

Lifestyle

Scarvey column: Message from a bumpy skull

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My daughter Spencer went to Chicago last weekend to attend a summit of SuperSibs! scholarship winners. Funded in part by the Lance Armstrong Foundation, the group supports siblings of children with cancer.

Spencer and 19 others were flown to the group's headquarters to give feedback on its support services — and to meet one another and share their stories.

Learning that many of her fellow SuperSibs! have lost brothers and sisters to cancer made us all consider how lucky we have been that our story — Quinn's story — has turned out so well.

Three summers ago, we were in New York, fervently hoping that Quinn's upcoming brain tumor surgeries would be the last treatment she'd ever need.

Her skull already felt like a topographic map, with its ridges and valleys. How many more invasions could one head withstand?

What a relief that Quinn's beleaguered skull hasn't been breached since then.

She's come a long way in three years. Ready to start her senior year of high school, she's already received a college acceptance letter.

The kid who used to be so fatigued she dozed off on the couch after school, who had to have assignments read aloud because tracking the words on the page was so exhausting, has achieved things we dared not dream were possible.

Because of the nature of Quinn's tumor — it's in a part of the brain that controls endocrinological functions — her surgeon predicted that she would gain a significant amount of weight. His prediction was confirmed in accounts I read of people who had similar tumors.

But Quinn wasn't having any of it. As soon as she recovered, she made physical activity a priority, facing the reality that she'd have to work harder and longer than most in order not to gain weight.

She did yoga with our wonderful neighbor, Anne Edwards, and tried to walk every day, either at the gym or the Y.

Little by little, her mileage increased, and last summer she completed a half marathon with her dad, walking and running. This spring, she entered a 5K race and ran the entire distance, with a respectable time to boot.

Recently, she completed a grueling week at an Air Force JROTC leadership camp, meeting all the physical challenges. She called it the toughest week of her life, which seemed funny when I thought about all those hospital stays— none of them exactly a stroll in the park.

Yes, there are still challenges presented by the endocrine issues. And yes, her short-term memory isn't quite as good as it would have been without all those surgeries — although apparently it's good enough that she aced her AP psych test and got three college credits.

Mostly, things are very good.

Although my husband thinks it's weird, whenever Quinn's head is within easy reach, I can't stop myself from running my fingers over its cratered surface.

She doesn't seem to mind at all. She says having her head rubbed feels good.

I try to explain to my husband why I am compelled to touch Quinn's scarred, lumpy, beautiful head.

It's a battleground. It's a map of her experience. It's a physical reminder. It speaks. And what it says to me is ... We have come through.