

Survivor Story: Brad Blakeney

**Cobb, GA Local 2563 / Fire Fighter & Battalion Chief's Aid
Diagnosed with medulloblastoma (malignant brain tumor) in 2014**

I am a fire fighter and field technician (battalion chief's aid) with Cobb County, Georgia, Fire and Emergency Services. I've been a fire fighter since 2010. I'm a member of the department's peer support team and its cancer committee.

As a lead volunteer organizer for the St. Baldrick's Foundation, I and several of my brothers from the department host an annual head-shaving event to raise money to help to prevent childhood cancer. Previously, I was a police officer for 13 years in Cobb County and am an Air Force veteran.

In spring of 2014, I began to experience intermittent severe headaches in the occipital region of my head. This was unusual for me, as I very rarely have headaches at all. At first, I thought they might have been due to elevation (my wife and I were in the mountains) or a change in barometric pressure due to the change in seasons.

I regularly see a chiropractor and continued to do so in case the headaches were a matter of spinal misalignment. After numerous weeks of adjustment, my chiropractor advised me that my alignment was better than it had ever been. He asked me what I thought the next step would be. I told him I thought an MRI would be in order. He agreed and set me up with my neurosurgeon. I was then scheduled for an office visit on June 13, 2014.

During the MRI, a lesion was discovered on the left cerebellum of my brain. My neighbor had taken me to my appointment due to the fact that I had another headache that morning. I was scheduled for surgery 10 days later.

Upon resection of the tumor, it was sent off to the Mayo Clinic for diagnosis, and it was discovered to be medulloblastoma, a malignant brain tumor. My doctor was able to remove the tumor in its entirety. By God's grace, the tumor was completely encapsulated and hadn't grown into any tissue.

Upon hearing the news from the doctor, my mind started to shut down. The next morning, when I woke up and realized what I was dealing with and it was something out of my control, I placed it all in God's hands and had faith that He would get me through it.

After surgery, I spent 10 days in a top-level, neuro ICU for recovery. I had a cerebrospinal fluid shunt in my head to allow swelling to go down. I was then scheduled for a strict regimen of radiation therapy to begin six weeks post-op. During radiation therapy, I had to be strapped face down on a table for approximately 30 minutes per treatment. This type of therapy is known as Cyber Knife. Six weeks after completing radiation therapy, I began a nine-month chemotherapy regime.

The support my family and I received from friends, family, and my fire service family was incredible. While in the hospital, I had visits from multiple crews from the department, including high-ranking members of the command staff daily. The department took great care of me during my recovery, allowing me to work light duty to continue to fully provide for my family. All of this showed me that the Brotherhood is real. A true blessing!

I am also blessed to be married to the most wonderful woman, the love of my life, my rock, who supported me throughout my entire experience. Her name is Amy. She never left my side the entire time I was in the hospital. She actually stayed all 10 days I was in the hospital. We have been married now for 24 years, and my son, Carter, is currently serving in the U.S. Air Force. He was 12 at the time this all started.

