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Grabbing Life by the Matterhorns

By **ALI DICKSON** | Photos courtesy of **JEFF LINDGREN, MARGARET ARTHOFER** and **XSIGHT VIDEO**

One of the most extraordinary aspects of Tahoe Donner is its membership. All ages, backgrounds, interests and abilities can be found at our amenities and throughout our community. When it comes to Darcy Cole, a member since 1994, that reminder of community was sparked through a Nextdoor post about her older brother that quickly snowballed into an outpouring of generosity.

Darcy's brother, Jeff Lindgren, was diagnosed with glioblastoma last year and will climb the Matterhorn in Switzerland this August to raise awareness and donations for the Glioblastoma Foundation. The response and encouragement from his mission has been nothing short of inspiring.

The Diagnosis

In April 2021, Jeff Lindgren was living an ordinary life with his wife, Margaret, when he started feeling a little off. "I noticed I was having a harder-than-usual time getting my head around what I needed to do that day. In a career of mortgage lending and owning my own business, I tend to stay fairly organized, but it was weird that I couldn't seem to focus on the things I needed to do."

After taking a trip to the emergency room and ruling out a stroke, doctors ordered an MRI and presented their findings. "Lo and behold, I had a mass on my temporal lobe. I was rushed down to a neurocenter and met with a neuro-oncologist who said it was probably glioblastoma. It is the most common primary brain tumor - meaning it doesn't metastasize from somewhere - but it is also the deadliest. Statistics are pretty grim."

What is Glioblastoma?

According to the Glioblastoma Foundation, "Glioblastoma (also known as Glioblastoma multiforme or GBM) is the most aggressive type of tumor that arises in the brain. It is one of the most lethal forms of brain cancer. The current standard of care (consisting of surgery, radiation and chemotherapy) is ineffective, and the median survival of a person diagnosed with glioblastoma is about 15 months; without treatment, it is a paltry 3-6 months."

Jeff considers himself lucky in his treatment thus far, which started with immediate surgery. "Only four or five days after the diagnosis, I went in for brain surgery to have the tumor removed. Removing a glioblastoma tumor is like trying to pull Bermuda grass out of your lawn - it almost always comes back. Part of my treatment involves an MRI every eight weeks to keep tabs on any new growth or development. I've been fortunate in that I've shown no growth so far."

As part of his treatment, Jeff wears adhesive transducers on his head to send electrical currents through his brain, confusing the



Top to bottom, left to right: a young Jeff climbs in Yosemite; a young Jeff climbs with friends; Jeff with Margaret in Yosemite; Margaret and Jeff in Tomales Bay State Park shortly before Jeff's diagnosis; a CT scan of a brain; Jeff recovering after surgery; Jeff showing off his craniotomy scar.

tumor cells to prevent them from dividing. Beyond the transducers, though, he is free to continue adventuring like any other 60-year-old, and the idea of adventure has been a driving factor in his life these days.

Finding the Things That Matter(horn)

As Jeff continues his treatment, he has had time to develop and hone an unprecedented mission: to climb the Matterhorn in Switzerland in August 2022 in order to raise awareness for glioblastoma and funding for the Glioblastoma Foundation.

Growing up, Jeff was often climbing boulders, doing handstands from high spots and probably making his mother very nervous. When his family would take their annual pilgrimage to Yosemite, Jeff would look upon the park's climbers as if they were superhuman. He and his wife were even married in Yosemite, and you can bet he brought his gear along for a quick climb after the ceremony.

When it comes to his ability to take on this mountaineering challenge, Jeff is ready to stand out in the crowd. "I have the rope skills and am familiar with climbing and heights and exposures. I know thousands of people have climbed the Matterhorn, but I might be the first to climb it with glioblastoma. And if nothing else, I had both hips replaced at the same time years ago, so I'll probably be the first to climb it with glioblastoma and two fake hips!"

Tahoe Donner and Truckee Support

Jeff often trains by hiking canyons in the Auburn area and building upper-body strength in the gym. This spring, his sister, Darcy Cole, encouraged him to train on the Tahoe Donner trails, taking advantage of the association's swift elevation gains and high-altitude trail system. With a variety of options and difficulty levels

to choose from, it wasn't hard to find a route that broke a sweat and strengthened key muscles. After their hike, both siblings went to Granite Chief, a local outdoor gear shop in Truckee, to look for additional gear. What they found was more than just products - they found hope.

Jeff is always open to talk about his disease to spread awareness and understanding, and while talking about glioblastoma and his upcoming trek at the gear shop, an employee made a donation to the Glioblastoma Fund before Jeff and Darcy even had the chance to check out. Darcy shared the positivity on Nextdoor, and the post ended up with over 150 reactions and some generous donations.

"My brother was explaining to two of the people who work at GC that he was preparing to climb the Matterhorn in Switzerland as a fundraiser for the Glioblastoma Foundation. My brother was diagnosed with this terrible brain cancer 13 months ago. Most patients don't make it more than a year. Before we left, worker Jeremy Bell had already donated to the Foundation in my brother's name. We were so touched by his thoughtfulness and Marley [Anderson]'s offer to help my brother with corporate contacts."

Darcy shared her encounter for more than just the popularity - she shared it to show what community truly means. "It's why I posted on Nextdoor - someone who didn't even know Jeff or why we were at the store donated to a cause so close to us. It shows what a caring community we have. I don't feel like that would happen in other areas, and that's part of what makes this community feel so close."

Rising to the Challenge

As Jeff wraps up his training and turns his eye towards the Matterhorn, Darcy looks back on how proud she is of her brother, both in the past 14 months and throughout her life. "My brother, who is five years older than me, has always challenged me to keep up. He dared me to take the most difficult runs on the ski slopes,



jump from big heights off bridges into lakes or hard cut in slalom waterskiing. He is never prouder of me than when I rise to his tests of courage.

"Now, I see him being challenged by glioblastoma brain cancer, and he is proving to be the superhero that I have always thought he was. Even his wound after brain surgery healed so quickly that it was as if he has a supernatural healing power. He is truly amazing!"

Jeff's wife, Margaret, has also been an incredible source of strength and support. She encourages him to eat well to heal and to keep his strength and has developed a method of removing the electrode patches that he wears on his head. They were asked to be ambassadors for the device so other patients and families can use them as a resource.

No matter the situation in Jeff's life, it's all about mind over matter. "Your mind will believe whatever you tell it to do. I'm telling my mind that I can climb the Matterhorn, and I'm telling my mind that I can beat this thing. My wife and my kids tell me that if anyone can beat this, I can, and that makes me happy. It's all about what you believe you can do."

A Community Inspiration

Jeff's story is inspiring not only for those who have glioblastoma but for anyone who feels an innate desire to take this one life as far and as wide as possible. To feel your blood flowing through your legs and your heart pumping takes life away from the everyday and into the extraordinary.

A super-survivor is someone who lives at least five years after their glioblastoma diagnosis, and as Jeff preps for the climb of a lifetime,

he is planning for more than just a summit. "I'm doing this not only for altruistic reasons; some of it is to just wring more adventure out of this life. I want to do something that might be inspiring to other folks. This summit might not just encourage others to donate money but might inspire other patients who have been diagnosed. I want to inspire them to keep on living and grabbing life by the horns."

While Jeff is funding his mountaineering mission on his own and companies like Patagonia are donating gear for his climb, he has created a fundraising goal of \$100,000 through the Glioblastoma Foundation to transform glioblastoma therapy and fund research for a cure. To donate, please use the QR code found below.

In June, Jeff spent four days near North Cascades National Park in Washington participating in an alpine rock-climbing course run by the same outfit that will be guiding him in Switzerland. With airline tickets booked, guide services secured, base hut accommodations reserved and excitement growing, follow Jeff's journey through his QR code.

To learn more about glioblastoma, please visit glioblastomafoundation.org or use the QR code below.



Left to right: Jeff explains his transducer array headgear and electrode patches; Jeff on route to a climb with his transducer array and rope; Jeff climbs with his transducer array.