



"The Gray Matter" is a monthly publication of WNC Brain Tumor Support.
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George Plym is an 11-time brain tumor survivor. He is the founder and president of WNC Brain Tumor Support.

From the desk of George....

A lot has happened in one month. Some of it good, but some of it bad. I will start with the bad. You know, there is a saying that says "in everyone's life some rain will fall." There is also another saying, "when it rains, it pours." Well, this month the rain came in buckets! I guess it started with the passing of our dear friends Mary C. and just after we got over the shock of losing her, David Abbey died as well. It was a great memorial for Dave and his wife. Lisa was a very strong. She told me that Dave was now in a better place. She also said that Dave went very peacefully. That was somewhat comforting to know. For the ones that don't know or remember Dave, he was diagnosed with the AA3 about 10 years ago, had a recurrence recently that turned out to be a GBM and died. Those are the two most devastating events to all of us at WNC Brain Tumor Support.

I guess the small things that have really been bugging me are nothing compared to that. Nonetheless, it is frustrating when you're computer crashes and you lose all of your valuable stuff in your computer. That's what has happened this month. Then the old oak tree in my backyard was hit by lightning and had to be cut down. It was a 130 year old tree and I will miss it. I will not miss the leaves though, especially in the fall! And then after being told that Dr. Reardon at Duke would be speaking to our group this month, then realized that he had a prior commitment and he could not make it to our meeting. That was after I had already booked the room at MAHEC. So I got in touch with public relationship director at Wake Forest University, Kyle Hanser to see if he could book Dr. Mike Robbins. Dr. Robbins is doing research on brain tumors. He will be in Washington that week so he can't make it. Kyle than told me that he would find somebody else that would be just as qualifying to speak. Well, that's as far as it got. I have not heard from Kyle since. So we will just have a regular meeting this month and we will have it at our normal place, at the church. I know that I am whining for all of the unfortunate things that have happened this month. BUT...great things that have happened this month as well! My son-in-law, Eric is now back home after two tours in Iraqi in the army, the tree did not land on our house (or our neighbors), and I have a song stuck in my head...."It Could Been You..."

George Plym
President, WNC BTS

A Six-Foot Lab Rat

There's hope ahead in the battle against deadly brain tumors, thanks to new treatments and brave patients.

Samuel Hassenbusch knows brain tumors. As a neurosurgeon at M.D. Anderson Cancer Center in Houston, he's been operating on them since 1988. But early last year, when he suffered a month long string of persistent headaches, he told himself it was just stress. After all, he was only 51 and fit enough that he'd just completed a charity race for his hospital, combining a 5K run with a 50-mile motorcycle ride—or, as he calls it, "the iron-leg and iron-butt competition."

When the thought kept popping into his head that he might have a brain tumor, he quickly dismissed it. "Come on, this is paranoid," he told himself. "Get an MRI to prove it's nothing." Hassenbusch went for the scan on May 10, 2005. When he exited the scanner room, he saw a 17-by-14-inch film posted against a light board—probably some other patient's. Poor guy. Even from 10 feet away, Hassenbusch could see clearly that the patient had a large glioblastoma—the deadliest type of brain tumor. He moved in for a closer look. That's when he saw the name on the top in small white letters—Hassenbusch, Samuel J.

In an instant he knew exactly what the next year of his life was going to be like, and it wasn't pretty. "Only 3 percent of glioblastoma patients survive five years—and that's the good news," he says. "More than two thirds die in a year, according to the Central Brain Tumor Registry." Twenty years of medical advances have done little to alter that. But for the first time in decades, scientists are now daring to hope that a series of experimental new therapies could one day meaningfully extend patients' lives—not by weeks, but by months and even years. Hassenbusch became the first person in the country to receive one of them. And though it is too early to declare that he's in remission, he says, "So far it seems to be working. I'm 18 months out, and the tumor hasn't recurred."

That he can make that statement at all is no small feat. Glioblastomas are among the most lethal tumors, because they are resistant to both chemotherapy and radiation. Worse, they send out microscopic tentacles that seed other areas of the brain with individual tumor cells. Even if a surgeon can remove the main mass of a tumor, he cannot possibly excise all these scattered cells. It would be like a chef trying to remove the marbling from a marble cake—and get every last crumb. These additional cells generate new malignancies, sometimes within weeks of the initial operation.

Knowing all that, Hassenbusch underwent surgery at M.D. Anderson on May 25, 2005. He followed up with radiation and chemotherapy. But he had no intention of stopping there. Heck, he was at one of the nation's premier facilities for cancer research, and he was going to look into every possibility. "I made myself into a six-foot-tall lab rat," he says.

After combing the medical literature, he approached Dr. Amy Heimberger, a fellow neurosurgeon at M.D. Anderson, and asked about receiving a new treatment she was testing with Dr. John Sampson at Duke—a cancer vaccine for glioblastoma. The vaccine works by training the immune system to attack cells that have an abnormal receptor on their surface called (take a deep breath) epidermal growth factor receptor variant III, or EGFRvIII. This receptor is found on almost half of glioblastomas and is one of the things that jack up growth signals in them. In phase-two testing, the vaccine has extended patients' median survival to at least 29 months. But the vaccine works only if one's tumor cells carry that specific receptor. Hassenbusch's did.



Relay For Life of Asheville

Dear Honored Survivor:

We would like to take this opportunity to invite you to the annual Relay For Life of Asheville. We have honored and memorialized survivors and those who have been lost to cancer each year, and it remains our purpose and vision for the Relay for Life. We invite you to participate this year on May 18th at Carrier Park on Amboy Rd., at 6pm. The Relay will begin with the Survivors Victory Lap so that you and others who have defeated cancer will be honored as you walk around the track- join us to "Pack the Track!" In addition to the Survivors Lap, you are invited to the Luminaries Ceremony at 9pm with hundreds of lighted candles honoring and remembering cancer survivors.

The Relay For Life schedule is as follows

RELAY FOR LIFE OF ASHEVILLE- May 18 from 6pm to 9am
Carrier Park on Amboy Rd. (the old Speedway) in Asheville
Survivor Registration- 5:00 – 6:00pm
Survivor Victory Lap- 6:00pm
Lighting of the Luminaries Ceremony- 9:00pm



Look for the survivors Tent at Relay for registration and pick up your T-shirts.

We would also love to have you join us for the Survivor's Dinner on Saturday, April 21st at Asheville Ballroom and Dance Center at 991 Sweeten Creek Rd., beginning at 5:00pm. It is another opportunity to honor you and one guest with a delicious sit down dinner and special entertainment. Please RSVP to Sandy Thompson at 251-0392 or tracyorsandy@aol.com or Marion Thompson at 298-7911 x 14035 by April 17th.

Member Update

Tim is now done with is radiation treatment but will have cyber knife in Asheville on May the 10th to zap any parts of cancerous growth that may be lurking.

Virginia Green will have gamma knife surgery on May 10 at Wake Forest University Medical Comprehensive Cancer Center in Winston-Salem for a recurrence of a meningioma.

Roz had a great MRI last week. Yippy!

Pat Webb got a good report at W-F. The MRI was good - showed the tumor had shrunk a tiny bit. No big change.

Events

Mark your calendars!
Visit our online calendar for more
info on events .



Upcoming Events

April 19, Thursday

WNC BTS membership meeting at West Presbyterian Church Hall, 690 Haywood Rd., Asheville (west). Refreshments served at 6:15, meeting starts at 6:30.

May 17, Thursday

Annual Spaghetti Supper and Silent Auction at West Presbyterian Church Hall, 690 Haywood Rd., Asheville (west). 6:30

May 18, Friday

RELAY FOR LIFE OF ASHEVILLE - May 18 from 6pm to 9am
Carrier Park on Amboy Rd. (the old Speedway) in Asheville
Survivor Registration- 5:00 – 6:00pm
Survivor Victory Lap- 6:00pm
Lighting of the Luminaries Ceremony- 9:00pm

Inclement weather policy

The following procedure will be observed for inclement weather conditions for WNC BTS functions. We will go by A-B Tech. night class policy. Announcements concerning WNC BTS (AB Tech) will be made by 5:30pm on local radio and TV stations for night classes. A voice mail message will be recorded on the switchboard (828-254-1921) and posted on the ABTech website (www.abtech.edu).

Parking at Normal Meeting Place

The best place to park is in the Suntrust bank drive-thru parking directly along the drive of the adjoining the church. Do not park next to the night deposit box! If you park in the back lot of the church, for security reasons, the back door will be locked at 6:30. So, park on the side of the bank!

Hmmm....

- Can I yell "movie" in a crowded firehouse?
- Can you be a closet claustrophobic?
- How is it that a building burns up as it burns down?
- If a train station is where the train stops, what is a workstation?
- How is it possible to have a civil war?
- How does a thermos know if the drink should be hot or cold?

**HAPPY
BIRTHDAY**

April Birthdays

Jesse Harayda 1st

Ray Wilson 13th

Nancy Blum 26th

Tammy Corn 26th