

Desperately Seeking Help for Migraines

Thank you so much for your cover story on Marcia Cross and migraines ["Desperate for Relief," September/October 2006]. I think it's helpful for the public to see that migraines do not discriminate: young, old, rich, poor—they can strike anyone. I was glad to read this quote by Ms. Cross: "But today, this is definitely a condition you can do something about. There is no reason to suffer." I frequent migraine message boards and this is the point I try to emphasize. There are still many people out there just trying to "tough it out," and I try to convince them to seek help for this monster we call migraine.

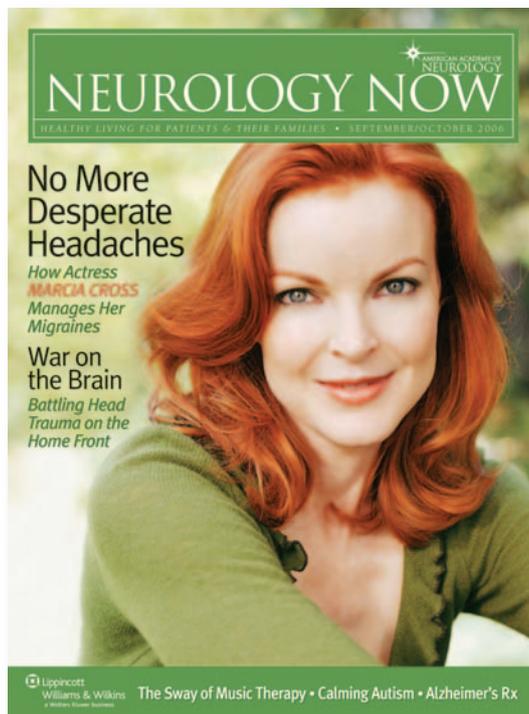
Michele Ocejo
Saddle Brook, N.J.

A Daughter's Dance of Memories

I just had to tell you how touched I was by Ginnie Horst Burkholder's essay "Dance of Loss" about her husband's Lewy body dementia [SPEAK UP, July/August 2006]. My dear mother, Evelyn, got dementia at age 72. I saw my mother—a woman full of joy who always smiled, heartily laughed, happily sang—slip away mentally. The last words I heard her say to me were "You're putting on weight, honey." And she never spoke to me, or anybody else, for the next 10 years. Not one single word. She had to go to a nursing home. She just stared at me, my brother, and my sister for the next 10 years. She died at age 82.

I weep for her still. I weep for the mother who suffered. I weep for the mother I lost to dementia at 72—and for the mother I lost to the physical death at 82. Yes, I can relate to "Dance of Loss."

Martha Stair
Sioux City, Iowa



Sharing Common Experiences

My mother signed me up for a complimentary subscription to your magazine about a year ago and it has been a lovely addition. I have multiple sclerosis, and I have found your articles—even those not about MS—to be very enlightening. After suffering with symptoms for 12 years, I was finally diagnosed with MS in 2001. Reading your magazine, I have gotten a lot of good information from articles about diet and exercise benefiting those suffering everything from Alzheimer's disease to restless legs syndrome—not to mention MS. It has been my experience that most of these neurological diseases share a common denominator, and your magazine seems to underscore that fact. Thank you so much for publishing such an enjoyable and easy-to-read magazine, and please keep up the good work!

Cathi Russell
Montgomery, Ala.

The Winning Spirit to Beat MS Odds

I really identified with your story on Kieran McLaughlin ["Beating the Odds," July/August 2006]. At 19 I woke up one

morning with blurred vision, the first sign of multiple sclerosis. I became 90 percent paralyzed on my right side. Eventually the paralysis passed, and I was able to resume walking and then running. Within five years I could do 12 miles and, at 40, was in the best shape of my life and met a beautiful woman willing to marry me. But then, I was dealt another setback: cancer. Three surgeries later and a few parts removed, I came to believe there's more to life than boredom.

The past 15 years have been a roller coaster, with high peaks of 12-mile runs and clear thoughts alternating with low valleys of no exercise and many aches, pains, and visual oddities. I'm now coming out of a valley. I force myself to go out and run for as long as possible. I'm feeling better every day. Today is a bright, sunny, warm day. Life is good.

I've found that anger, irritation, and stress are very harmful, and that diet and a stress-free lifestyle along with a positive attitude seem most helpful. Like Kieran McLaughlin, I realize laughter helps. Best of luck, Kieran, and thanks for sharing your story.

Name Withheld

EDITOR'S FOLLOW-UP NOTE: Kieran McLaughlin, the thoroughbred trainer whose MS struggle we chronicled right after he guided his horse Jazil to victory in the Belmont Stakes, capped his dream year on an even richer note—winning the Breeders' Cup Classic in November. Invasor's upset win at Churchill Downs made McLaughlin an unlikely favorite to win the prestigious Eclipse Award as Trainer of the Year. "This," he said after the Breeders' Cup, "is the best medicine you can have—winning a \$5-million race."

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YOUR VOICES

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PERSONAL ESSAYS: The SPEAK UP essay is a forum for people who live with neurological conditions and those who care for them. Submissions should be kept to 600 words and sent to the addresses above.

ASK THE EXPERTS: If you have a question for a doctor to answer in our ASK THE EXPERTS department, send it to the addresses above.

RAISING VOICES TO BREAK A SILENT EPIDEMIC

Adding Insult to Brain Injury

Thank you for your Special Report on Brain Injury ["War on the Brain," September/October 2006]. Traumatic brain injury is a silent epidemic, and it feels so good to be validated. In 2004 I was struck on the head and neck by a large backpack. I was working at a department store in the jewelry department and, while assisting a customer, I was knocked to the ground. Everything went black and I saw stars, but I could hear the people around me talking. I remember feeling a tremendous amount of pain. The most frustrating and lonely part was dealing with the doctors who were so dismissive of my symptoms and pain. I searched for help and found it in Dr. Frank Gazzillo of North Jersey Neurologic Associates. Two years later I still suffer with pain because I have cervical and lumbar radiculopathy, and I also have "classic" migraines.



My family is very supportive, and they understand when I can't handle all the noise or when I can't remember something I may have done or said recently. Sometimes I just need to check out, take my medications, and lie down because the pain in my head, neck, or back is so bad. I miss the old me, but at 38 I am accepting the new me.

Thank you for bringing other people's stories and traumatic brain injury to the medical field's attention.

Patricia A. Cusack
West Paterson, N.J.

The Long Road to Thankfulness

I just read "The Long Road Home" about Kim Valentini's car accident and brain injury [September/October 2006] and I felt such a connection to her. In 1976, when I was in my 20s, I was hit by a train. I had a concussion, and had amnesia for six months afterwards. I was hurt more physically—my shoulder, neck, and lower back.

Thirty years later, here I am! I can't remember the accident, or the next four years. My sister and daughter tell me what happened from 1976 to 1980. I'm just glad I'm *alive*. I can drive, and I volunteer at a hospital twice a week. I think I am damn lucky not to have more traumatic brain injury and more long-lasting effects than I had.

Martha Stair
Sioux City, Iowa



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