

UW Health: Grateful patient keeps honor for his surgeon in the family

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MADISON, Wis. – What’s in a name? For one Madison family, it’s a way to show gratitude for preserving a life.

In May 2018, Joe St. Peter’s life changed forever. One night, Joe’s wife, Bryce Joslin St. Peter, woke to the sound of Joe having a seizure.

“I was asleep, and I could feel a lot of movement,” Bryce said. “I started calling his name and he wasn’t responding.”

She yelled for the help of Joe’s sister and brother-in-law, roommates at the time in their Madison home. While Joe’s sister administered CPR, Joe’s brother-in-law called 911.

At the hospital, a CT scan revealed a golf ball-sized tumor in the frontal lobe of his brain.

Next came a rush of physicians, residents, nurses and information. Soon, Joe met Dr. Mustafa Baskaya, professor of neurological surgery, UW School of Medicine and Public Health, and a neurosurgeon at UW Health, and Baskaya made plans for brain surgery.

Aggressive in his approach, Baskaya achieved a gross total resection of the tumor a few days later, the best news the family could hope for, Bryce said.

“When Joe came out of the surgery, it was a bit shocking,” she said, “It was like he was dead behind the eyes.”

Joe suffered from left-side neglect, where the left side of his body would not function

well. He was scared and worried he would never physically return to normal, but then Baskaya said something so reassuring that it will stick with him forever, Joe said.

“[Baskaya said] ‘You’re going to be OK. Why are you worrying? I’m the one who needs to worry.’” Joe said. “His calm demeanor just put us at ease.”

After a few days in the UW Health Rehabilitation Hospital, Joe received the biopsy results; the tumor was cancerous – he was diagnosed with a grade-3 astrocytoma.

“When we first got the diagnosis, we felt like life was going to be over,” Bryce said.

They tried to prepare for the worst. Joe went through months of physical therapy to regain mobility, but the surgery was such a success, Joe’s scans have been negative for three years. With each negative scan, their hope for a normal future grows, Bryce said.

That’s not all that gave them hope. While on chemotherapy treatment – which can cause infertility in men – Bryce and Joe conceived and were blessed with a baby girl, Julia Jane, their second child, joining their son, Ezra, who is now 5 years old.

A year and half later, and feeling fully recovered, they learned they would be having a third child. They wanted to recognize the doctor that made this possible, and with Joe’s prognosis improving with every clear brain scan they felt certain it was the right choice to name their final child in honor of Baskaya. Sylvie Baskaya Joslin St. Peter was born Aug. 26, 2021.

Besides Baskaya, Joe and Bryce are grateful to all the staff at UW Hospital, Bryce said.

“Dr. Baskaya was incredible, but there was an entire team that cared for us, and we also want to give special mention to Joe’s caring oncologist Dr. Ian Robins,” she said.

For his part, Baskaya was emotional about hearing the news and seeing Sylvie for the first time last week, he said.

“It is incredibly humbling, and I am honored to have been able to help Joe,” Baskaya said. “Who knows, maybe Sylvie will grow up to be a neurosurgeon, and it will come full circle.”