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A TURNING POINT
FOR WOMEN

Tracey's Story

Sherry Trithart & Anne Marie Brennan

As if being a newlywed and new mother is not enough change in a woman's life, our friend Tracey became both while recovering from multiple surgeries, undergoing radiation, and adjusting to sudden, permanent blindness.

Tracey's childhood was like many; she grew up with parents that love her and a sister she adores. She lost her right eye to a childhood illness but it didn't slow her down. From a young age, Tracey showed a knack for good ideas, an entrepreneurial spirit, and a desire to achieve remarkable things. From real estate, to small business, to non-profit work, Tracey followed her heart. Her vibrant and dynamic personality eventually led her to the world of communications.

In August 2008, Tracey's life took a wonderful turn. Recently engaged to her long-time partner, Jason, Tracey discovered that she was pregnant with their first child. It was an exciting time but the pregnancy was difficult from the start. Tracey was often ill, experiencing intense headaches and fatigue. Tracey had a busy job, she was full of hormones, and she had a history of migraines. It didn't occur to any of us that her symptoms signaled anything more.

By January 2009, it was clear that something was seriously wrong. Tracey's vision was blurry, accompanied by swelling behind her left eye, and the headaches were now a constant companion. A trip to the emergency room confirmed that she had a large mass behind her left eye. Tests showed an aggressive, malignant tumour which would require drastic treatment. Tracey's remaining eye would need to be removed; however, 6 months into her pregnancy, it was too soon to bring the baby into the world. Doctors agreed to delay the surgery a few weeks, allowing the baby to develop.

On February 22, 2009 Emerson arrived safely by c-section. He was, and is, perfect. Tracey was able to see her son before the doctors removed her eye and most of the surrounding tissue.

This experience would have crushed the spirit of most people but Tracey is not most people. In the months following her surgery, Tracey has worked hard to regain her mobility and independence. She is learning Braille, has taught herself to knit (better than most sighted people), and she is learning cook and navigate on her own. She is finding creative ways to return to her favourite hobby, quilting.

Tracey's story has also inspired countless others. Tracey's father and her surgeon (affectionately nick-named "Dr. McBlurry") were inspired to complete the Ride to Conquer Cancer. In Ontario, a church group heard Tracey's story and made her a quilt. Tracey's response to adversity, her relationship with Jay and Emerson, and her tenacity have inspired friends and strangers alike.

Today, we have marked the first anniversary of Tracey and Jason's wedding, her diagnosis, numerous surgeries and the birth of her son. The family copes, as one would expect them to - some days are better than others but they persevere together.

Tracey plans to write a book to share her experiences.

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