



Warren, who survived a brain tumour, and Tanya Hayes and their son Josh. Pictures: WAYNE VENABLES



Warren Hayes works on his rehabilitation exercises.

# The power of love

People told Tanya Hayes her fiance would never recover from a brain tumour but she stayed by his side. Now they're married with a son, writes JODIE DUFFY.

"Walk away - life's too short to waste your youth in a hospital watching your fiance waste away," was the harsh advice many people gave 22-year-old Tanya Hayes.

But 10 hours a day for 16 months she sat beside her future husband's bedside willing him to stay alive.

Against the odds he did.

Gwynneville real estate agent Warren Hayes was 29 when in 1997 it was discovered he had a massive brain tumour that was tangled around everything in its path - the brain stem, vital blood vessels and nerves.

Doctors told him the risk of death during surgery was high - but if they didn't operate by the end of the week he'd be dead.

"It felt like a death sentence, I broke down and continually sobbed," Warren says. "I kept hearing the same words echo through my mind - brain tumour, brain tumour, brain tumour."

Two lengthy operations later doctors managed to remove the tumour, but a day after being transferred into a rehabilitation unit he was struck down by fungal and bacterial meningitis of the brain.

For months he was on the brink of death, but finally a risky procedure pulled him through.

Doctors injected concentrated antibiotics directly into the four major blood vessels in Warren's head - recovery though was short-lived.

Tests revealed the antibiotics had cleared the meningitis, but in the process he'd contracted golden staph in the brain.

Tanya says that after months in intensive care, medical staff silently gave up on him.

"It was like a nightmare, I'll never forget the day when the registrar asked me to consider turning off the life support," she says. "It was my darkest moment.

They had written Warren off, they were pulling the pin.

There were dark moments when Warren himself wanted to let go of life.

"I watched him struggle and fade and come back to life over and over," Tanya says. "He couldn't talk, he couldn't move, he just lay there looking up at the ceiling.

"The moment that almost broke my heart was when he lifted his hand and made the gesture of a gun against his head.

"He wanted to die.

"But I thought to myself 'don't listen to any of them, somehow we'll get him out alive'."

Of the 16 months he spent in hospital Warren can only remember the last six weeks - around the same time that Tanya told doctors she was going to take her fiance home and care for him herself.

"It was the most horrifying thing I've ever done, I had no hospital staff to help me, I was petrified, but I didn't want Warren to know, so I kept telling him we can do this.

"All I knew was that I loved this man and I hoped and prayed that somehow I would be able to fill the shoes of the carer I needed to be.

"I thought if I keep this going maybe it will work and it did, the years went by and he got better bit by bit."

Warren had no idea that he had been in hospital for almost a year and a half.

"When they told me what the date was I couldn't believe it.

"My body had wasted away, I was a vegetable, I was bedridden, unable to walk, eat, talk or go to the toilet on my own.

"I was totally dependent and even today I still need Tanya to do most things for me."

For the next six years they embarked on a rehabilitation program where for five hours a day Tanya would help Warren

exercise. Slowly he began to make progress - the results were minimal but eventually he began to learn to talk again and he can now walk a little with the help of two people either side of him or if he is hooked up to a harness.

Because doctors had to cut nerves on the side of his face to release the tumour he has lost the hearing in his left ear, one side of his face now droops and he's paralysed down his right side.

While she was in hospital, nurses, friends and family would often ask Tanya why she was wasting her time sitting by Warren's side.

"I was young and they thought I should be out having fun," she says. "But they didn't understand the love I had for Warren, I didn't want to be anywhere else, if I didn't have Warren I didn't have a life."

"Just because Warren fell sick it didn't change who he was, it didn't change him as a person.

"Even today when I look at Warren I don't see his disability, I don't see his wheelchair. I just see the same person I fell in love with all those years ago."

Four years after Warren was discharged from hospital they married at the Beachhouse Restaurant in front of family and friends and the doctors and nurses who had kept him alive.

"When we married it wasn't just a wedding, but a celebration of Warren's life and how he'd beaten the odds.

"It was a beautiful day, the happiest of

my life," says Tanya.

Because Warren had 150 X-rays in hospital doctors told him he would probably be sterile - but still the couple didn't let that stop them.

Within three months they had conceived naturally.

"Most people thought we couldn't have sex because Warren was in a wheelchair, so it was a shock when we told everybody that I was pregnant," says Tanya.

After a dream pregnancy Josh was born and the last 16 months have changed their lives forever - but this time for the better.

"We've been given this beautiful gift, a precious little miracle that we've created and he's just like an angel, he's such a happy baby," says Tanya says.

Josh seems to accept his father's disabilities and entertains himself when Tanya has to care for Warren.

"I do regret that I'll never be able to kick a soccer ball with him," Warren says. "But then I remind myself that I could be six foot under pushing up daisies, so I'm just grateful that I'm here and I have the opportunity to watch him grow."

Tanya will help launch Carers Week at parliament house in Canberra on Monday.

BELOW: A scan showing Warren Hayes' brain tumour.



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