

## Finding a Lost Soul

**Yvonne Garcia says that when she finally turned up in the office of Dr. William White, "My soul was lost."**

Little wonder she should feel that way. For four years, she had suffered the debilitating effects of a little-known ailment called Cushing's Disease. A benign tumor was pressing on Yvonne's pituitary gland. The pituitary gland is a small, bean-shaped organ, in the middle of the skull. Called the "master gland" it regulates metabolism and many other important functions, including maintaining blood pressure and balancing the effects of insulin in breaking down sugar for energy. Cushing's Disease affects women at five times the rate it hits men.

In 2002, not long after Yvonne moved to Phoenix from Globe to work as a computer specialist for an insurance company, she began to gain weight, putting on 35 pounds in two years. To fight the weight gain, "I was working out three hours a day. I was killing myself."

Over time, her hair began to fall out and her nail-beds darkened. She developed severe acne. She began to notice disfiguring stretch marks known as "bear claws" on her young skin. Once when she went to the mall with her boy friend to help him pick out a shirt, the salesclerk turned to her and said, "And what does Mom think?" She was 21 years old at the time.

By chance, her grandmother saw a television program on Cushing's Disease and recognized many of the symptoms that were tormenting Yvonne. But her doctors insisted she had high blood pressure, high cholesterol and was borderline diabetic.

By this time, "I couldn't even recognize myself. My face was swollen. I had acne. I was growing a hump on my back," she says. "I thought I was dying. Every time I closed my eyes it felt like I was being poked by needles."

Then in 2006 she visited a diabetes specialist who by chance had researched Cushing's Disease in medical school. Before she knew it, she was in Dr. White's examining room at Barrow Neurosurgical Associates.

"He was so great. He said, 'I understand the way you're feeling. I'm going to do every thing I can,' "she says." And his staff was great. They were very supportive."

An MRI located the tumor. In October, 2006, just before Yvonne's 24th birthday, Dr. White successfully removed it. Yvonne is on the road to

recovery. She is learning to walk steadily again. Her body is returning to normal. Her hair and nails are back. And she knows who brought her back to health.

"Dr. White was really kind, really friendly, really supportive," she says. "When I tried to tell him how much I appreciated what he had done, he just said, 'No problem.'"

Dr. White operates on more than 100 pituitary tumors each year, making him one of the most experienced surgeons in this area of neurosurgery.