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## **Her story may save a life**

**Edie Magduff seemed destined to live out her golden years in misery, as her muscles and memory failed.**

By Peggy Kreimer  
Post staff reporter

Edie Magduff sits in her comfortable Mason, Ohio, home, eyes sparkling, hands punctuating her conversation, and remembers lying on the floor for hours, scared to tell her daughter she had fallen again.

She remembers the army of caregivers who virtually moved in with her to give her showers, dress her, feed her and change her when she was incontinent.

Other memories are mercifully fuzzy - the days and months of living in a what she calls "outer space," barely speaking, confused, staring incoherently.

Those days are preserved in the caregiver agency's daily logs - pages of handwritten notes like dreary clouds of gray ink detailing day after day of Edie Magduff's deteriorating life.

Her doctor told her she had incurable dementia that would keep getting worse.

She calls it the year of horror. And also the year of the miracle.

Two months before Magduff's family was scheduled to move her into a nursing home, her daughter, Debbie Roll, by chance saw a segment of the "Today Show."

The guest was talking about a condition with symptoms almost identical to Alzheimer's disease or Parkinson's disease, but easily treatable. The signs are difficulty walking, forgetfulness or dementia, and incontinence.

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"They describe it as the three Ws: wobbly, wet and wacky," said Roll. "It was my mother exactly."

For a year, Magduff and her daughter had gone from doctor to doctor trying to figure out what was wrong. But they had never heard of Normal Pressure Hydrocephalus.

Now they're doing everything they can to make sure others don't waste that same precious time.

"I'm not one to talk about myself, but if my story can help one person, then I want to tell it," said Magduff, 72.

She will be featured in the September issue of Prevention magazine and in an upcoming issue of Woman's Day. She and her daughters, Roll, of Mason and Marci Allen of Aurora, Ohio, went to New York in September to join other people with NPH to talk with media representatives about the often missed condition that can change a person's life.

It happens when the body no longer efficiently absorbs the spinal fluid around the brain. As the body continues to produce the fluid, the over-filled spinal fluid chambers press on parts of the brain that control walking, thinking and bladder control.

Magduff was 69 when she noticed the first signs of trouble in early 2004.

"At first we thought her arthritis was getting worse," said Roll. "She was having trouble walking. It was like her feet were magnetized to the floor."

And she would fall for no reason.

"I thought maybe her knees were giving out, so we went to an orthopedic surgeon." Roll said.

He thought it might be an inner ear problem, she said.

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Each doctor suggested another. Meanwhile, the falling escalated to several falls a day.

In March 2004, Magduff spent a week in the hospital.

"They gave her every test imaginable," said Roll.

They couldn't find physical causes so they looked for a mental cause. Magduff's husband had died a year before.

"They thought it might be underlying depression," said Roll.

Magduff went into grief counseling and even checked into a nursing home for two weeks of therapy. She was weak. She took no interest in life.

"I got to the point where I only looked at the paper to find out what day it was," Magduff said.

"I don't want to be with anyone I can't talk to. Who doesn't know what Bush is doing, who doesn't read a book, or know what's going on in the world? They're dull people. And that's exactly what I was," she said.

"It wasn't like me at all. I thought I had Alzheimer's."

A neurologist said it was normal aging - nothing that could be fixed.

The home care service she hired to help a few hours a day grew to 24-hour service as she moved from walker to wheelchair.

The deterioration was frightening and frustrating, said Roll.

"Our relationship deteriorated. We used to go out together for lunch and we'd have so much fun, so much to talk about," She said.

She remembers taking her mother to their favorite salon and Magduff just stared and asked what day it was.

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Roll, a pharmacist at the poison control center at Cincinnati Children's Hospital Medical Center, got to know the caller ID numbers for the caregiver agency and the doctors. Every call was bad news.

"I'd get a call and rush out of work, crying," she said. "I'd get up and say 'However bad it was yesterday, today is a new day and maybe things will be better.' But they never were."

They finally realized Magduff couldn't get proper care at home anymore and needed to go to a nursing home.

The nursing home director happened to be the gerontologist who had evaluated Magduff when she had taken the two-week therapy program at the nursing home 10 months earlier.

"She could see the deterioration. She diagnosed mom with vascular dementia," said Roll.

When Roll saw the television program, she asked the doctor if there was a chance Magduff had NPH. The doctor ordered a brain scan.

"Two days later, she called me and said 'Your mother has NPH.' "

They met with Dr. Lee Greiner, neurosurgeon at the Mayfield Clinic in Cincinnati and a leading expert in NPH in the region. Two weeks later, Edie Magduff was in surgery.

The treatment is a shunt, placed in the brain to drain fluid through a flexible tube that runs under the skin to the abdomen.

Roll said she knew it helped the minute she walked into her mother's recovery room.

"Mom was telling the nurse where to put something," said Roll. "And when she talked to me, she was really talking, not making rote responses."

Magduff had to relearn how to walk and went to therapy sessions for daily living skills.

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"The therapist asked me what my goal for my mother would be," said Roll. "I said I'd be happy if I could make sandwiches and she'd be able to get them out of the refrigerator and put them on a plate. That was my goal," she said.

"Last week, mom called and said she was driving to Costco for some fish and a baked potatoes to make for dinner. She just got a new car. I still can't believe it. We go out together for lunch like we used to."

The national Hydrocephalus Association estimates that 5 percent of everyone in the country who is diagnosed with dementia actually has NPH.

Every time Magduff leaves her house, she passes a nursing home.

"I'm sure there are people over there right now who could be walking around, who could have their lives back," said Magduff. "I was almost over there myself."