



Surviving an Aneurysm

Louise Theall shares her recovery after a brain aneurysm



When NJ resident Louise Theall started to experience symptoms of a headache, dizziness, and vomiting, she was sure she had caught a virus. The otherwise healthy 52 year-old hadn't taken a sick day in over 5 years and as she struggled to dress herself for work that morning, she remained adamant about resuming her day as normal. Louise worked as an x-ray technologist

for an orthopedic surgeon, and would have felt guilty for leaving her co-workers and patients with such a busy day ahead. "I am very dedicated to my job and to my patients; I felt terrible, but I got myself ready and headed off to work." About an hour into her work day, Louise suddenly collapsed.

After being rushed to a local hospital, Louise was diagnosed with a ruptured brain aneurysm by ANS neurosurgeon Ron Benitez, MD. "Mrs. Theall suffered an aneurysm in the frontal lobes, the most common type of aneurysm." Dr. Benitez performed a coiling procedure to repair the ruptured aneurysm.

Aneurysm coiling is a minimally invasive procedure that involves entering the bloodstream through the femoral artery in the groin area. A catheter is placed from the femoral artery to 1 of the 4 arteries in the neck that lead to the brain. Platinum coils are then released. The coils bring on clotting (***embolization***) of the aneurysm, preventing further damage to the brain. Louise spent a total of 8 weeks in the hospital and remembers the stress on her husband Bruce, and family as being one of the most difficult obstacles. "My younger son, Brian, wrote me a letter and left it by my bedside at the hospital. I was having a terrible time remembering and he wanted me to know why I was there and what had happened to me. I still have that letter and will keep it always."

Months after her diagnosis, Louise battled another hurdle: depression. Because Louise didn't have any obvious signs of trauma, people assumed after her hospital stay, life for her would go back to normal. For Louise, like many other brain aneurysm survivors, that wasn't the case. "I

had very dark days and I still didn't feel like myself," says Louise. "The brain needs time to heal. During that time, I suffered from severe depression."

"Depression is a common symptom in aneurysm survivors," says Dr. Benitez. "To ensure my patients are getting the care they need, I suggest they get cognitive testing to show any issues that have developed post aneurysm. Because the coiling procedure is not invasive, it is hard to tell that something traumatic has happened to a person. In turn, sometimes the patient doesn't get the emotional support or empathy they need from those around them. Patients need to know that there is support for them after an aneurysm has occurred."

As a result of the growing success of Atlantic NeuroSurgical Specialists (ANS) support group for brain tumor patients, *Partnership of Hope*, ANS is forming an aneurysm support group called the *Partnership of Strength*. "I believe the *Partnership of Strength* will be a great asset to a patient's recovery," states Louise. "I looked everywhere for information and support when I was recovering and there wasn't a lot out there. The group will be invaluable to brain aneurysm survivors, helping to connect patients with people who truly understand what they have been through."

Today, Louise continues to live her life as a happy and healthy mother and wife. She enjoys spending time with her husband Bruce, her sons Brian and Jeffrey, and her new grandchildren. At times, Louise does suffer some short-term memory loss, but says she works through it and does the best she can. With the combination of therapy and the belief that time heals all wounds; Louise has been able to recover from her depression. "I feel lucky to have found Dr. Benitez," says Louise. "Without his knowledge and skill, I wouldn't be here today. I look forward to participating in the *Partnership of Strength*, and continuing to raise awareness about the symptoms and recovery of a brain aneurysm. I encourage survivors to remember that as long as you are breathing, and your eyes open in the morning...you have a purpose."

For more information about ANS or the *Partnership of Strength*, please call 973.285.7800 or visit www.ansdocs.com.