

## Recognizing the gift

Written by Deb Egenberger  
Friday, 06 November 2009 14:29 -

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### **Brain tumor puts life in perspective for Brady woman.**

Every morning when Amy Most wakes up, she says a prayer of thanksgiving and then hits the floor running.

With four active children between the ages of 5 and 15 and a full-time job as the Brady school's assistant cook, Amy doesn't see much of a choice.

"Life gets busy," says Amy, who has lived on a ranch west of Brady since 2006. "I'm just grateful the Lord still has a purpose for me."

After a hiccup feeling on the right side of her stomach evolved into an uncontrollable twitching in her arm two years ago, Amy sought medical advice from her family doctor.

The twitching was thought to be a muscle spasm caused by lifting and carrying her youngest son, Lukan, too much.

But when Amy started feeling weakness in her hands—unable to successfully remove seeds from a watermelon—and she stumbled when her foot dropped, she knew it was more.

Blood tests and an MRI (magnetic resonance imaging) ordered by a North Platte neurologist held the answer: Brain tumor.

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“I was in denial,” Amy says of the diagnosis. “I felt healthy, like it couldn’t be me.”

But the MRI pictures were unmistakable. A large “blank” spot showed clearly on the left side of Amy’s brain near the area that controls the motor skills.

Four days later, Amy and her husband Nate were on their way to see a neurosurgeon in Omaha.

“I had no idea what to expect,” Amy says. “There’s so much that goes through your mind.”

When Amy and Nate met Dr. Michele R. Aizenberg, they were taken aback by her appearance.

“She seemed so young,” Amy said, “and I was concerned about her experience.”

Despite being Aizenberg’s first patient at UNMC, the Mosts soon realized the assistant professor in the neurological surgery and oncology is an accomplished neurosurgeon.

“She seemed very confident and that put us more at ease,” Amy said. “She took the time to answer every one of our questions and we never felt pressured or rushed.”

The decision to do surgery, Amy said, was not easy but obvious.

A week later, the Mosts traveled back to Omaha. Amy went through several tests including brain mapping to pinpoint the tumor and surrounding control centers of the brain.

Knowing the complexity of the surgery and the proximity to the motor strip, Aizenberg chose to

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perform an awake surgery.

“Of course that’s scary,” Amy said, “but I trusted her to do the best thing for me.”

Amy was under anesthesia for the first portion of her surgery when her skull was opened to expose her brain.

Then she was awakened so she could respond to the doctor’s commands.

“I’m not sure I realized how tricky the surgery would be with the tumor so close to the motor strip,” Amy said. “That’s why they woke me up, to make sure they weren’t compromising any motor skills.”

To ease her mind through it all, Amy said she quoted Bible verses, sang Sunday school songs under her breath and said lots of prayers.

“I was feeling a lot of anxiety but I knew if I could survive this, I could survive anything,” she said.

Amy remembers Aizenberg saying this thing or that thing was “pesky.”

“She likes to say pesky a lot,” Amy said. “At one point I heard her tell one of the nurses to go tell my family I was doing great.”

During the surgery, Aizenberg asked Amy to perform a series of tasks such as lift her fingers, grip a wash rag, wiggle her foot and smile.

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Although she had no pain from the surgery and little memory of the nine-hour surgery, she woke up with a backache.

“I had to lay flat on that table for a long time,” she said. “My back was killing me.”

Tests following the surgery showed Aizenberg removed the entire tumor and Amy was cancer free. Six weeks of radiation therapy followed as insurance.

“This put me face to face with my own mortality,” Amy says. “I’ve tried not to dwell on the negative possibilities. A lot of things could happen but it doesn’t do any good to worry about that stuff.”

Two years later, Amy still has a little celebration after every checkup. Again last month, her tests showed no reoccurrence.

And other than a funky ridge on the top left side of her head, Amy hasn’t had any residual effects from the surgery except a new perspective on life.

The experience not only strengthened an already solid marriage, she said, but it also helps her sort out life’s daily struggles.

“I realize some battles just aren’t worth the fight,” she says.

A story about Amy’s brain tumor, surgery and recovery has appeared in the UNMC magazine and she recently taped a commercial for the hospital.

“Every time I’m asked to tell my story, I do,” she says. “It’s an opportunity for me to share what God is doing in my life.”

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Amy continues to be active in the First Baptist Church. She also enjoys sewing, scrapbooking, gardening, reading and spending time with her family.

She doesn't dwell on the fact that she survived having a brain tumor. Instead she realizes the gift of life every day.

"I'm alive. I need to live," she said. "None of us are promised any more than today."