

# Our Journey Rance & Ashlee

*Stronger Than  
Brain Cancer*



GreyMatters365

11.2.13 - FOREVER



## DATES

12.2.14 / Tumor Found  
12.4.14 / Craniotomy  
12.18.14 / GBM Diagnosis  
1.7.15 / Chemo & Radiation Begin  
2.20.15 / Last Day of Radiation  
3.11.15 / MRI Reveals Tumor is Gone  
3.16.15 / DUKE Visit  
3.16.15 / Round 1 Maintenance  
Temodar  
3.21.15 / 1<sup>st</sup> Annual Stronger Than  
Brain Cancer 5K  
4.20.15 / Round 2 Maintenance

## FROM THE START (LOVE)

The Beginning: Rance and I had known one another for years because we have children the same age and always got along with such similar personalities, very talkative and never meet a stranger. After we were both no longer married and hadn't seen one another in years, we literally ran into one another on a local jogging path. From that afternoon on it seemed like we ran into one another everywhere, I smile just typing that and reminiscing! On November 2, 2013 after a semi-coincidental meeting, I just may have known where he might be because his son was on my niece's soccer team, we planned our first initial meeting! We met at the jogging path at 9:00 PM. We walked and talked and literally feel in love under the full moon. From the first look that night, through the 5 amazing hours of talking and walking, to that first touch, we know we were meant to be together. We had found our person! From that moment on, we shared every detail, kept no secret untold, and went in with eyes wide open, learning one another fully, and with each detail, we only loved more. Each and every day we would say, and I didn't think I could love you more! We promised to forever celebrate the 2<sup>nd</sup> of each month and we did!

and then one day **EVERYTHING** changed



**Rance graduated from the  
University of Alabama  
and is Roll Tide all the way!**

## Symptoms? Not Really!

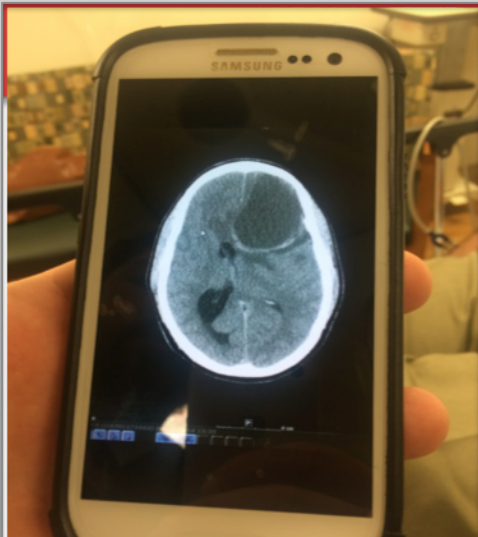
Fast forward, we went through a lot of tough personal situations together that year, but it was the most magical year of our lives and we were anxiously planning our one-year anniversary!

Sunday, November 16, 2014 began as a normal Sunday. I specifically remember us being home and hanging a clock in the kitchen when Rance first said he didn't feel right. Within the hour he started feeling worse and had a horrible headache. Rance is never sick and never rests during the day, so when he went to lie down I was worried he was coming down with something.

After sleeping for a few hours and waking up still feeling bad, I was convinced he was coming down with the flu. He was sick, he ached, was tired, and his head killed him. Over the next 10 days he slept a lot but began feeling better. However, over the Thanksgiving holiday he took a turn for the worst. He slept almost the entire weekend,

even during the Bama/Tennessee game! He said he was just tired, but would occasionally mention his head hurting. By this point we thought he might have mono and/or a sinus infection.

On Monday, December 1, 2014 I took him to the doctor but everything appeared fine, including the initial bloodwork. The doctor said to call back the next day for the rest of the bloodwork results but if anything got worse, take him to the ER because her next suggestion was a CT scan. The next day, Rance got ready for work but his head was "killing him." I finally convinced him to take the day off, at least until we got the bloodwork results. He agreed. We spoke with the doctor a little before noon and learned that all bloodwork came back normal. However, during the conversation with the doctor, Rance sounded slightly confused. We immediately headed for the ER.



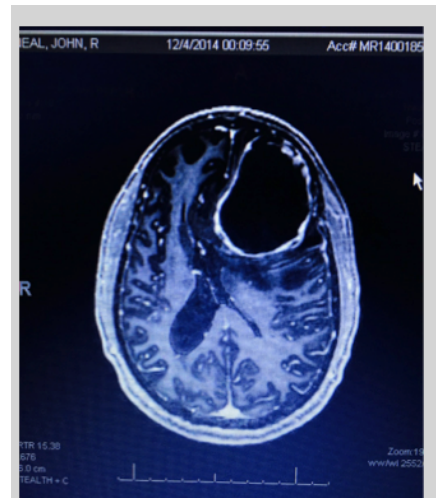
# ER Visit CT SCAN 3 Hospitals CRANIOTOMY

I had no idea as we entered the ER at noon on Tuesday, December 2, 2014 our life would forever be changed. At 2:00 pm on our one-year anniversary, the doctor entered the room and said they knew what was causing the headaches. The CT revealed a tennis ball size tumor in the right frontal lobe. I'll never forget the scene as the doctor held out his phone revealing an image of the tumor. Standing beside Rance, looking at this amazing healthy man, and seeing the first image of the beast inside his head, I knew this couldn't be happening. But the nightmare was our reality.

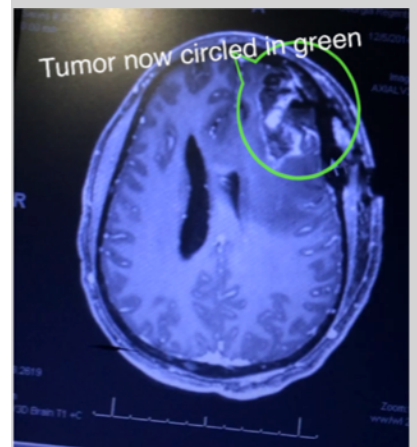
During the next 36 hours Rance was transported by ambulance to two different local hospitals before having an emergency craniotomy at Georgia Regents University on Thursday, December 4, 2014. During the seven-hour surgery, a nurse called from the operating room to notify us that everything was

going good but they were having to send another section of the tumor for biopsy.

When Dr. Rhami arrived at the waiting room after surgery, he told us that there was a lot of bleeding which is uncommon. The initial biopsy was not conclusive but a strand of melanoma was detected. At this time, he did not know if Rance's brain tumor was a primary brain tumor or if it had metastasized from another cancer. It was evident that this was not the results for which we had been praying. Dr. Rhami informed us both possibilities were a worse case scenario, but that at this point, melanoma having metastasized into the brain tumor would be the worst case.



Before Surgery



After Surgery:  
90% Resected!



# The Wait

Over the next 2 days, Rance had another MRI, a full body CT Scan and an ophthalmology exam. Each exam confirmed there were no signs of tumors anywhere else in his body. Each day we waited for pathology to come back, on the twelfth day, the pathology report came back confirming the tumor was not benign and it was most likely not from melanoma. Rance was diagnosed with an aggressive, malignant brain cancer, a glioblastoma multiforme, Grade IV brain cancer. There is currently no cure, the median survival rate with surgery, radiation, and chemo is 14.6 months.

Rance is already beating the odds! Prior to surgery the doctor prepared us for the most likely reality, that he would need physical therapy, speech therapy, and occupational therapy. Not the case! Rance did not need any therapy. He does struggle with short-term memory and what I term "processing speed." He just needs a little more time to comprehend. He is doing great!

The main consequence from surgery was his vision, he lost all peripheral vision and has limited tunnel vision. This has been a huge obstacle to overcome, but he is learning to adjust. (Just don't approach him from the left-side, he's very easy to sneak up on! :) However, his sense of hearing is overcompensating for his lack of vision! He is extremely sensitive to noise (and poor thing has to live with me, someone who has never been good with an "inside voice," but I'm working on it.)



The power of Bama! The first time Rance got out of bed was to sit in the chair beside his dad and cheer for his alma mater on Saturday, December 6th! Roll Tide was heard throughout the Neuro ICU!



My Warrior's Wound!



**"Team Rance! Stronger Than Brain Cancer!" was born!**

The bracelets came in and we sent to everyone who requested. Over 2000 Prayers Warriors have joined: **Pray! Fight! Win!**

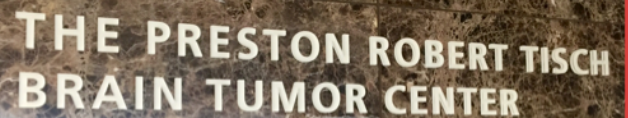


**Strolling with my baby along the Savannah River. His staples were still in, but he was ready to get outside!**

# Initial Treatment

On January 7, 2015, Rance began the initial 7 week round of oral chemo (Temodar, 160 MG daily) and radiation at Georgia Regents University here in Augusta, GA. During these weeks, Rance experienced severe stomach issues and constipation, he stayed bloated and uncomfortable. Both Temodar and Zofran for nausea can cause constipation. I highly recommend staying on stool softeners while on these medicines and record bowel movements so this doesn't occur to you loved one!

On Friday, February 20, 2015 he rang the radiation bell signaling his 30th and final radiation treatment. That night he took his last initial chemo dose. After the initial round of treatment (30 radiation treatments and 45 days of chemo), Rance is scheduled to take a double dose of Temodar (320 mg 5 days a month for the next year. Rance has had several more ophthalmology appointments, but his vision has not improved.



THE  
Dr. Friedman

On Sunday, April 15th, Rance and I traveled to The Preston Robert Tisch Brain Tumor Center at Duke University. Duke is internationally recognized for neuro-oncology offering the most advanced treatments, often with therapies not available anywhere else. There we met with the renowned Dr. Henry Friedman. He was extremely concerned with Rance's vision because it was not consistent with his tumor location. He worked his magic and got Rance in that afternoon with a neuro-ophthamologist at Duke.

After 4 hours and several exams, she ordered an Optic MRI. Her fear was that the GBM cancer cells had spread to Rance's optic sheath, which she expressed, would be rare but possible. At 9:30 PM Rance got the MRI and the next day we received good news



# Stronger than Brain Cancer

Rance has not been able to drive or work since diagnosis. That sentence may sound simple, but it is his independence he has lost. In addition to a terminal cancer diagnosis, he has to deal with depending on someone for everything. This definitely takes an emotional toll. He has qualified for long-term disability benefits and Social Security Disability (which won't start for 6 months after diagnosis). Finances and paper work are a huge stress for him and I hate that so much! I try so hard to help but the unknown of what he will be able to live on is exhausting. Navigating benefits is extremely hard, I have no idea how some people do it. There is no way he could have done all this alone. It has taken a team of his parents, sister, and me to figure all of it out and we still have more to do!



Christmas 2014



## **STRONGER THAN BRAIN CANCER 5K RUN/WALK**

The First Annual Stronger than Brain Cancer 5K Run/Walk was held on March 21, 2015 and was an overwhelming success. Over 400 people flooded the North Augusta Greenway to support Rance and Brain Cancer Awareness. A special part of the Stronger than Brain Cancer 5K, was the opportunity to honor seven brain cancer warriors who bravely fought this disease. Each warrior's family donned grey shirts in their honor and displayed pictures and special memories of their loved one at the event. In addition, we were surprised with an honorary guest, Sharon Tanner who has been bravely fighting brain cancer for five years.