

Comprehensive Epilepsy Program



Epilepsy Surgery Book (with patients' testimonies)

Introduction

Surgery is the most definitive treatment for difficult epilepsy, often resulting in a cure. Unfortunately, the fact that surgery is a treatment option for difficult epilepsy is not widely known. Worse, physicians are not always up to date and informed about this topic, and they may at times give their patients inaccurate (and scary) information.

The purpose of this booklet is to help alleviate the fear of patients who are considering surgery, and to correct possible misconceptions.

This booklet features real people who have had surgery at our center. Sometimes there is a testimony by the patient, sometimes a commentary, sometimes both.

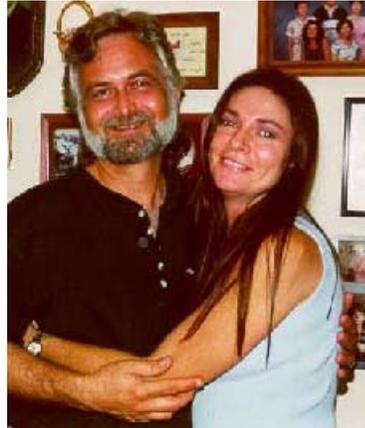
All patients featured in this booklet have given us written permission to use their stories and pictures in order to help others. Most are more than happy to be contacted by telephone to speak in person about their experience. We appreciate their willingness to do this.

As the busiest surgical epilepsy center in Florida, we now perform over 40 surgeries per year, so these are only a few of our patients. To see complete numbers and statistics, and for more information, please contact us or go to our web site at: <http://epilepsy.usf.edu>

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Teri

- "For 13 years, I was constantly tired. I would go to work and come home and fall asleep. I was taking 12 pills a day and still having seizures. I kept asking my doctor to take out whatever part of my brain was making this happen. We tried more pills. When I got married recently, my husband and I sat down with him. He gave me the name of several physicians, including Dr. Benbadis. Now I am seizure free for the first time."
- *Teri had clea-cut right temporal lobe epilepsy associated with mesial temporal sclerosis, the most common cause. Her work up was straightforward, and she had a right temporal lobectomy on 2/1/2000 (Dr. Vale). She was completely seizure free and off medications for over 2 years and then unexpectedly had a single seizure. She restarted a low dose of a single medication, and has had very rare seizures (every couple of years). This sometimes happens and is difficult to explain. {updated January 2006}.*



Jean

- "I've had seizures all my life, beginning with convulsions and febrile seizures as an infant. After trying every known medicine for seizure control, both singly and in combination, I was still experiencing seizures. It got to where seizures were becoming more frequent and I had reached maximum levels of medicine that I could tolerate. My neurologist, Dr. Isa (Maitland, FL), encouraged me to go see Dr. Benbadis for an epilepsy consultation to determine if I was a candidate for surgery. Somewhat apprehensive I hung back, but at Dr. Isa's urging I did go and I will never regret that decision. It was obvious that Dr. Benbadis had a real understanding of the underlying cause of my seizures, and a well thought-out game plan for testing to see if I would be a good candidate for surgery. This was a medical team who had done this many times before, and knew exactly what they were looking for and what was required to make surgery not just a way to hold the seizures in check, but the door to removing the seizures completely. Dr. Vale performed the surgery on March 7, 2000. Every phase of recovery has been exactly as Dr. Benbadis and Dr. Vale said it would be. Having the surgery as one of the best decisions I have ever made. I've been given back my life!"
- *Jean had a single isolated seizure about 2 years after surgery, and has again been seizure free since {updated 2004}.*



Agnes

- "Without a warning a light goes out, you're in the dark, loss of control, loss of thought, jerking, you hit the ground,... slowly the lights come back on but with some new bruise, new soreness, a broken bone, or a burnt hand. You ride the bus destination planned... but you find yourself in an unknown land. You prepare dinner, the lights go out, and you have fried your hand. You're at a special occasion dinner with friends and family... the light goes out... you wake up and the food lies on the floor all around. You live this life where the light goes out with prayer, faith, and hope for a cure. You trust God for healing. You wait and wait and know this is God's perfect plan, 5 years, 10 years, 20 years, and 43 years go by. I have lived most of my life without control, not knowing when and where or what harm may come at any given time, concerned not only for me but for my newborn babies, grandchildren. I have seen so many doctors, been part of many medical trials and experiment with new drugs. I gladly participated hoping... One day I was told about the USF/TGH epilepsy program. All the doctors were so very careful, testing me physically, mentally, emotionally. They informed me of the risks but were confident they could help me. My eldest daughter who is a nurse was very apprehensive and fearful. After meeting with the doctors, she walked out more confident. The doctors may no guarantee but offered me a new life, using their knowledge and experience... I am writing this to encourage anyone who has seizures and would like to be free. I woke up after surgery to say 'I am freezing and my head hurts.' My family was ecstatic. The day after surgery I was eating, and the next day I was walking. I have had no seizures since, and the doctors are decreasing my medications. My family is so very thankful. For the first time in 43 years I feel free."
- *Agnes had had seizures for a record 43 years, and had a left temporal lobectomy at the age of 65. While it is unusual to perform epilepsy surgery at her age, she was motivated and clearly medications were not working. Localization of the seizure onset zone was clear, but we were concerned about the effect of surgery on her memory. Complications are slightly more common at her age but, as illustrated here, epilepsy surgery is very safe at any age.*



Jacqueline

- "I had complex partial seizures for over 20 years. Taking medicines would help some, but I had side effects from that... and still seizures each month. I met Dr. Benbadis at USF medical clinics around 1999. He led me in the right direction. I went through the tests for surgery, and Dr. Vale performed the surgery at Tampa General. I never had a seizure again. I highly recommend this to anyone with epilepsy."

- *Jacqueline had classic evidence for mesial temporal sclerosis on MRI, with concordant abnormalities on multiple interictal EEGs. Her seizures were frequent and uncontrolled with several antiepileptic drugs, but clustered monthly, often around her menses. She was sent by her neurologist. Despite multiple attempts, we were never able to record a seizure with EEG-video monitoring or even ambulatory EEG. While this is unusual, it was decided to offer her surgery without having recorded actual seizures! She had a left temporal lobectomy on 8/29/2000. She has been seizure free since, and is off medications {updated 11/03}.*
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Erica

- "I had my first seizure when I was 8 years old. I was put on medications for 2 years, and then seizures stopped. When I was 16 and had just started driving, seizures came back. I was put on medications again but the seizures continued. Unfortunately I was unable to drive my new Firebird because of the seizures. I felt like my life had been taken away from me. My doctor said we would have to keep trying different medications until something worked. I continued to have seizures weekly, and side effects from the medications: fatigue, stomachaches, hair loss, weight gain etc. It was frustrating, and I felt like I was missing out on a lot of fun. I lost my independence and I had to depend on my family and friends. In early 1999, when I was 19, my mom and my aunt searched the internet and found Dr. Benbadis. We called his office and were seen that week. I was excited but still not sure he could help me. We started with testing in June. There were a lot of tests, and some were not conclusive. Additional testing were done in December 2000, and proved that I was a candidate for surgery. I was ready to get it over with. I was scared, but I wanted my life back. I was 20 years old and still depending on everybody, and I hated it. The seizures continued to disrupt my life. I put my faith in Dr. Benbadis and Dr. Vale, and prayed a lot more than I had ever prayed in my life. My surgery was January 16, 2001. I was in the hospital on Tuesday and went home on Thursday. I can hardly believe it. I am very thankful for finding Dr. Benbadis and Dr. Vale, and for the great care I received from all the nurses on the 9th floor, who were always there at TGH. Thank you from the bottom of my heart."
- *Erica was a good example of misinformation. She was told by her doctor(s) not to consider surgery, probably because they were poorly informed and not up to date. After receiving intracranial electrodes (subdural strips) to verify the side of onset, she had a temporal lobectomy January 2001, and became seizure free. She had had occasional partial seizures requiring some medications, but is doing much better. She is now married {updated 2005}.*



Melanie

- "I had been an epilepsy patient for 5 years before I was able to consider the possibility of surgery. When I was first diagnosed with epilepsy, I came into contact with various seizure medications and none were able to get rid of my seizures. My seizures started right after I started driver's education before my 16th birthday. I was very upset because my life seemed much more difficult than the lives of my friends. AT least once a week I was having seizures that left me extremely tired and in a state of confusion. It was very discouraging to have to go through most of highschool and all of college with epilepsy and its added difficulties. Just before I thought that I would never be able to drive and that my seizures would last forever, I came into contact with Dr. Benbadis. I learned that surgery was a possibility to cure my seizures, and that I should not give up hope for a cure. After being accepted as a candidate for surgery, I knew that all my possibilities of being independent and seizure free could be considered again. Since surgery, I have been seizure free, which is quite a change in my life, because I used to have at least one seizure a week. I am really thankful to Dr. Benbadis, Dr. Vale, Kip, Leanne, and all of the nurses and EEG techs who have helped me to get a second chance at a much easier and happier life."
- *Melanie had presented a difficult situation. EEG-video recordings (July 2000) indicated that her seizures originated in the temporal lobe, but the lateral (outer) rather than the mesial (inner most) part. She went through some unpleasant times during her lengthy evaluation, especially since she had convulsive seizures during monitoring, and a difficult time during the Wada test. Furthermore, her MRI showed abnormalities in both temporal lobes. Therefore, she required an invasive EEG evaluation, with electrodes inside the skull. Despite the difficulties, she made the courageous decision to proceed towards possible surgery. The first operation allowed us to pinpoint the area of seizure onset with enough confidence, and finally on May 12, 2001, she had a left temporal lobe resection by Dr. Vale. Since then, she has been completely free of seizures and aura except for one isolated seizure without explanation. Between her first monitoring and her surgery, Melanie worked for several months as a volunteer in the EEG lab and epilepsy monitoring unit, and has become friends with all of us {updated 2005}.*



Debra

- "I cannot express the gratitude I have for Dr. Benbadis and Dr. Vale. For 22 years I had petit mal seizures. At times grand mal, even with the increase of medications I was still having seizures. I had myself convinced that this was the way my life was going to be, and there wasn't anything that could change it. I only drove when it was absolutely necessary such as work. I was driving from work one



evening and had a grand mal seizure, I lost consciousness and my car had been submerged in a lake. The following day after seeing my neurologist, he said there wasn't any more that he could do for me. He then told me that he knew of the Epilepsy center in Tampa. Dr. Benbadis told me that he felt that surgery might eliminate my seizures. I had surgery on July 3, 2001, and again January 2003. For the first time in 22 years I am seizure free and I can live a normal life."

- *Debra started having seizures at age 26. Her seizures consisted of staring and unresponsiveness ("complex partial" seizures) sometimes preceded by a déjà vu sensation (aura) and continued several times a week despite several antiepileptic drugs. When she was referred by her neurologist (Dr. Vollbracht, Largo, FL), testing indicated clear left temporal onset. She underwent a left temporal lobectomy (Dr. Vale) on July 3, 2001. She was improved but continued with some seizures, so she had a re-operation January 2003, and she has been seizure free since.*
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Alicia

- "I began having seizures in April of 1999, my sophomore year in high school. I was sixteen years old and had gotten my car just two months prior to the beginning of my battle with epilepsy. I was very scared and went approximately nine months with auras that were easily hidden. Therefore I did not tell family and friends about my problem. This was the biggest regret I have throughout my entire journey. My auras developed into "complex partial" seizures, and my family and friends began to notice. I went to my neurologist, Dr. Zala (Brandon, FL). After trying different medications, he referred me to Dr. Benbadis - the best thing that ever happened to me. I was given a new hope. I was put on another antiepileptic medication that, once again, did not succeed in conquering my seizures. Dr. Benbadis then suggested surgery. At first I was horrified. I had already had four surgeries on my stomach due to another disease as a child, so surgery was not a word I liked to hear. However, due to the comforting words of Leanne, Dr. Benbadis and Dr. Vale, I was not as scared anymore. These are people who know what they are doing, and know how to comfort a patient in emotional distress. Throughout the process of defeating my epilepsy, I had monitoring with EEG testing several times, and eventually my seizures were specifically localized. Although these tests made me scared and frustrated, I stuck with it and never gave up hope, which is the one thing an epileptic patient should always do. The most stressful procedure was the Wada test. My advice to anyone who has to do the same is to not fear this test because it is not as frightening as it seems. I was very scared prior to the procedure, but the actual procedure is not scary, it is not painful, and it does not have negative effects afterwards. Think of it as the next step closer to the defeat of your epilepsy. On July 3rd, 2001, Dr. Vale performed a temporal lobectomy on me. He is an amazing neurosurgeon as Dr. Benbadis is a neurologist, and due to their hard work, I am a

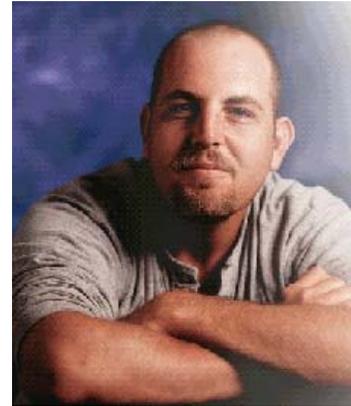


healthy and happy person again. Words fall short of expressing how they have affected my life, and in no way could I ever repay them for what they have done for me. "

- *Alicia has been seizure free, off medications, and is studying to become a nurse {updated 2006}.*
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John

- "John's seizures started seven years ago as a result of a severe automobile accident. He saw several neurologists, and after trying many different medications, he was referred to USF by Dr. Atit. Dr. Benbadis and Dr. Vale were optimistic from the beginning about John being an excellent candidate for surgery. After many tests, including MRIs and EEG-video monitoring, Wada, and neuropsychological evaluation, it was determined that John's seizures were coming from the left temporal lobe. I met John 2 years ago and have been through the whole process with him from the beginning of our relationship. It is unbelievable the strength it takes to go through such an ordeal. On July 31, 2001, John had a left temporal lobectomy. He went back to work three weeks later. We were married only two months after the surgery, on September 29, 2001 and even honeymooned in the Bahamas. John has been seizure free since surgery! Since surgery, family and friends have raved about how much better his speech is. His outlook on life has improved too. I want to thank everyone from Tampa General Hospital, the nurses and staff from the 9th floor, Leanne, (you are Heaven sent), Dr. Benbadis and Dr. Vale, and God for John's surgery being such a great success. Thank you from the bottom of my heart." {by Shannan P. Medders}
- *John's story illustrates that post traumatic seizures can also be treated with surgery. He has been off medications and returned to driving trucks. {updated November 2005}.*



Paula

- "My seizures began when I was 25 years old, and continued in various styles for 2 years. Neurologists could not come up with an agreed upon diagnosis over that time, chiefly due to the fact that my EEGs were always normal (the test was never done during seizure activity). Overall it was titled a type of partial-complex epilepsy, though once labeled as only a mental condition, and finally diagnosed as left temporal AVM (vascular malformation). Regardless of the reasoning or specific diagnosis, my



neurologists attempted many medications since almost every month I would experience at least a day or two of brief mental blackouts accompanied with typical seizure symptoms. Tegretol finally had me under pretty good control for several months, though the dose had to be continually increased. Once brought to the maximum, before long the seizures returned. Worst, my seizure behavior began including loss of physical ability along with the usual mental blackout. In February 2001, severe jaw breakage occurred when I collapsed onto my face during a seizure. That was when I expressed that I wanted to go somewhere for further testing. I just wasn't going to accept that I could not get better. A referral was made to the Epilepsy Program in Tampa. By summer 2001, I had met with Dr. Benbadis. I first went through a 5-day inpatient testing with EEG-video monitoring. There was a major problem with my left brain that only showed up on my EEG while I was having a seizure. I was delighted to have their offer of brain surgery with Dr. Vale to get this under control. My surgery was Dec 10, 2001 - a date I will never forget. They told me it was possible to have seizures or auras, but I have had none. This group definitely gets compliments from me whenever I share my story."

- *Paula was diagnosed with epilepsy around 1979, when she had brief episodes of language difficulties associated with confusion. She then had rare generalized tonic-clonic seizures, but frequent episodes of "confusion" and "chewing" lasting one to two minutes. At one point, she was diagnosed with "psychological" seizure. She also had a left temporal vascular lesion for which she had surgery in 1995, but that did not help her seizures. After she was sent by her neurologist (Dr. Ibrahim, Titusville, FL), her evaluation revealed that seizures were coming from the area around the old vascular lesion that had been operated on. She had left temporal lobe surgery on 12/10/01, and has been seizure free since {updated 7/02}.*

Christy

- "As far back as I remember, I had seizures. My father had painted a picture of men's faces fading into a dark background. My mother told me that I said, "The men in the picture are scary." I thought they were the mean voices I always heard during my seizures. We didn't think anything of that event. I did find out later that the voices were a part of my seizures. To say the least, I thought I was crazy and if I told anyone they would think the same. I finally told my parents that I was "blinking out" but nothing about the voices I heard during that time. About one week later, I went to see my first neurologist. When he told me I had epilepsy and that I wasn't crazy, I was very happy! Now I knew what my problem was and what I needed to do to control it. I wasn't very good about taking my medicine at first but eventually I started to take it as I was told. Several years later, the medicine no longer helped and I just wanted the seizures to go away. About the same time, I read about Dr. Benbadis and his group. My best friend Susan had read the same article. We both agreed that I should at least give them a call. The very next



day I called and set up an appointment. I went to see Dr. Benbadis in July of 2001 and started an exciting journey. I will never forget how happy I was during all of the testing! They had to show that I would be a good candidate for the surgery and boy did they! Then, around three months later, I had my surgery. I have a great team to thank for the rest of my life! They have turned my life around. I am doing better than I have since I was a child. I am still on my medicine but I have more energy and a happier and healthier attitude all around. I also have to say, "Someone above sent me to them and helped us all make my life happier than I ever expected." Thank you Dr. Benbadis, Dr. Vale, Leanne and the great people at Tampa General Hospital (including the people who took me from one floor to the other). You will remain in my heart forever!"

Gail

- "When I was a small child, I had febrile convulsions at the age of 2 or 3. They occurred until I was about 3 1/2 years old. They did not reoccur until about 4 years ago when I was going through menopause. Although I was advised to have the temporal lobe lobectomy at Shands Hospital about 4 years ago, I did not take that advice because naturally I was afraid. I strongly recommend the operation to anyone whom Dr. Benbadis and his team of surgeons can perform this procedure. First, Dr. Benbadis is a doctor who tells you the truth exactly as it will be. This helped alleviate any fears I may have had. He has the gifted ability to inform his patients as to the necessity of the operation and the success of the operation. He has a tremendous support system in his surgeons, in my case Dr. Vale, and his entire office works as a team with excellent results. I strongly urge you to do as I did and listen to his advice as I have been seizure free since the operation December 11, 2001. I feel strong and whole again. After 4 years of seizures which were changing my life, I am thankful that I put my brain in their very capable and caring hands. These are gifted, talented men who can help any epileptic patient. Thank you Dr. Benbadis, Dr. Vale, and staff."



Eddie

- *Eddie's seizures began in 1998, consisting of "blackouts" and a feeling in his head or a "tingly sensation" or occasionally a déjà vu sensation. During the blackouts, he had swallowing or mouth movement and was unresponsive. The frequency was at least two to three per week, sometimes more, despite multiple medications tried. He was sent by his*



neurologist (Dr. Cascione, Tampa), and EEG-video showed a consistent left temporal seizure onset. On 1/15/02, he had a left temporal lobectomy. He has had no seizures since {updated November 2005}.

Gordon

- “Gordon has not had any seizures since surgery, and we believe it is a miracle. Thank you for the years of excellent care you have given our son, and for offering the surgery that has changed his life. We thank God for you.”
- *Gordon had severe seizures several times a week despite multiple medications. Seizures were related to a severe head injury (boat accident) as a young child. The area of seizure onset was localized to the lateral part of his right temporal lobe. He had a right temporal lobectomy on 3/5/02, and has so far been seizure free {updated 2003}.*



Curtis

- "At the age of 13 my husband Curtis fell out of a truck and it caused head trauma, which led to him having seizures. He had so many yearly that it was impossible to keep track. On April 4, 2002, he had brain surgery to remove scar tissue. I am happy to report that since October 2002 he has had no seizures. Surgery was more of a Blessing than we can ever say.”
- *Curtis had seizures since age 12, after a severe head injury. Seizures did not respond to multiple medications. Seizure onset was localized to an area of scar tissue in his right frontal lobe. He had a right frontal resection on 4/2/02. After that, he has had only 1 seizure, related to a low Dilantin level. He and his wife estimate that he is overall 90% improved since surgery {updated 11/25/02}.*

Matthew

- *Matthew had post-traumatic epilepsy and was having frequent and severe seizures (grand mal convulsions). Seizure onset was localized to the frontal lobe. He had a frontal lobe resection 5/14/02. He had a couple of seizures a few days after surgery, but since then has been seizure free. He is more alert, and his medications have been decreased {updated 12/3/02}.*



Joseph

- *Joseph had severe, violent, and frequent seizures despite medication. Localization of seizure onset was difficult by EEG-video monitoring, but the remainder of the testing was helpful. He eventually had a left temporal lobectomy 5/21/02, and has been seizure free since {updated 12/15/02}.*



Paul

- I'd like to let everyone know that if you are a candidate for epilepsy surgery you will be doing yourself a favor to put your life and health in the hands of Dr. Benbadis, Dr. Vale, and all the great staff at Tampa General. All of them are like family to me now and I wouldn't have it any other way. I had seizures from the time I was 9 months old till I was 29 years old. I had a right temporal lobectomy on 7/16/2002. My wife and I are so happy now that I have been seizure free for 16 months as of 11-5-2003. I have had zero seizures since surgery and I no longer have to take any medicine. My wife and I are going to try to have another baby now that I am seizure free. I owe everything in my life to Dr. Benbadis and Dr. Vale because without them in my life I would still be having seizures and would not have the freedom I have now, like driving and working. Thank you all so very much; without every one of you this could of never happen to me.
- *Paul had seizures since early childhood, which continued despite drugs. He was sent by his neurologist (Dr. Tanner, Winter Haven, FL), and his evaluation showed typical right mesial temporal epilepsy. He had a right temporal lobectomy on 7/16/02, and has been seizure free since. As a result, he and his wife have decided to have more children {updated November 2005}.*



Kera

- *Kera had severe seizures and her surface EEG monitoring narrowed down the onset to right frontal or temporal. A phase II with invasive EEG (subdural grid) indicated clear temporal onset. She had a right temporal lobectomy on 9/10/02, and has been completely seizure free since {updated 11/03}.*



Ursula

- “I feel as if I need to express how grateful and most thankful I am to all of you. You have always been there for me from day one. Had it not been for you, I don’t know where I would be right now. Since my surgery in September 2002, I have been seizure free. Words just can’t express how thankful I am.”
- *Ursula’s seizures were typical complex partial seizures, and were uncontrolled on medications. At one point they had been diagnosed as a heart problem and she received a pacemaker.*



Kristina

- *Kristina's seizures were uncontrolled despite medications. After she was referred by her neurologist (Dr. Ibrahim, Titusville, FL), her evaluation confirmed consistent right temporal onset. She had a right temporal lobectomy on 10/1/02, and has been completely seizure free since {updated 11/16/02}.*



Reginald

- *Reginald's seizures started after an abscess for which he had brain surgery at age 13. His seizures came from the scar in his right frontal lobe, and continued despite multiple medications in combinations. His parents were reluctant to proceed with surgery, but eventually he had a right frontal resection. Aside from one seizure within a month after surgery, he has been seizure free {updated 12/03}.*



Steve

- *Steve's seizures were refractory to medications. First EEG-video evaluation showed that they clearly arose from the left hemisphere. However, he had a small parietal abnormality on MRI. Thus, he needed "invasive EEG" evaluation to determine whether the seizures came from the parietal abnormality or the temporal lobe. Subdural electrodes showed seizure onset 100% in the temporal lobe (none around the parietal lesion),*



so he had a left temporal lobectomy on 1/13/03. He has been seizure free since {updated 03}.

Debbie

- “Thank you, thank you, thank you”
- *When her seizures did not respond to medications, Debbie was sent for vagus nerve stimulation (VNS) and was very apprehensive about surgery. In fact her response when we first discussed the possibility surgery at her initial visit was “no one is operating on my brain!” After her evaluation clearly showed a localized seizure onset, she had a right temporal lobectomy on 6/10/03. She has been seizure free since, and is very happy {updated November 2005}.*



Andrea

- “My Daughter Andrea had her first seizure two weeks after her High School graduation, in 2001. We had no idea what was happening. It started out with one or two every couple of days and progressed very quickly. She was on more and more medication which was doing nothing. She lost her job, her apartment, had to drop out of school, and lost her car. Her quality of life was gone. By the time we came to Dr. Benbadis, Andrea was having many seizure daily. She would have episodes that lasted 4 or more hours, with seizures every 30 to 60 seconds. I counted over 125 in one day. It was a nightmare. Our lives were consumed by this and there seemed no way out. Then we were recommended to the USF/TGH epilepsy center. After some testing, it was decided that Andrea was a candidate for surgery. She had her surgery on October 13, 2003, and has been seizure free since that day. Thank you to you and your excellent staff. We can never express our gratefulness enough. You have given my daughter her life back.
- *Andrea had seizures for about 2 years and had undergone a first surgery, which did not help the seizures. Seizures were severe, in that she would abruptly tense up and fall, and they were occurring several times a day despite multiple medications. On 10/13/03, she had a fronto-parietal resection, and has been seizure free since. She is even off medications. {updated 12/03}.*



Sherilyn

- “There are no words to express our thankfulness for you, as you gave our loved one a new lease on life. You are and will always be in our hearts and prayers. Our Lord gave you a special talent and you are using it to serve him. Thank you and God bless you always.”
 - *Sherilyn was very motivated because her seizures were severe. Her evaluation was complex and we had some reservations about proceeding, as we were not fully confident that she would benefit. However, she has proven us wrong and has done wonderful. She has been seizure free since surgery in March 2003 {updated 2003}.*
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Audra

- “Thank you.”
- *Audra was a little difficult because all her imaging (MRI and PET) was completely normal. However, her EEG was very clear so it was decided to proceed with surgery. She was a little skeptical about surgery and hesitated quite some time before proceeding... but she has been seizure free since surgery in April 2004. {updated November 2005}.*



Jeff

- “Thank you.”
- *Jeff was told by a center up north that he was not a candidate for surgery. His evaluation here, however, showed reasonably localized onset of seizures, and he had surgery in January 2004. He has been seizure free since, with the exception of some possible auras {updated November 2005}.*



Christina

- Since my surgery in April of 2005, I have been seizure free. Everyday seems like a new day. I have more confidence and energy because of the steps I took with Dr. Benbadis, Dr. Vale, and the epilepsy center. Being seizure free has given me many opportunities and I am very thankful to all those involved in giving me and my family a second chance without seizures. If given the opportunity again, I would take advantage for a seizure free life.



Tara

- I have had seizures for 10 years. My first seizure happened when I was 5 in kindergarten. We didn't know what was happening so I went to my first doctor and he told us it was a seizure. We don't know what they were caused from but we think it was caused by the shot you get before kindergarten.



Through kindergarten they were at their worst, I would black out and have no control of what I was doing. Then in middle school they got a little better in that I would know when I was having them, but they became more frequent. I was on medication, if that one didn't work he would give me a different medication and it went on and on. Finally I was sent to see Dr. Benbadis. It was kinda exciting and scary at the same time to know that they had a cure for my seizures. It was scary for me cause I had never been operated on before. The tests I had to do were an EEG, a Wada test, and an MRI. The test had to show: 1 - able to pinpoint where the seizures were coming from, 2 - be able to get to that spot, 3 - they don't cause any damage. I passed all 3 and Dr. Vale did my surgery on 4/6/05, during the school year in 9th grade. I only stayed 2 days in the hospital then I was released. I missed like a month of school but I managed to catch up in time before report cards! I have been seizure free for about 9 months and almost off my meds {Updated February 2006}.

- *Tara had clear-cut temporal lobe epilepsy, and was fortunate that her neurologist sent her for possible surgery without waiting several years.*

Viviana

In fifth grade, at the age of ten, my life took a turn that would mark my whole life. While I witnessed my teacher being unfair to a classmate, I felt the rage built up inside me. When I spoke up in defense of my friend and was asked by the teacher to shut up and sit down, two things happened. First I decided I wanted to be like Perry Mason, an attorney. Then, right in there in front of 42 fifth graders girls, I had a seizure. For the following 35 years I had seizures on a monthly basis; rode in numerous ambulances, visited many emergency rooms. Doctors in major hospitals through out the United States eastern coast ran endless tests, prescribed all sort of medications. Still could not explain why I kept experiencing seizures even when treatment was followed and no test ever revealed epileptic activities in the brain.

I suffered seizures couple of hours before delivering my two children. I had seizures in airplanes when flying home at the end of every semester and after finals. I had a massive seizure the second day I sat for the Bar Examination in Tampa. Oh! By the way I did become an attorney! I had seizures couple of times before a federal administrative judge when arguing a case for a child I claimed was disabled. I had seizures driving home after investigating cases of child abuse and neglect for the then Department of Health and rehabilitative Services. I had seizures at home after realizing I

could not do much to protect my girl from being ridiculed by her kinder garden classmates because she was overweight and could not run as fast! I learned to identify “feelings” and circumstances inside and outside my body which I knew would lead to a seizure. I learned to take deep breath, screamed and cried out loud my angers and frustrations in order to avoid a seizure. I even visited naturalist doctors and spiritual healers seeking for an answer to my ailment. But I would still suffer at least a seizure episode every month that would keep me in bed for 3 to 5 days. During the period of time pre and post seizure, I could not remember anything! I would not recognize people around me, did not know who I was, where was I , who were those 2 children crying in a corner and why was I in a hospital or just laying down on the floor. I suffered massive migraines, beat my tongue, scratch myself, pee on myself, become violent with whoever tried to assist me and still would never remember a thing. For 35 years I wrote hundreds of notes apologizing and thanking those my seizure had affected. I also paid thousands in medical bills and suffered the side effects of the medication which included excessive sleepiness, drowsiness, bleeding of my gums.

In 2004, my life took another major turning point. I was panicking as I had become a widow 4 years before and while still raising my two children as a single mother, I was experiencing more and more seizures, more and more incidents described by myself as “forgetfulness” or “absentminded” or just “ hey I am dating Alzheimer” That is when I met Dr. Benbadis and Dr. Vale and my life took a turning point for the best! With the assistance of their Nurse Coordinator, Leanne, and their assistant, Kip, I went through a years of tests, pre-surgery orientation and counseling. Both Dr. Benbadis and Dr. Vale won my trust right away! I am still debating in my heart if it was because of their display of medical knowledge or because they are both young, dynamic, good looking and full of charisma and kindness. They opened my brain and removed an ugly mass of blood which occupied the right side of the front lumbar of my brain. They explained to me that it was formed as a result of several childhood accidents when I had smashed my head pretty bad. The area where I had the mass is connected to the brain’s short memory activities. That also explained some why I would easily forget names, addresses, and events, pre and post seizure activity. I went through one of the most wonderful experiences in my life. These doctors and their staff make me feel special, important. Never like a “weirdo” because of my ailment. During our visits, pre and post surgery, doctors and staff conveyed to me a feeling of accomplishment by undergoing this surgery. I felt all the time that I was not only doing something for myself but also for the medical field. I very much enjoyed all the young doctors asking questions, reviewing my file, listening to Dr. Benbadis explaining to them my medical profile. The days I stayed at Tampa General Hospital were also filled with excellent care and kindness. Every time I woke up, the nurse would make me count backwards, tell the alphabet. They walked with me the aisles, helped me to the bathroom and answered all of my family’s concerns every time they visited. My children, who had already lost a parent while in a hospital in Tampa, were really sensitive and scared about the whole process. But the doctor’s assurance and the nurses’ attentions every time the kids visited me worked miracles on them.

Today, a year later, I am a different person. I haven't suffered any seizure, I am off medications and I had learned to deal with stress and anger in different ways. Most important, I can no longer say "I have Alzheimer" or "I am having a seizure" as an excuse for being moody or forgetful. I gladly take responsibility for what I fail to do or remember. I know I am cured. I am healthy and capable to continue to care for my children as a single mother without the threat of suffering a seizure that might endanger my kids, others and myself. I know I can go anywhere I pleased and do whatever I want to without having to consider the issue of a possible seizure. I am alert, full of energy and determination as I no longer need medication which in the past affected my energy level. Meeting these two doctors, trusting them with my life and future has been a mayor turning point in my life which I do not regret.