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## Westminster woman pens kid's book



SENTINEL & ENTERPRISE / BRETT CRAWFORD

Danielle Rocheford talks about her book 'Mommy, I Feel Funny!' Tuesday at her Westminster home.

## Author draws from her childhood to shed light on the 'monster' of epilepsy

**'MOMMY, I FEEL FUNNY'!** tells the story of Nel, a young girl who discovers she has epilepsy and believes a monster is following her.

By Nick Brown  
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WESTMINSTER -- Author Danielle Rocheford said her new children's book on epilepsy, "Mommy, I Feel Funny," started as notes jotted in a journal.

"It was 1996 and I'd just had brain surgery for my epilepsy," Rocheford, 39, said during a recent interview at her home. "There was a good chance I'd lose memory, so I wrote everything in a journal."

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Doctors diagnosed Rocheford, a native New Yorker, with epilepsy when she was 2 years old.

Epilepsy, a neurological disorder causing unprovoked seizures, can originate from severe head injuries or brain tumors. It can also be a genetic or developmental condition, Rocheford said.

Rocheford relied on a slew of medications for her epilepsy as a child and into adulthood. She moved to Massachusetts for college, and decided to stay in the Bay State when she met her husband.

"We decided to settle down, and I found out Massachusetts state law wouldn't let me drive in my condition, so for six years I didn't drive," she said.

Rocheford opted for surgery at age 27, around the time she decided to have children.

"I didn't want to have to rely on anyone else to care for me while I cared for my kids," she said.

Surgeons removed a "golf ball-sized" section of brain from which the seizures originated, Rocheford said.

Doctors kept her on medication for precautionary reasons for a year after the surgery, but she reported no side-effects from the operation, other than intense headaches.

"That's pretty normal," she said.

Seizure-free for 13 years Rocheford said she wants to help children coping with the same condition.

"The idea for a children's book was actually my mother's," she said. "She told me I should use the journal entries as a basis for a kids' book."

Rocheford tells the story of Nel, a young girl who discovers she has epilepsy while outside playing.

Nel becomes scared and believes a monster is following her, a fear

Rocheford said she experienced prior to her seizures.

"Some epileptics have auras, which are sensations or feelings you have leading up to your seizures," Rocheford explained. "I felt like there was someone following me. Other people will suddenly get a bad taste in their mouth, or their vision will become dark. An aura can really be anything."

Rocheford said the story is largely about her own experience with the disease.

"Nel is the nickname I had growing up," she said.

Various activities or circumstances can trigger seizures, Rocheford explained.

"For me, when I'd got excited or stressed, those were the times I would have the seizures," she said.

The book also explains epilepsy from a medical perspective, defining and illustrating terms like Magnetic Resonance Imaging (MRI) and Electroencephalography (EEG)."

"An EEG is basically when they attach suction cups to your scalp and read your brain activity," she said.

Rocheford, whose 7-year-old son attends Westminster Elementary School, said her extensive searches yielded only "five or six" books written for children with epilepsy.

"There's plenty of resources out there for adults, but not for kids," she said. "I really wish I'd had a resource like this to help me understand what I was going through when I was a kid."

Westminster Elementary School Nurse Marcia Sharkey, who offered a blurb on the book's back cover, praised Rocheford for filling a serious need.

"If a child is diagnosed with anything -- cancer, asthma -- and I can bring in a book to show that they're



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normal kids, it really eases tension, both for those kids and for the other kids in class," Sharkey said.

Sharkey said she plans to push awareness of the book among school nurses and other educators throughout the state.

A portion of the proceeds will benefit charities for children with epilepsy, Rocheford said.

She said she hopes to follow her debut publication with a collection of poems and essays on epilepsy submitted by visitors of her Web site, MommyIFeelFunny.com.

After that, she said, she'd like to go on the Oprah Winfrey show.

"I'm not getting my hopes up, but it would be nice," she said.

Rocheford credited publisher Wyatt-MacKenzie, a small, Oregon-based publishing house, with working hard to push her story.

"They understood what I was trying to do and how I wanted to do it," she said. "They understood my dream."