

Media Contact: Sandra Van
Telephone: 1-800-880-2397
E-mail: sandy@vancommunications.com

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE – December 1, 2004

HIGHLIGHTS:

Although Marylou Ferry experienced increasingly debilitating headaches for years, a benign tumor that was crowding out the normal tissues and structures of her brain was not found until it was the size of a large orange. Neurosurgeons at Cedars-Sinai's Maxine Dunitz Neurosurgical Institute removed the meningioma during a five-hour operation on May 4, 1999. Now, with a husband, two step-children, and two additions to the family, she anticipates her fifth tumor-free holiday season.

WIFE AND MOM CELEBRATES FAMILY AND FIFTH CHRISTMAS FREE OF LARGE TUMOR CROWDING HER BRAIN

LOS ANGELES (Dec. 1, 2004) – When 3-year-old John and 21-month-old Faith rip into their Christmas presents this year, the excitement in their eyes will be another perfect gift for a woman who feared she would not be alive to see the Christmas of 1999.

“I feel like the five years I’ve been given already since having the surgery is like winning the lottery,” says Marylou Ferry, 42, of Claremont. “I married the man of my dreams. I have a beautiful son and a beautiful daughter. I celebrated my parents’ 50th wedding anniversary with them and my brothers and sisters. I’m really so grateful that I came to be in the hands of Dr. Black and Dr. Schievink and the team at Cedars-Sinai.”

In 1997 and 1998, Marylou served as press secretary and communications director for Washington Governor Gary Locke, moving to Southern California in 1998 to spend time with “the gorgeous man I’ve fallen in love with,” Rick Ferry, and to resume her corporate and political communications career in the private sector. Because high stress was a routine part of her work life, she initially gave little thought to the gradually increasing headaches that eventually demanded her attention.

“I was worried that something was wrong,” she recalls. “I asked two doctors during a 10-year period if they thought it was possible that my headaches were caused by a brain tumor. ‘Just stress,’ they said. ‘Get a massage. Don’t work so hard.’”

Several of her colleagues, however, pushed her to be assertive. “We know our bodies. Women must be more adamant about managing their health,” they urged. With their encouragement, Marylou asked her doctor to order an MRI. She was, after all, taking pain medications day and night by this time, early 1999. On April 27, the neurologist wrote a prescription for an MRI – to relieve her anxiety more than anything else, she says. She made an appointment for the test on the upcoming Saturday at 7 a.m., part of a morning full of plans.

But instead of working out at the fitness center, going for a swim or buying herbs, Marylou suddenly found herself being escorted to the hospital nearby. “You have a brain tumor,” the doctor said. “We suspect a meningioma. The tumor is very large, dangerously close to the brain stem, and you need an immediate operation.”

(more)

Although meningiomas often are benign, they can be malignant. Either way, Marylou frantically called Rick, her parents in Oregon, and brothers and sisters who within minutes were headed for Pasadena and her bedside. Rick's parents, Maude and Richard, were driving to Palm Springs for a golf weekend when they received Rick's call.

"Richard, founder of one of the most successful executive search firms in the world, built a corporate empire matching the right person to the right job. He took my situation personally," Marylou says. By the time they arrived, they had the name of neurosurgeon Keith Black and were ready to help arrange a transfer. "Maude gathered my films and belongings and we were off to Cedars-Sinai Medical Center and the Maxine Dunitz Neurosurgical Institute."

Marylou, her future husband and future in-laws arrived at Cedars-Sinai at 4 that afternoon. She remembers the warmth she felt when greeted by Wouter Schievink, MD, one of Dr. Black's colleagues. "We've been waiting for you," he said. They moved to a small cubicle where Dr. Shievink reviewed the films.

"He looked directly into my eyes and said, 'We can do this. When will your family arrive?' I melted right into his arms and assurance," Marylou recalls.

Because there was an extensive network of blood vessels throughout the tumor, surgeons on Monday evening performed an endovascular embolization, threading a catheter through arteries from the groin to pack material into the vessels feeding the tumor. Blocking this blood flow would reduce the risk of bleeding and complications during surgery.

On the morning of May 4, Dr. Black, Dr. Schievink and colleague Reid Thompson, MD, removed the tumor during a five-hour operation. They worked through small holes drilled into Marylou's skull, using surgical microscopes and an approach that Dr. Black likens to that of a thief in the night.

"We snuck in underneath the brain so that we wouldn't manipulate it very much," he says. "It's the concept of being like a thief, sneak in and sneak out without the brain realizing that we've been there. The tumor had invaded the bone at the skull base, so we had to drill that bone down, but because these types of tumors have well-defined margins, we were able to dissect it free from the normal blood vessels and nerves in the brain."

The slowly developing tumor, the size of a large orange by the time it was discovered, may have been growing in the right temporal lobe of Marylou's brain for as many as 10 years. Although she eventually battled constant headaches, she was spared some of the other symptoms that might be expected: vision, memory and motor movement impairments.

"The brain, being very soft, is able to accommodate up to a point, but what we often see is deterioration occurring very quickly," says Dr. Black, founder and director of the Maxine Dunitz Neurosurgical Institute, and director of the medical center's Division of Neurosurgery and the Comprehensive Brain Tumor Program.

"Because there is the possibility that a few cells were hiding somewhere that we couldn't see, there is about a 10 percent risk that Marylou will have a recurrence of the tumor at some point in her lifetime. On the other hand, there is a very good chance that we were able to get everything out. After five years, she can almost expect that she is cured at this point," Dr. Black says.

"Her experience is a good example of what can be done with today's state of technology," he adds. "She had this large tumor removed on May 4 and went home on May 7. Fifteen years ago, she would have been in the hospital for weeks and would have had a much higher risk of complications and side-effects."

Dr. Black and his team often deal with the deadliest types of malignant brain tumors that grow rapidly, intermingle with healthy brain tissue, and even consist of cells that detach and migrate to other regions of the brain to form satellite tumors. Marylou's tumor, though very large, was self-contained and would require no follow-up chemotherapy or radiation.

In fact, a sample of the tumor was sent to the hospital lab during surgery and, as hoped, the initial results confirmed it to be a meningioma – a *benign* meningioma.

“We approach this type of tumor expecting that surgery alone will provide the cure, and we expected for her to do well,” recalls Dr. Black. For the family fretting in the waiting room, however, word that the tumor was benign and that the surgery appeared to be 100 percent successful could not come soon enough.

“While I rested in an unconscious state, they laughed and cried,” says Marylou. “My brother Rob said, ‘Lou will go to any length to get a family reunion, won’t she?’”

Marylou and Rick were married the following November. Marylou became step-mother to Graham, now 14, and Taylor, 12. John came along a couple of years later and Faith was born a few weeks before Marylou's 41st birthday. “That's what happens when you don't meet Prince Charming until you're already into your 30s,” she says.

“When I had my brain tumor, I guess I felt like I was the only person in the world dealing with this. But I called one of my very best friends in Washington right off the bat because I was absolutely terrified and I felt alone with my cell phone and my fears. She knew of this other woman who had had a brain tumor. She called people and said, ‘Call Marylou and tell her stories you know about people who lived.’ When you're sitting there, you think it's a death sentence. When someone shows you this picture of this big, huge monster, it is so frightening, just terrifying,” Marylou says.

Grateful for the talents and facilities that gave her back her life, Marylou hosted a fund-raising event for the Maxine Dunitz Neurosurgical Institute last October. And although she tries to do a little free-lance writing while being a stay-at-home mom, when asked about her daily routine, her voice changes from that of a successful communications executive to that of the mommy reading a nursery rhyme: “Today we had a play date at the park, did laundry, and made dinner.”

Feeling the pain, fear and uncertainty that come with being diagnosed with a brain tumor, Marylou says she tries not to be too concerned with life's little challenges.

“It really helps you take a look at things you thought were so important and put them in a different perspective – a perspective that I don't know that I would ever have had if I hadn't gone through that experience. When it's just one of those days when you can't do anything to make the kids happy, just remember that tomorrow's another day and you get another try.”

###

If you have received this news release in error and do not wish to receive future advisories, or if they should be directed to someone else in your organization, please call 1-800-396-1002, so we can update our records. Alternatively, you may fax your updated information or your request for removal from our list to 808-263-3364 or e-mail it to sandy@vancommunications.com.