

Growing up in fear of the 'monster'

Resident tells story of living with epilepsy in new book

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Growing up with epilepsy, Danielle Rocheford dealt with the constant fear of having a seizure, prompting her to tell the story in a children's book.

Beginning with the early memories following her diagnosis at age 2, Ms. Rocheford traces her experiences through her brain surgery to correct the disorder in 1996.

Ms. Rocheford, 39, said she wants the book to educate children and adults about epilepsy. Growing up, she said children's books on epilepsy did not exist.

"Even today, there's not many. ... This is something that so many people still don't understand," Ms. Rocheford said.

Doctors diagnose approximately 200,000 new cases of epilepsy each year, according to the Epilepsy Foundation, while 45,000 children younger than 15 develop the third-most common neurological disorder in the United States annually.

The book, "Mommy, I Feel Funny! A Child's Experience with Epilepsy," is scheduled for release March 1. Ms. Rocheford said she would tell her mother she would "feel funny" just prior to a seizure.

"My seizures were a feeling of fear, like somebody was following me. ... As a child, it felt like a monster was behind me," Ms. Rocheford said. "That phrase stuck with me my entire life."

Based on the uncertainty of the timing of another seizure, usually triggered by stress or

excitement, she always studied her surroundings. While some people with epilepsy might limit their exposure to certain public settings, that was not the case with Ms. Rocheford.

"I always had to be on top of what was going on at that moment," said Ms. Rocheford, adding that the frequency of the seizures ranged from one per month to as many as 20. "I was able to do a lot that any child was able to because I was just a very determined individual. I wasn't going to let this control me. I was always very open about my situation."

Despite her courage, Ms. Rocheford admitted certain times proved more difficult than others. The transition to a different school and larger classes in ninth grade sparked seizures on a more regular basis.

"All of the therapeutic effects of the medicine just stopped," Ms. Rocheford said. "Nothing worked. I spent all but eight weeks of that entire year in the hospital trying to get the right medicine."

After deciding to have surgery in 1996, Ms. Rocheford started documenting the incidents involving epilepsy in a journal, beginning with the earliest memories at age 4, in case she lost her memory. Following the successful operation, her mother suggested making the stories into a book.

"My mom was a big supporter of it. ... My mom was the one that kind of started me thinking about rewriting it into a level where a child could understand," said Ms. Rocheford, who has been



News staff photo by STEVE MARCOTTE

Westminster resident Danielle Rocheford recently wrote a children's book about her experiences with epilepsy. The book will hit shelves March 1.

seizure-free since the surgery.

Ms. Rocheford received several positive reviews on the book, including one from Marcia Sharkey, the lead nurse of the Ashburnham-Westminster School District. A quote from Ms. Sharkey appears on the back of the book.

Ms. Sharkey said it's helpful to have a book illustrating the childhood of someone with epilepsy.

"It's a beautiful book," she said. "It's something that I'm going to be promoting."

A portion of the proceeds from the book sales will benefit

epilepsy organizations. Through the Web site, <http://www.mommyifeelfunny.com>, Ms. Rocheford also started a project called "Awakened Voices," which allows people with epilepsy to express themselves.

Even though she hasn't had a seizure in more than 10 years, Ms. Rocheford remains cognizant of the chance.

"Anything is possible," she said. "My fingers are crossed that it never does, but I am very much in tune that it is a possibility."

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