James ’98 & Jamie ’01 Broach

Brainstorming for a cure

For James Broach, the first sign of trouble came two years ago during a tennis match: vision problems and shooting pains in his extremities were bad enough to warrant a call to a neurologist. By the time he and wife Jamie got an appointment, the symptoms had disappeared, but the doctor made a fateful recommendation. “He said, ‘While you’re here, why don’t you have an MRI,’” recalls Jamie.

The scan found a small mass, and the only way to know the big picture was surgery and biopsy, which revealed a grade II astrocytoma (“thought not to be growing very fast,” says Jamie) with a median survival rate of 7 to 15 years. “We said, ‘We’ll get through this,’” says Jamie. “Who knows where technology and medicine will be in ten years?” That was October of 2010, and life went back to normal, with James returning to work as managing director at Houston investment firm Kayne Anderson, and former attorney and stay-at-home mom Jamie tending to three young boys. “Everything was fine.”

And then it wasn’t. James experienced a grand mal seizure in March of last year, prior to a business lunch. Even though James had had numerous local seizures in his right arm (“The tumor was on the spot on my brain that controls that arm.”), there had been no other symptoms until then. “I could tell immediately that something wasn’t quite right.”

This time the scan results were devastating: Another tumor had appeared and soon doubled in size—an aggressive glioblastoma, “one of the most rapidly growing incurable types of brain cancer you can have,” says Jamie. A second, 10-hour craniotomy took place in August, followed by radiation therapy, and then oral chemotherapy, a regimen he followed for almost seven months. “It’s not as bad as it sounds,” James insists.

With steroids disrupting his sleep, James had a lot of time in which to think. And think. One morning he announced to Jamie, “I think we should start a foundation.” Their experience at Houston’s M.D. Anderson Cancer Center and with James’s neurosurgeon Dr. Frederick Lang taught them that promising research was in the works, but funding was always an issue. With no prevention and a generally poor prognosis—glioblastomas have a five-year survival rate of below 10 percent—it remains “one of the most underfunded types of cancer,” says James. “We knew we could tap into the Houston energy and financial markets.” For Jamie, starting a foundation was for when her husband got some rest and felt better. For the impatient and determined James, that meant now.

In November of 2011, The Broach Foundation for Brain Cancer Research was officially born, with Jamie running the administrative end from her bright and airy home office while James and the executive and advisory boards focus on fundraising efforts. In May of this year, they held “The First Annual, Stand-Up for Brain Cancer Research” at Houston’s River Oaks Country Club, featuring comedian Kevin Nealon. The gala has raised more than $900,000 to date. They hope to hold more events to funnel more funding into research, says James, “to help doctors eventually find a cure.”

This remarkable couple tells their story without a trace of self-pity, but Jamie admits there were some long nights in the beginning, “just talking about all the what ifs, trying to wrap our heads around it.” These days, the boys—Parker, 6; Harrison, 4; and Oliver, 3—“help us stay in the moment.” James says that they play a huge part in his ability to cope with his situation. “That and your amazing wife,” jokes Jamie. “Of course, she’s my inspiration,” retorts James, good-naturedly.

Both economic majors, James and Jamie have “the fondest memories” of Trinity, particularly as members of Chi Delta Tau and Gamma Chi Delta, respectively. Not surprisingly, James names then-tennis coach and now director of tennis Butch Newman as his biggest influence. “We still stay in touch, and he’s been a lifelong mentor.” Jamie credits dean of students David Tuttle with guiding her “the whole four years to get me where I wanted to go.” She pauses. “He was one of the first people to contact me when he heard about James.”

Despite everything, the couple strives for normalcy whenever possible. “We still go on date nights, still travel,” says Jamie, “although sometimes we tell ourselves to slow down.” James plays tennis “maybe two or three times a week,” he says, and recently won a big local tournament. Jamie looks at her husband and can’t resist a chuckle: “It always makes people feel worse when they know they just lost to someone who’s in the middle of cancer treatment.” She laughs, and James just smiles.

Julie Catalano
For more information, thebroachfoundation.org