



# DEEP BRAIN STIMULATION, DEEPLY HEARTFELT

**By Gavin Mogan**

October 20, 2017

I have always enjoyed travelling roads less taken in search of life's hidden gems. Heck, I enjoy those roads just fishing for good value, really.

I recently trekked 200 miles from Dallas to Northwest Louisiana in search of a physician to perform a surgical procedure known as deep brain stimulation (DBS) to relieve symptoms of Parkinson's disease (PD). [*They don't do those in Dallas? The dominant surgeon in the Dallas area only installs one company's equipment – if seeking the new product installed by experienced hands... road trip!*]

I struck gold in the city of Shreveport, although it had nothing to do with the abundant casino gaming. This gold was the instant bond formed with a like-spirited, California-raised neurosurgeon whose love of all things neurological is exceeded only by love for her patients.

## **Passionate Heart**

Jessica Wilden's actions are aligned with her values. She is acutely clear on who she is and her purpose. There's no line of separation between Jessica Wilden and Dr. Wilden, founder of Tri-State Neurosurgery. Life is free and easy when you play a single role - yourself.

Her credentials are extraordinary. Her knowledge of Parkinson's is on a higher level. She seems to be fulfilling her destiny.

But it's not those factors that set her apart. It's love. Love for her craft and for the people whose lives she impacts.

I spoke with several people who have known Dr. Wilden longer than I have. I wanted a broader perspective. All included terms like "passion" and "patient-first" in their descriptions.

One medical device rep, operating room-experienced with Dr. Wilden, told me that not being up to speed was grounds for firm, immediate admonishment. This person also said her passion is unquestioned and always on the patient's behalf.

Post-DBS, my local neurologist has handled device programming. Dr. Wilden provided me with programming expertise in addition to that of my local neurologist's. She

adamantly felt her knowledge could significantly improve my quality of life. She boldly acted for my benefit.

### **Impact on Team, Impact of Team**

Having lived nine years with Parkinson's, I've learned that choosing your doctor is important, but is less meaningful than choosing yourself. The exception to this refrain, however, is a physician that can help grow self, set the tone for the next 3 to 6 months until follow-up, and is supported by a staff who genuinely care about patient well-being.

Dr. Wilden's staff understands each patient. They are heavily involved in the local PD community, even assisting in publishing the Patient's Resource newsletter.

Commonly in medical care, physician support staff simply read from a prompted checklist of questions. An excellent staff will listen, assemble a story, detect plot. They know context is critical. Dr. Wilden's staff used my answers to fashion their next questions. They document stories.

I asked one of her nurses what makes Dr. Wilden stand out. Her response was lengthy:

"Her heart, courage, commitment, her unfailing moral code, perseverance, the need to always be better, and the belief that her patients deserve better. We are talking about a real-life Mother of Dragons, a breaker of chains."

Mother of what? Don't be alarmed. It's *A Game of Thrones* reference intended to convey bad-assness.

According to the same nurse, Dr. Wilden's example influences her team to strive for perpetual growth, to aim for perfection.

When one staff member was struggling to meet work obligations due to a variety of personal demands, Dr. Wilden insisted the employee design the work schedule best suiting her needs. She gained a stronger person and a stronger, more fiercely loyal employee.

### **A Forward-Driving Approach to Life**

If able to engage her in conversation about her love for extreme sports, you might detect a surfer vibe. Understand clearly, though, this is no beach bum. Dr. Wilden has the energy and determination that perpetually seeks bigger waves, higher peaks.

Many upper-income professionals enjoy pampering escapes to the Caribbean. Dr. Wilden prefers testing her physical limits in places where first responders arrive by helicopter.

There's no pretense about her. There is confidence. Infectious confidence. I like that in my surgeon.

She's also candid, withholding nothing. I asked her to tell me what I haven't heard about my DBS device. She not only told me, she also told me how she was correcting the potential flaw, as well as the research she hoped to publish to inform others. Turns

out Dr. Wilden concerns were alleviated. But not before she shook some high-level company reps out of their tree-tops to prove her otherwise.

On another occasion, Dr. Wilden told me she once hosted another doctor needing temporary space. She laughingly mentioned that he saw eight patients in the time she saw one. This was funny to her, not frustrating.

She's not caught in the pursuit of money. Her pursuit is always quality. Quality of treatment, quality of character.

### **Freedom to be Extraordinary**

Search Google Images using the term "neurosurgeon profile". Results resemble the membership directory of Augusta National Golf Club – well, in gender anyway.

Perhaps a female in an all-boys world doesn't get caught-up with fitting-in. When not caught-up with fitting-in, you're free. When free, boundaries are removed, limits undefined.

Dr. Wilden is not trying to make-nice with other doctors or collect the swag of suitors. Her measure of success is simply observing patients walk into her office feeling better than when last walking in.

She could make more money working with a Dallas practice and hospital affiliation. But would she make a better *living*? Who would treat the patients left behind in Northwest Louisiana? What about her handpicked staff so important to the mission?

We often feel powerless to dent an entrenched culture of *never enough* and compromised principles. Choosing to align our beliefs and actions not only allows for some feeling of control around us, but also fulfills our own need for contributions to a more just world.

Exercising my freedom to select Dr. Wilden as my DBS surgeon reflected my faith in her surgical skills, sure; it was perhaps equally my endorsement of her approach to life.

## **The Magical Science of Brain Chemistry**

There are many treatments available to relieve suffering caused by PD. However, PD's parade of vexing symptoms often dampens our will to seek them. In my experience, it often requires the genuine attention and concern of another to flip the switch of will. It usually takes an especially inspiring person to shift will in this way. Without will to improve, fancy treatments mean nothing.

Having a *why*, a purpose, is critical to living well with chronic illness. It's free, yet often hard to obtain. Doctors' offices that combine first-class treatment with a strong dose of *why* are worth their weight in gold.

You may have a three-hour drive down I-20 from Dallas to Shreveport. But upon arrival at Tri-State Neurosurgery, you'll find a different world. I'd say that's good value.

Gold?

Better, actually. Your health is priceless.