

# Thyrobulletin

The bike accident  
that saved me



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# The Bike Accident that Saved Me

*Melanie Solmon*

In the summer of 2008, I was having a great time participating in sprint distance duathlon races. I was feeling really good and even ended up placing in the top 3 for my age group. Unfortunately, a few days later, I had a serious bike accident. Flipped over the handlebars, blacked out, and needed to have surgery for a displaced wrist bone! Three months later at a follow up appointment for my concussion, when the doctor scrolled through my report on the computer, I saw her quickly pass over something about an abnormal thyroid nodule. I asked her to go back so I could see the comments and right there, in black and white, it said I had an abnormal nodule in my thyroid gland. Really? This information has been there for 3 months and no one mentioned it to me! I just found out about it and she matter-of-factly said to follow up with my family doctor, and that's where my story began.

The ultrasound showed that the nodule was large enough to be of concern, but not so large that I noticed it. I had a fine needle biopsy which was not supposed to create any significant problems, but I felt strange afterwards. Lesson #1: Always bring someone to new procedures in case you cannot drive after!

Next was the big discussion about how the biopsy did not determine the probability that the nodule could be cancerous. However, I was not supposed to worry because Thyroid Cancer is the cancer with the small 'c'. It was recommended that I just have one side of the thyroid gland removed in case it was NOT actually cancer. Of course, the downside would be if it was cancer, then it would be necessary to have a second operation. Well, I like to be positive, so I hoped for the best and did a hemi-thyroidectomy. I had to wait a few months, for the surgery, as I was not a priority case since it was not known if I even had cancer.

The operation was successful, except I discovered I was allergic to morphine during recovery when I had a really strong itchy reaction. At my post-surgery exam, I found out that I had stage 2 Papillary Thyroid Cancer, but told again not to worry, "it's Cancer with a small 'c'". "Great!" I tell myself, but why am I not feeling that calm about it? Another operation for the real reason, cancer....Here I go again.

Well operation 2 was even a better success (because there was no morphine), but now came the fun stuff. Radioactive



Iodine. Just in case there was any leftover cancerous thyroid tissue as it is so close to the parathyroid glands and the vocal cords, often some tissue is left behind. I was advised not to take any thyroid medication as it could interfere with the uptake of the Radioactive Iodine. As a result, I became pretty weak and tired as I was in a severe hypothyroid state when it was finally time for the treatment. I also had a tremendous loss during this time as my father died 10 days after my surgery. I was so absorbed with my father's death that I almost forgot to start my salt free diet!

The day I went for the Radioactive Iodine treatment is still very vivid. I was taken to a room with signs, "Danger Do Not Enter", but this is where I get to stay for my treatment! As soon as the doctor opened the cup with the radioactive pill, there was smoky vapour pouring out and everyone left quickly. I was all alone in this room, that was now unsafe for anyone else and anything I brought for my stay, including clothes, must be thrown away after because of this pill I just swallowed. I felt like I would be the next superhero, Radioactive Girl.

My food was delivered through a slot and when I opened the door to get the food, I could see the face of horror of the person across the hall. Radioactive waves could come to attack her! Even when I went home, I had to sleep downstairs and stay away from everyone for a week. I felt like I had some highly contagious disease. Radioactive Mom, couldn't even drive her kids to school. It was tough but I made the best of it.

One week later, it was time for me to go back to the hospital for my full body scan to make sure that all of the cancer was gone. I made the mistake of driving to the appointment myself. I was so tired that I wanted to nap at every stoplight on the way there. Lesson #2: Remember Lesson #1. I could not even walk across the street in one traffic light. I actually had to pause on the median at the half-way point. I remember thinking how quickly everyone was moving. Pretty funny considering how well I was doing at races one year previously! Well, guess what, ALL CLEAR! Great, I can start taking thyroid medication now. I am officially a Thyroid Cancer Survivor. OK so it's smooth sailing now? Cancer with a small 'c', here I come....NOPE, not even close! Why? Well no one seems to know for sure, but there were several factors involved.

First of all, my immune system went wild. About 10 years before my thyroid was removed, I developed a chronic skin rash, atopic dermatitis, and after my thyroid was removed my



skin condition became much worse as a result of an overactive immune system. I ended up having to take very strong allergy medication just to have some relief from constant itchiness everywhere. I also had to start taking immunosuppressant medication which is not usually advisable for cancer patients.

In one year, I gained 30 pounds which is a significant amount for a 5'3" petite person like me! Even though I was not exercising anything close to the same level that I was doing during my racing days before the operation, the increase in weight did not make sense based on the amount of food I was eating. I was used to being one of those lucky people who had a very high energy level and metabolism since childhood. However, those days seemed to be gone for me.

My endocrinologist kept lowering my thyroid medication after every blood test, until he was finally happy with my thyroid levels. However, I felt worse than ever with such a big weight gain, lack of energy and very uncomfortable and unsightly skin rash all over my body!

Fortunately I had a breakthrough thanks to the great advice I received from a Naturopathic Doctor, Natasha Turner. One of my friends heard her speak at a conference about some issues that seemed to be quite relevant for me and gave me a copy of Dr. Turner's best-selling book, "The Hormone Diet". I was so impressed by the connections between her book and my own situation that I planned to make an appointment to see her.

Dr. Turner was REALLY concerned about my situation, and she discussed my liver, my blood cell count and other things that no one else commented on. She also recommended a special diet plan and supplements. According to her, my body was so toxic that I basically had to begin a detoxification process so that I could detoxify further without going into complete shock! So I left her office with my new diet, bought my detoxifying supplements and off I went to start my new regime.

I LOVE CHOCOLATE, COOKIES, BROWNIES, and used to be able to eat them and keep my weight consistent, but now I was advised to go gluten free, avoid all starchy vegetables, like corn and potatoes and the worst part....NO SUGAR! The results? In less than 3 weeks, I lost 13 pounds! I also got my energy back and even my skin was improving! So why did I go gluten free? By taking a detailed history, Dr. Turner learned that I was intolerant to gluten as a baby (got rashes then too) and once you have that problem, apparently IT NEVER GOES AWAY! So all those years that I was enjoying bread, pasta, and chocolate chip cookies, I was actually destroying my immune system leading to the chronic eczema later in life and my digestive system was not absorbing nutrients properly. Celiac

Disease is genetic and sometimes it becomes active for the first time after surgery.

After I cut out gluten, I began to see another doctor (MD) who advised me that some people don't do well on synthetic thyroid (T4) and they do better on desiccated/porcine thyroid (from a pig) thyroid T3. So I tried that, and off came the next 20 pounds! I had my body back at last. The only problem was that my endocrinologist was very unhappy about this new medication I was taking, but nothing he was suggesting worked and I finally felt great and no one was going to take that away from me!

So what did I learn from all of this? There is a great need for far more research to consider other aspects in treatment outside the usual plan. Thyroid Cancer had a big "C" for me, and I had no expectation of this at all based on what all the doctors said. It took several months for me to sort through the fallout from my surgery and it was only because I was determined to find answers to feel good again. I felt like I was battling uphill to find the right answers and seek opinions from two professionals outside of the original recommended experts who were directly involved in treating me. But one thing for sure, I'm really lucky I had that bike accident. In fact, I think it saved me!!



Melanie (centre) and family

Read more about Papillary Thyroid Cancer, other forms of thyroid cancer and treatments in our *Health Guides on Thyroid Disease* which can be found on our website: [www.thyroid.ca/educational\\_material](http://www.thyroid.ca/educational_material)