

## **Dan Wiggins**

With hindsight, I first started to experience symptoms of the brain tumour around Christmas 2005; on a couple of occasions I lost my voice for 30 seconds or a minute. Sometimes I felt a bit wobbly, that spinning sort of feeling you can get when you have had too much to drink. At the time I did not think anything of it.

In April 2006 I had a grand mal seizure and was rushed straight to Chichester hospital. I remember being in the middle of a conversation and I just could not get my words out. When I came around I was quite confused, I had no idea of the time of day.

The next day I went to see my GP who referred me to a neurologist. I remember wondering if I had epilepsy and feeling frustrated to think I might not be able to drive – I love driving. As commercial director for an importing business, my car is crucial to my life and work – it also gave me a sense of independence. I was not sure how I would manage without it.

I had not driven at this point, my wife picked me up and took me for the MRI scan, which I had arranged for 7.30 in the morning so that it did not disrupt my working day. Little did I know how much my life and work would ultimately be disrupted.

Two hours later at 9.30am the neurologist rang me at work and asked me to return the same day at 6.30pm to meet a Mr. Mendoza. I assumed he wanted me to see someone who had taken the scan, not a doctor, because he was referred to as Mr. Mendoza. I had no idea at that time that Mr. Mendoza was a brain-surgeon and that surgeons are traditionally not called Doctor. I think if I had known that he was a brain surgeon, it would have been a very stressful day, instead I remember I found it hard to concentrate but was basically fine.

At 6.30pm that same day I met Mr. Mendoza and found out that he was a neurosurgeon. He was surprised that I had not been told what was going on, perhaps because of the speed of the process. After all I had been scanned only 11 hours before I saw him – quite a record, I imagine. He explained that I had a Grade II brain tumour, also called an astrocytoma – which could not be removed by surgery. It was in the left side of my brain near the speech area, which accounted for the problems with my speech.

They organised a biopsy for the following week, the first week of May, which was to confirm the grading of the tumour. This confirmed that it was grade II and that it would not be possible to remove it by a physical operation – it was a crab like tumour with many legs. At that point I was put on medication for epilepsy – autil – and have been on that ever since.

I continued to work although I was not able to drive for a year. My company were fantastic and gave me a driver – in fact he has become a friend to this day and drove at our wedding the following year. In 2007 I got my licence back which seemed a great relief at the time.

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However, by late 2008 I was starting to lose my speech again and having a lot of headaches. It became noticeable at work, it was affecting my work, sometimes when I spoke it came out as 'gobbley goop'. I found I started to have some serious speech arrests with some of our customer base, who did not understand what was happening. On the other hand many of my existing customers were amazing, really understanding.

At the end of 2008 I had another grand mal seizure and have not driven since that date.

In the Spring of 2009 I had an operation to de-bulk the tumour – a craniotomy - and a further biopsy. By this stage the tumour was re-classified as a grade III or IV and my doctor recommended that I have a course of radiotherapy and chemotherapy.

By late 2009 we had moved to Surrey which made it easier for my wife's commute to work and also gave me access to the train network to get into Charing Cross for treatment.

Doctors gave me what I call a 'modern chemotherapy'. It can be taken orally and side effects are really not that tortuous, certainly nothing to complain about. My mother, who has been a nurse for the last forty years, recommended I keep fit in order to help fight the tumour and to remain positive. Since I can't drive where possible I bike everywhere, or I use the train network when I am on my own.

My wife, Lucy, has been fantastic and very supportive. There has been a huge cost to her, not least she has to ferry me around the place – we were in Devon last week and Scotland before that. She has also helped me stay fit through the cycling.

I have also got involved with the charity Brain Tumour Research Campaign (BTRC) through Charing Cross Hospital. I spoke to Dr. Mark Glaser, head of neurology, there and asked him which brain tumour charity gave all its money to research. I know there are other charities that do great work for brain tumour patients, but I was clear I wanted to raise money for research. He recommended BTRC.

At present I am planning a bike ride from John O'Groats to Land's End at the end of April. It should take 19 days to complete. If you want to know more go to my website [www.mindovermiles.org](http://www.mindovermiles.org) or donate through [www.justgiving.com/danwiggins-btrc](http://www.justgiving.com/danwiggins-btrc)

Dan Wiggins – March 2010