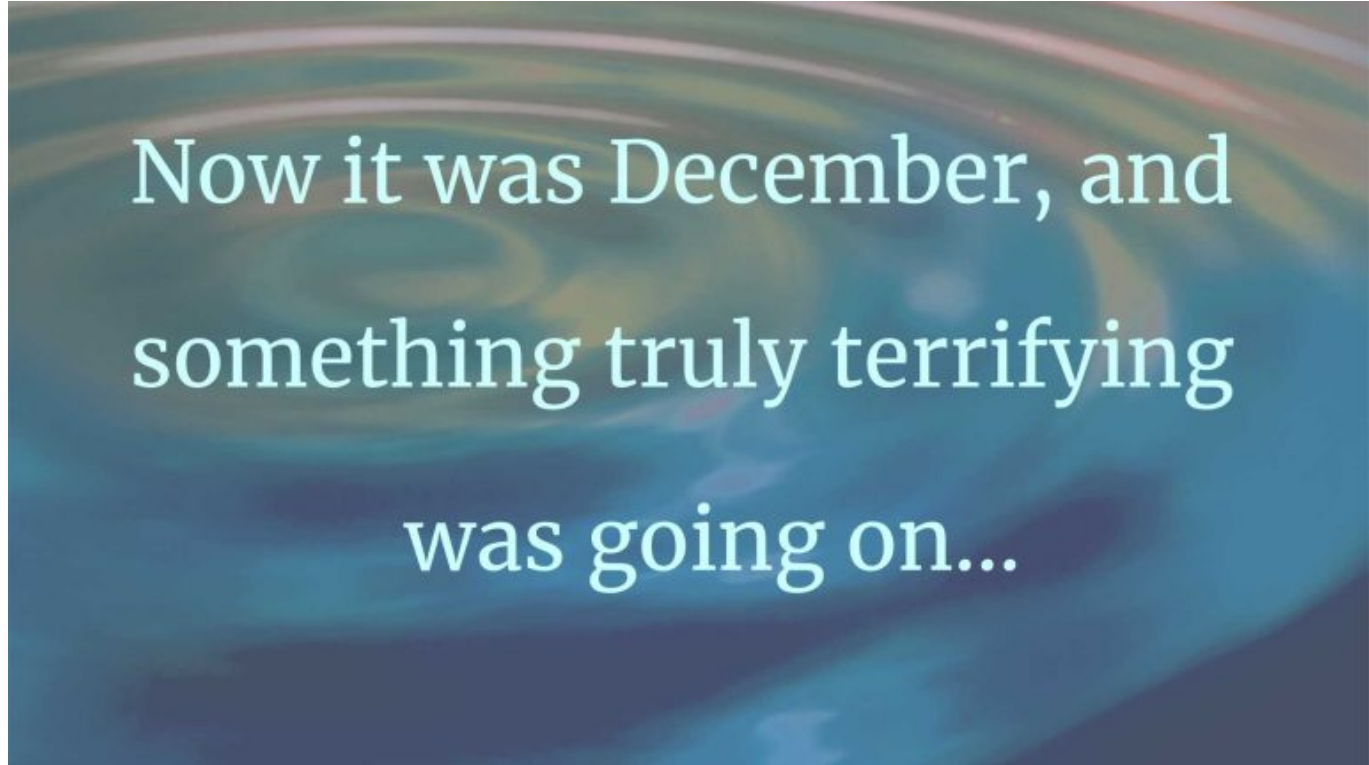


Pulling No Punches

Category: Stories

written by Cori Terry | April 24, 2026



Now it was December, and
something truly terrifying
was going on...

I woke up in an ambulance.

I was in Portland, Oregon, visiting my daughter Ayla and her family for Christmas and expecting another fun holiday with the grandkids, making cookies and eating Chinese food on Christmas Day. My husband David had stayed back in Kalamazoo, Michigan, to spend the holidays with his ninety-six-year-old mom.

For several years, I'd been experiencing troubling episodes that I thought were ocular migraines—shimmering lights in my left eye that blocked my vision. These episodes weren't painful, but they'd been occurring more frequently, and my coordination felt increasingly off. I'd had one frightening experience: David had found me lying on the floor, feeling panicked, shaky and disoriented, with a dull pain in my left shoulder.

After this incident we went to the doctor, who immediately zeroed in on my shoulder pain. Thinking that it was cardiac, he gave me an EKG whose results, he said, looked "beautiful." By then I was feeling fine, so we went home.

That was back in September; now it was December, I was in a guest bedroom in Ayla's home, and something truly terrifying was going on.

Ayla entered to find me sprawled on the bed, repeating, "Something bad is happening...something bad is happening."

Somehow remaining calm, she asked, "Should I call an ambulance?"

"Yes," I said, then passed out as a violent seizure overtook my body. My daughter had to witness it—it hurts me to imagine how traumatizing it must have been for her. Fortunately, I was completely unaware of it all, and I don't remember much of what happened even after I awoke in the ambulance—except that, in the hospital, they wheeled me off for an MRI.

I do remember feeling completely exhausted and out of it, lying in the hospital bed awaiting the results with Ayla at my side. Apparently a seizure is very hard on the body, severely contracting the muscles, depleting them of potassium and using a tremendous amount of energy.

A grey-haired, bespectacled neurologist came in and sat down across from my bed.

"Look, I'm not going to pull any punches," he said briskly, looking into my eyes. "There's a large mass in the right side of your head. It's not in your brain, but outside of it, in the meninges—the protective membranes around the brain and spinal cord. It's highly likely that this is benign, but we won't know for sure until we test the tissue."

Still dazed, all I could think was, *What does he mean by 'not going to pull any punches'?*

Of course I'd heard the phrase before, but oddly, I wasn't sure exactly what it meant in this context. I got hung up on the verb "pull"—*Is he pulling my leg?*—and the word "punches"; such a violent word.

Well, this news certainly did feel like a punch in the gut. In a way, though, it was almost a relief to hear it, to give it a name and have an explanation for all of my mysterious left-side symptoms—and, importantly, to imagine that it could be treatable, and that I would get better.

Strangely, I absolutely knew in my gut that the growth was benign. He did say this was "highly likely"; and I later discovered that 90 percent of meningiomas are benign.

Thankfully, it was.

David flew in the next day; meanwhile, Ayla was taking care of everything lovingly and efficiently—staying with me nonstop, dealing with insurance and holding my hand. I was put on steroids and anti-seizure drugs, and after just one night in the hospital, I came home.

All I could do was sleep; the meds made me feel like a zombie, and I had lost my appetite, presumably due to trauma and to the seizure itself. David and I stayed in Portland through Christmas, with me mostly napping. We decided to have the surgery back home in Kalamazoo—and after many phone calls, David miraculously secured an appointment with a top neurosurgeon for December 31, the day after our return.

Dr. Fabi looked at my MRI and said simply and kindly, "Yeah, that's got to

come out.”

“You’re going to cut a hole in my skull to remove this thing?” I asked incredulously. But then I surprised myself by being more brave and practical than I’d have imagined. *I’ve just got to face it and get it over with*, I thought.

“When can you do it?” I asked.

“How about Thursday?” he said. And that was that.

I was lucky to have only a day and a half to prepare for the surgery, with little time to persevere and imagine the worst. We spent the next day shopping for appealing foods and ginger ale, since I was still barely able to eat. I took comfort in the thought that I was going to get through it okay, and strength in knowing that friends and family were thinking of me.

Honestly, brain surgery wasn’t that bad! They had me appropriately drugged up, and after only two nights in the hospital, I was home again. They immediately sent the tissue sample to the Mayo Clinic to be tested, and in two days we got the results confirming what I’d somehow already known: The tumor was in fact benign.

There were metal plates and screws in my head, and scalp sutures that were replaced, two weeks later, by eighteen staples. (Okay, *that hurt*—eighteen staples is no joke!)

But the meningioma was gone.

I healed fast, and almost pain-free: lying on the couch for two weeks, taking walks by the third and returning to work on February 2. The worst part was being forbidden to drive for six months (per Michigan law), so I walked, then biked everywhere when warmer weather arrived. And every week, friends kindly drove me to Trader Joe’s.

I saw the excellent Dr. Fabi again after a follow-up MRI, but when I tried to book an appointment with a neurologist to discuss getting off of the anti-seizure drugs, no one was available. Instead, I saw a physician assistant and decided to continue the drugs at a very low dose until my next (hopefully last) MRI in November.

The MRI delivered great news, and I’m off the drugs now. It’s been several months, and I feel great. I haven’t had the slightest hint of a recurring seizure or any ocular disturbances. My hair’s grown back in—and, thankfully, I’ve resumed driving.

I ran my own modern dance company for forty-three years. I guess that over the course of my dancing years I developed the courage to believe in my body—never suspecting I’d ever need to find the strength and resolve to face something like this.

I got lucky.