



“The words brain aneurysm sounded very frightening, but they were only words to me. I had absolutely no idea what an aneurysm was or any idea of the seriousness of the illness. . . .”

November 2003



*Front Row: (L to R) Larry, Chris, Mark & Jay
Middle: Parents of the clan Fred & Hon
Back Row: (L to R) Michael, Broadway Joe, Buddy,
Jackie, Jimmy, Paul & Tommy*

Dear Friends,

My name is Joe Rooney (a.k.a. “Broadway Joe”). I am 30 years old. I am a survivor of a grade four ruptured brain aneurysm. Don’t worry, two years ago I didn’t know what that was either. Today, I know all too well what it is.

On January 19, 2001, I was enjoying a wintry weekend in Vermont. It was just three weeks after my wedding day, and life was good. It would have been great, if not for the terrible headache I had. I asked myself, could this just be from the couple of drinks I had last night? Am I worn out from the whirlwind of a New Year’s Eve wedding and a honeymoon in Hawaii? I wanted to believe those excuses in the worst way. However, I knew deep down that this headache was unlike any pain I had ever felt. Within hours of waking up that cold and crisp Saturday morning, I was near tears from the headache. I just kept trying to shake it off. You know the old saying “take a couple aspirin and call me in the morning.” I gave it a shot. But the aspirin seemed to magnify the pain. Before I knew it, a sharp pain rushed through my head. It felt as though I had been shot. I remember screaming for help. I did not know what was happening to me and around me, but I knew it was life threatening. At that moment I decided I was not going to give up without a fight. The course of events that followed is at best blurry for me. My friends and family have helped me to put the pieces together.

I have since learned that the pain I was feeling was from a ruptured brain aneurysm. In other words, a major artery in my brain had a weakness in the wall that formed a “bubble” known as an “aneurysm.” The “bubble” burst causing leaking of blood on the brain. This can be deadly. Unfortunately, fifty percent of people die with the initial bleed.

I knew that the people around me were very upset by what was happening to me. I remember being told by a family friend not to fall asleep. I wanted so much to close my eyes and drift off, but I fought to stay awake. I was taken by ambulance to a local hospital, where a helicopter was waiting to med-flight me to the Dartmouth Hitchcock Medical Center in New Hampshire. I was about to face the first of many challenges. I remember that the doctor told me that they would have to put me under in order to transport me in a helicopter. I had been fighting with every bit of strength I had to stay awake. How could they do this to me? I was so scared that I would not wake up again. Again another first, I had to relinquish control to the medical team around me and trust that they knew what they were doing. Believe me, it was not easy.

I woke up to my brother Tommy talking to me. Where the hell did he come from? He told me that I had to fight. That I’d better or he’d kick my ass. His speech was followed by an equally heart-felt (and threatening!) speech from my brother Mark. And then again by my twin brother Jay. And again by Paul. And again by Buddy. And again by Jimmy. And finally, by my mother and father, Hon and Fred. Where was I? How did they all get here so fast? I did not know. What I did know was that I’d better not disappoint them. I’d better fight through what ever was coming my way.

I did not know it, but what was coming my way was brain surgery that lasted well over five hours. An incredible doctor named Dr. David Roberts saved my life in the operating room that night. He was able to stop the bleeding, clip the left middle cerebral artery aneurysm.

(continued)

While he performed this miracle, the crowd in the little waiting room grew and grew. You see, I am one of eleven brothers. We are not your typical family unit. Not only are there 11 of us, we are all close. Also, we are all strong and strong willed! As they gathered that night and through out the next day (they had to come from a vacation in Aruba, a business trip in Florida, a vacation Las Vegas, and a home in Ireland) the strength began to multiply. The speeches from Tommy, Mark, Jay, Jimmy, Paul and Buddy were followed by speeches from Larry, Jackie, Chris and Michael. Needless to say, we took over the Dartmouth Hitchcock Medical Center!

I came through the surgery better than anyone expected. Challenge number one was over! The long and hard process called healing began that day and continues to this day. As elated as everyone was that I survived the surgery, I was still in a life-threatening situation. I literally fought for my life for the first three weeks following the operation. I developed vasospasm (narrowing of the artery secondary to the bleeding) which can be as damaging as the actual aneurysm. I was treated with medical management, and after three weeks and one big scare, the vasospasm subsided. We knew at that point that I would live through this.

After the first three weeks, I was able to move around. At that point we knew that the damage was surmountable, but I would have to work hard in therapy. On Feb. 21, 2001, I was able to be transported from the Dartmouth Hitchcock Medical Center in New Hampshire to a rehabilitation center in Braintree, MA. It was a major step to getting me back home to my friends and family. I spent six weeks living at the rehab center. After that I was able to move home and proceed with my therapy on an outpatient basis. Over time I have been able to spend less and less time in rehab. I still make improvements everyday.

When you are twenty-eight years old and have the world on a string, you don't think that anything like this can or will happen to you. I am writing to you today to tell you that it can. It can happen, but with a little luck and a whole lot of support, it can't ruin you. The Brain Aneurysm Foundation (The BAF), has been a tremendous source of strength for me. My friends and family, together with all of the remarkable people I have met through the BAF have allowed me to thrive, once again.

The Brain Aneurysm Foundation was established in Boston on August 19, 1994, as a public charity. The Foundation developed from a close relationship between patients and healthcare professionals who identified the need for comprehensive information and support for brain aneurysm patients, their families, and the medical community.

The **mission** of the Brain Aneurysm Foundation is to provide support networks and educational resources to raise public awareness regarding early detection and treatment of brain aneurysms.

This mission is accomplished through the following goals:

- Raising public awareness about brain aneurysms through the dissemination of educational literature geared to topics surrounding this medical condition.
- Easing the recovery process for survivors and families through support groups, the website, and the Foundation's continued presence.
- Assisting medical professionals, health institutions, and other individuals to set up local chapters and support groups around the country.
- Raising money for the Foundation to expand the educational library, coordinate symposiums, enhance support groups, and eventually provide money for research.

The Foundation has recently produced the educational pamphlets; Brain Aneurysms, Endovascular Therapy, and Recovery, and two new videos; "Unruptured Aneurysms: The Arterial Challenge," and "Ruptured Aneurysms: What now?" There is also a website: www.bafound.org.

The venerable old saying, "to be fore-warned, is to be fore-armed" *still rings true today. Advocacy, on one's own behalf, or for a loved one, is often required. To be a strong advocate, one must be both aware and informed. This is what The Brain Aneurysm Foundation is all about-please join us.*

I am sharing my story with you so that you will know where I am coming from when I ask you for your support. **With your support**, the BAF may fulfill it's mission, With increased knowledge, hopefully others will better understand what causes brain aneurysms so that they will not be caught by surprise like I was. **With your support**, we can continue to help other survivors flourish, like I have. **With your support**, we can give survivors and their families the one thing they need to fight the fight of recovery-*hope*.

Thank you for taking the time to read my story. If you can, please make a contribution to support the Brain Aneurysm Foundation. Your support will make a tremendous impact.

Thank you for your support.

Love,
"Broadway Joe"

Joe, I'd like to make a gift to help The Brain Aneurysm Foundation continue its mission toward a cure for brain aneurysms.

Here's my gift of:

- \$25 \$50
 \$100 The most I can give \$ _____

Name: _____

Address: _____

City: _____

State: _____ Zip: _____

Tel: (____) _____

Enclosed is a check, payable to The Brain Aneurysm Foundation

Please charge my contribution to my credit card:

- VISA MasterCard

Acct. #: _____

Expiration Date: _____ / _____

I'm interested in volunteering for or obtaining more information about The Brain Aneurysm Foundation.

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*Open to read an amazing story
from a brain aneurysm survivor . . .*

“The news changed the lives of my family and friends.
We were fighting something that we knew very little about. . . .”

THE BRAIN ANEURYSM



FOUNDATION

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