



Tracy Mobley and son Austin.

## Tracy Mobley Shines a Ray of Hope On Young Alzheimer's Patients

Story & Photos by Laura Scott

At 38 years of age, the last thing you expect to hear from your physician is that you have Alzheimer's disease.

As Tracy Mobley, now 40, struggled with her memory, her life at home and work became hard to manage. Depressed and confused, Tracy turned to her doctor for answers. They treated the depression, but the memory problems became worse. It resulted in more doctor visits, to Mayo Clinic and to see psychiatrists and a psychologist, before she was diagnosed with *frontal temporal lobe dementia* in August 2002.

"It took two years to get a diagnosis,"

she said. "The doctor actually said if I were in my 60s, he would diagnose me with Alzheimer's. He said I was too young."

During that time, Tracy and her husband Allen learned to cope with this devastating illness while raising 10-year-old Austin. Tracy began keeping a journal, taking notes to help her remember the daily challenges and events.

It wasn't enough for Tracy Mobley to just manage the terrible hand she'd been dealt. She wanted to educate others and hopefully offer hope and healing through her book, *Young Hope*. The Elkland resident is extremely candid in her book, sharing personal struggles, family issues, about how the disease takes its toll on her

daily life. "The message I want to get out is to let people know Alzheimer's is not only an old person's disease. It can strike in your 30s, 40s and 50s," she said. "I also wanted to talk about the denial that is common with families. It's a very powerful weapon and it can destroy families. My hope is the book will help even one family."

Most of all, Mobley hoped it would help her own family. She says her mother's denial is so strong that their relationship is divided. "My mom thinks I'm too young to have Alzheimer's. I agree with that statement but this disease is not a choice. I've sent her test results and information and she still doesn't believe me." Tracy hoped that giving time to her mother and eight siblings would help them to accept reality. Though she still waits for healing within her family, it has yet to happen. She relies on Allen, Austin and her in-laws for support.

At times, Tracy has difficulty remembering how she once was and the life she and her family had before the disease struck. She worked at a Springfield hospital as a technician in ICU-PACU. "I had 18 years experience in the medical field and I loved it," she explains in the book. "I was first trained as a nurse technician at St. Francis Hospital in Tulsa. I decided to go to nursing school and was halfway there." Putting things on hold, Tracy was having trouble retaining information and completing exams. At Cox Medical Center's ICU, she rediscovered her passion for her work and was encouraged to go back to school by her co-workers. Yet her memory problems were getting in the way of her dreams. Always competent, Tracy would walk into a supply room and forget why she was there or get lost in the hallways. The dream of becoming a nurse was never realized. Mobley eventually had to work part time before finally leaving her job behind.

Slowly, Tracy Mobley began losing her independence. "I had to be with someone all the time," she said. Medications have helped her significantly. She takes Exelon and the new drug, Namenda. "That's the miracle part of it. Now I'm able to stay home alone and gained part of my independence back." Unable to drive before, she's now able to drive short distances or with someone in the car with her.

"Before I started taking the medica-