

SLICES OF LIFE

Woman overcomes brain aneurysm

Seven years ago, Holly Springer, 59, of Spring Township was in a coma and not expected to recover. Today she is a volunteer with the Berks Visiting Nurse Association and has written a book about her experiences. She is working on a second book about the adjustments she's had to make in her life.

By Jill E. Sheetz
Reading Eagle

Seven years ago, Holly Springer, 59, of Spring Township suffered a grade five brain aneurysm.

For women between the ages of 45 and 60, artery walls tend to become thinner as a result of hormonal changes. Springer said her doctors theorized it was congenital.

A former human resource manager for CNA Insurance, she now spends much of her time volunteering at the Berks Visiting Nurse Association, Wyomissing. She has also written a book, "Hello Tomorrow, I'm Still Here!" about her experience and recovery.

Springer considers her volunteer work and writing a form of therapy and a way for her to cope with life almost seven years after her aneurysm.

Shortly after arriving at work on May 29, 2001, she got a terrible headache and her eyes were not focusing correctly, she recalled.

"I still remember walking into my co-worker's office and asking her to call an ambulance because something was terribly wrong," Springer said.

After passing out at work, Springer was transported by ambulance to the emergency room of Reading Hospital. It was during this time that she thinks she slipped into a coma.

Later that evening, Springer was flown to Thomas Jefferson Hospital, Philadelphia, where doctors did not think she would survive the night, she said.

"A couple of days later, they (doctors) went in and tried to put a coil in the area of the aneurysm, but it kept coming out the wall of the artery," she explained.

Once Springer stabilized, doctors decided to operate to remove part of her skull on the back of her head. They also inserted a metal clip on the neck of the aneurysm to prevent it from happening again.

"I was expected to come out of the coma after the operation was done and drugs and anesthesia wore off," she said.

A couple of weeks passed and Springer still had not come out of the coma. Her family decided to take her to ManorCare, Muhlenberg Township, where the coma team told them she would not likely recover.

After much thought, Springer's family decided to remove her feeding tube.

They called her minister to ManorCare, and as he was saying the 23rd Psalm, Springer explained, she came out of the coma. Later, she drifted back into the coma, but woke up within 48 hours and did not relapse.

At this point, Springer was not able to talk, but she could write and blink her eyes. Because of the damage to the lower right side of her brain and cerebellum, her balance and ability to walk were impacted.

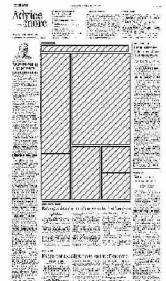
Springer finally arrived home on Oct. 14, 2001, after completing about six weeks of therapy at Reading Hospital's rehabilitation center.

She continued with physical and speech therapy. By November, she could walk without a walker.

"I really do have to remember when I have hardships to just relax and think about what the doctors said," she said, also saying her doctors still do not understand how she survived and recovered from the aneurysm.

Springer started volunteering at the Berks Visiting Nurse Association in September 2002. In the beginning, she only had enough stamina to volunteer four hours a week doing data entry.

She continues to volunteer about



10 hours per week, doing data entry and general office and clerical work. During flu season, Springer said she spends up to 25 hours per week helping out at the BVNA flu clinic.

"Volunteering gave me the opportunity to do something I had lost," she said. "I lost my job, my skills and my self-esteem as a person."

Having kept a journal since returning home, she began writing "Hello Tomorrow, I'm Still Here!" in the spring of 2005. Her book was published in late November 2005 by the

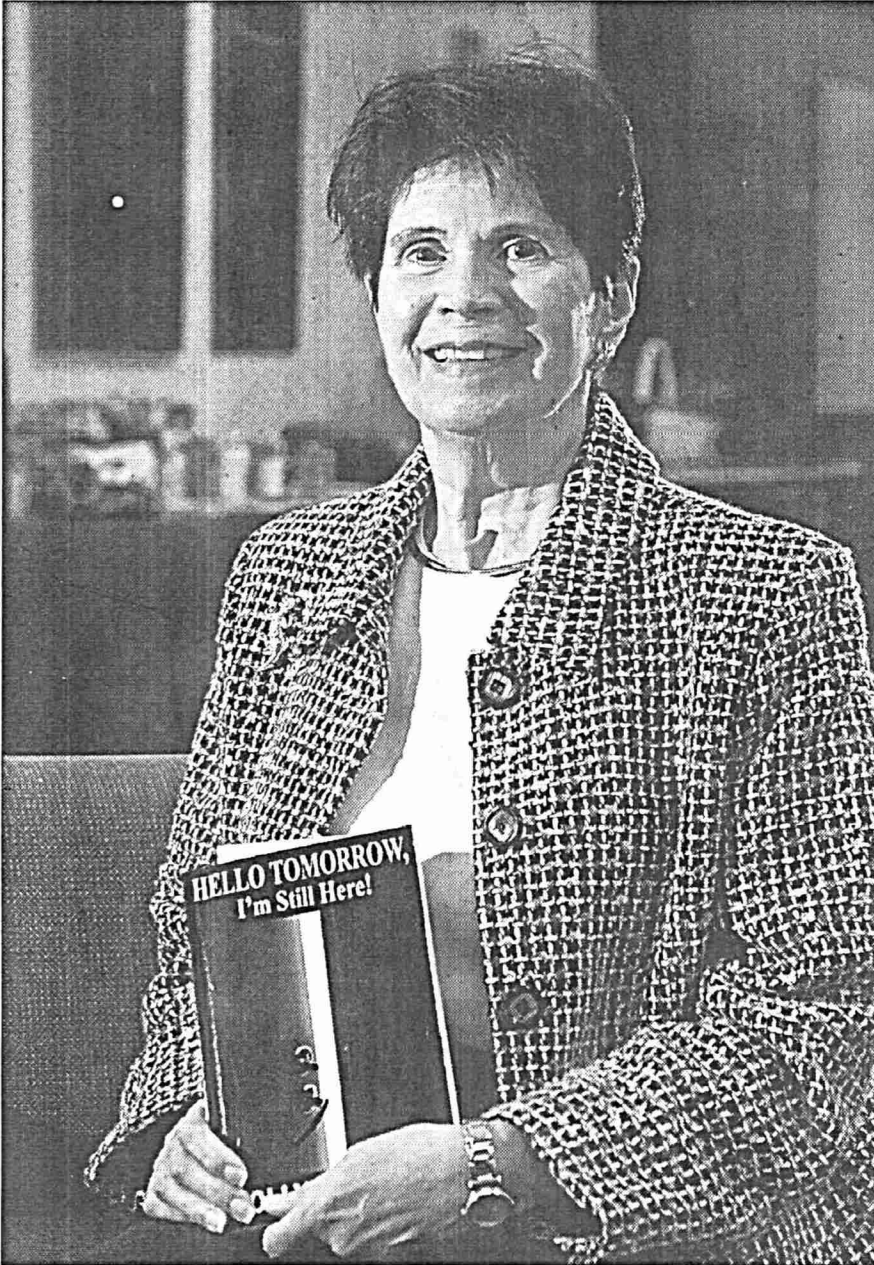
former ghostwriting firm, Empty Canoe, Seattle.

"I've always wanted to write," she said of her motivation to start the book. "Another reason I wrote the book is to make me focus on something and accomplish a goal."

Springer is writing a second book about dealing with the adjustments in her life.

"I'm not going to let this take my life away from me," she said.

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Reading Eagle: Lauren A. Little

Holly Springer of Spring Township suffered a brain aneurysm seven years ago. She wrote a book about her recovery, is working on a second book and also is a volunteer at the Berks Visiting Nurse Association, Wyomissing.