

LOCAL NEWS

Brain tumor won't stop 7-year-old Super Girl

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Winter Gilland was diagnosed with cancer in February 2003. One month after her third birthday, doctors found a cancerous tumor inside of her brain.

Her mother, Michelle Gilland, said that the tumor was initially the approximate size of a golf ball located in the "dead center of her brain." The doctors told her that it was in the worst location a brain tumor could be.

She was also diagnosed with hydrocephalus (water on the brain), as the tumor and the cysts that continued to form on its surface, blocked the fluids drainage.

At the age of three, she began a chemotherapy treatment called carboplatin, which would last two and a half years. Doctors hoped it would prepare her little body for the radiation she really needed to fight the tumor. At five years old, they started six grueling weeks of radiation treatment. It was the highest and most intense amount of radiation the human body can withstand. It was their main strategy at beating the cancer.

Michelle said they waited nine months after radiation, checking the progression every few months, before Winter began 10 more months of chemotherapy treatments. This therapy was a cocktail of four chemo drugs: thioguanine, procarbazine, CCNU, and vincristine. At the end of April 2007, a scan showed that the tumor (astrocytoma) was still there and was now bigger than ever. What started out as the size of a golf ball, was now approximately the size of a lemon.

"They told me I was going to lose her," she said, adding that the doctors told her she had a choice: they could either do the surgery and hope for the best or not do the surgery. "They told me 'Anything we do at this point is going to be palliative. This will most likely take her life.'"

After the surgery, Winter would most likely be totally blind, she could lose some of her motor functions, and of course, there was the risk of brain bleeds on the operating table. But without it, she faced much worse. "I chose the lesser of two evils," Michelle said. She told the doctors to go ahead with the surgery, having faith her daughter would fight it and faith that God's will

would be done.

Brave Winter was wheeled into surgery with a smile on her face on June 11, 2007. Her mother said she wasn't really scared because she knew that she would be put to sleep. This was an important surgery, but it was also the tenth one she has had in her young life, including the seven times she went under the knife to have shunts put in her brain to drain the swelling from the hydrocephalus.

The doctors thought the surgery a success. The next day, Winter suffered a grand mal seizure because her sodium levels dropped too low - a side effect of the surgery. After seizing nearly 20 minutes, the medical staff was able to get it under control.

Weeks later, Winter seemed to be recovering nicely. She is now legally blind, but can still see enough to read and write. She can walk and talk. Doctors are weaning her off of the seizure medications. Her mother said she is seven, with the maturity of a 25-year-old. Winter refers to herself as "Super Girl," determined to beat the tumor up.

Her body and brain is swollen from the fluids that refuse to drain, caused by the hydrocephalus. The slightest touch sends her into agony. On Monday, she will undergo her 11th surgery at 4:45 p.m. "The doctor said that he wants to change the shunt valve to a programmable shunt and move the tubing out of her heart and back into her belly," Michelle said, to help drain the fluids. "He also said that he wants to drill two burr holes into her skull and put siphons in (that will) hopefully drain that extra fluid off her brain more quickly."

An MRI scan a couple of weeks ago showed the doctor's and Michelle's greatest fear - there is still some residual tumor left in the brain. Radiologists don't want Winter to have any more radiation because they say she's had all that she can stand. The Gillands have to wait.

"She is such a brave little girl," said Shirley Garrett, a former cousin and present friend of the family. "She'll tell you all about her cancer, her tumor, her shunts. She's real smart."

"When a doctor forgets to do part of an exam she reminds him," Michelle said. "It's pretty funny. She's got seven doctors so she tries to keep them straight."

Michelle is a single mom of Winter and her twin, Sara. The medical bills and expenses keep piling up. Michelle had to leave her job, to take care of Winter full-time. The Gillands lost their home and are now renting in Bessemer City.

Garrett, of Grover, organized a benefit for the Gilland family to be held this Saturday, September 22, at Grover Rescue on Main Street, next to the fire department. The benefit will last from 8 a.m.-8 p.m. and will feature Gospel singing, hot dogs (2-8 p.m.), raffle drawings for gift certificates and other hot items, a cake walk and a yard sale. "We're just trying to do all we can do," Garrett said.

Other upcoming benefits for Winter are listed on her website at caringbridge.org/nc/wintergilland. If you cannot attend a benefit but would still like to donate, mail checks to: First National Bank, c/o The Winter Gilland Fund, PO Box 549, Bessemer City, NC 28016.



Winter Gilland, 7, is fighting cancer. A benefit fund raiser for Winter will be held Saturday, September 22 at the Grover Rescue Squad building on Main Street.



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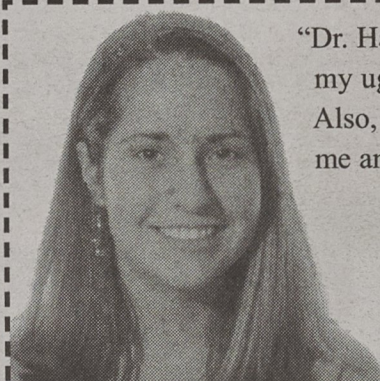
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