It started in December 2016, when Ann, a substitute teacher in Newton, started feeling sick during a workout, with a headache, stiff neck and the inability to keep anything down.

“The flu had been going around my family, so I assumed it was that,” she says. “But when I felt even worse the next day, and was getting dehydrated, my husband took me to the ER in Newton.”

She felt a bit better after receiving fluids, but after she described her headache to the ER physician as the worst she’d ever had, he ordered a CT scan, which showed bleeding in her brain, caused by an aneurysm. She was immediately transferred by ambulance to Mercy.

“It was a terrifying experience,” she says. “I was 37 years old and had two young children. I just kept saying, ‘I don’t want to die.’”

Fortunately for Ann, the surgery she needed was available in Des Moines, thanks to the arrival just a few months before of Einar Bogason, M.D., central Iowa’s only fellowship-trained vascular neurosurgeon. He is also one of only a few in the state trained in coiling, or clipping, an aneurysm.

In a procedure the next day, Dr. Bogason performed a coiling procedure by navigating a catheter through a vessel in Ann’s leg and up to the spot in her brain where the aneurysm was located. He then inserted coils into the aneurysm to prevent further bleeding.

The recovery included two weeks in the ICU, to monitor her and ensure healing was progressing, and Ann was impressed with the care she received from the ICU staff and Dr. Bogason.

“He stopped by several times each day, including the first thing in the morning and on his way home at night,” she says. “I would definitely recommend him and the whole Mercy ICU staff. They took excellent care of me and it was a very good experience.”

While Riley was writing her report, her mom was recuperating in the ICU at Mercy after undergoing a successful surgery to repair a brain aneurysm. If Ann and her husband hadn’t trusted their instincts and gone to the emergency room, the aneurysm would likely have burst and have taken her life.

Riley shared a copy of her report with Dr. Bogason, and even took a picture with him at one of Ann’s follow-up appointments. Dr. Bogason sent Riley a thank-you note and called to thank her for sending him her report.

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“I met Dr. Bogason the night I arrived at Mercy, and it was so reassuring,” she says. “He did an excellent job of explaining things. I could not have asked for a more pleasant doctor, and I felt very confident having him perform my surgery.”

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Her recovery progressed on schedule — as an avid exerciser, she may have been the only ICU patient who worked her way back to 25,000 steps a day while still in the hospital — she was able to come home three days before Christmas!

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“He is from Iceland. He kinda has an accent. He’s really nice and he saves people’s lives,” Riley wrote. “He saved my mom’s life.”