# Ditching Self-Doubt

A brain tumor taught author Karen E. Quinones Miller to trust her instincts

May 24, 2006 By Karen E. Quinones

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I've been writing professionally for 11 years and have written four *Essence* bestselling novels. So I was surprised when I reread a chapter of a book I was writing and found it extremely boring. I tried writing a new chapter but came up empty of ideas. Had I suddenly been plunged into the Twilight Zone?

I'd already been to the doctor complaining that I hadn't dreamed in weeks—and I always had such interesting dreams! Many times they inspired my novels. The doctor had given me a checkup and then said nothing was wrong. Maybe I just wasn't remembering my dreams anymore. "Not unusual," he said to me. "Bullshit," I said to myself.

But now things were worse—my creativity was gone. I returned to the doctor. Again, he said nothing was wrong.

Months later, I started having a series of partial complex seizures. The doctor ordered an MRI, and it disclosed a tumor on the left frontal lobe of my brain—the area that arranges words and concepts into new patterns, in effect allowing us to think of new things to say. The tumor had probably caused me to forget my dreams. Unfortunately, researchers don't know what causes brain tumors. And there was no way to know whether mine was cancerous until after it was removed.

I felt more aggravated than depressed by my diagnosis—it was my way of coping. I didn't want to face my vulnerability, deal with my fear of dying or think about my high school senior daughter becoming an orphan. I focused on life after surgery instead: negotiating a new deadline for my book—praying I'd be able to write after surgery—and figuring out how my daughter was going to pick a college, get to prom and attend graduation with me in this condition. I also asked family members and friends to help me make decisions and take care of myself before surgery and during recovery. Then I had the operation.

Thank God the biopsy showed the tumor was benign! I was home recuperating within a week. Five days later, I went to sleep and had my first dream. I submitted a juicy new manuscript on time. And my daughter started college.

In the meantime, I've learned to trust my instincts and push harder a lot sooner when I believe something is amiss. Had I done so, the tumor would have been diagnosed earlier. A lesson learned late, but learned well.

*Karen E. Quiñones Miller's new novel, Satin Nights (Warner Books), will be released in August.*

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