proudly note our progress, however, we recognize the need to continue this important work.

"Our expertise in Gamma Knife gives us the opportunity and responsibility to continue to lead international research efforts," says Dr. L. Dade Lunsford, director of UPMC's Center for Image-Guided Neurosurgery. "By testing the limits of the new Icon Gamma Knife technology, we will define its role in addressing the future health care needs of our families and communities. Funding is currently the most significant limiting factor for this important research. This creates an urgent need for additional philanthropic support."

Spotlight on Donors

Composer and musician **Stanley Silverman** was in demand as a classical guitarist until an arteriovenous malformation in the brain halted his performing career. Gamma Knife treatment by Dr. Lunsford enabled him to regain a significant level of function and dramatically improve his quality of life.

Mr. Silverman wanted to support Dr. Lunsford's research and was able to do so through the family foundation of his son, Ben. This gift, from the Ben Silverman Foundation, was eligible for an employer match, thus doubling the value of the gift.



"The successful treatment of my condition allowed for a return to activities, which included career tributes, travel, and most important, the witnessing of family milestones.

"Our support for the UPMC Gamma Knife program is based on the belief that Dr. Lunsford's passion for training students and sharing his discoveries is essential."

— Stanley Silverman



Dr. Richard Hertzberg (above, right), a materials scientist and Lehigh University professor, suffered from trigeminal neuralgia, a painful facial nerve disorder, for years. After three procedures at UPMC provided temporary help, a successful series of Gamma Knife sessions provided lasting relief. In deep appreciation, Dr. Hertzberg and his wife, Linda, began to make annual gifts to support research at the University of Pittsburgh. In 2013, he and his wife formalized an estate plan to provide additional support to this research. The medical attention that Dr. Hertzberg received at UPMC enabled him to continue his award-winning teaching, research, and writing career.

Customizing Your Gift

If you are considering making a gift to support Gamma Knife research, our Medical and Health Sciences Foundation staff is ready to assist you. We look forward to providing you with convenient gift forms, postage paid reply envelopes, credit card options, and practical information about tax-wise philanthropy. For further information, please contact Heather Mason at **412-647-4241** or mheather@pmhsf.org.