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BRAIN CANCER SURVIVOR RELIES ON HOPE TO PUSH BOUNDARIES

by [Trish](#) February 27, 2013 15:13

I was so inspired when I read BethAnn Telford's story. She is such a courageous, strong, determined, and caring person. It is so easy when faced with adversary to focus on the bad in life. BethAnn held onto one word during her medical, physical, and emotional challenges: HOPE. That one word inspired her to leap over each hurdle life put in her way, carrying the hearts of others in her hands along the way. I had the opportunity to ask BethAnn some questions, regarding her challenges and triumphs. I hope you find her to be as inspiring as we do, at 180 Medical.

In the Winter of 2005, you were diagnosed with brain cancer, and you were obviously terrified. What were the doctors' prognoses?

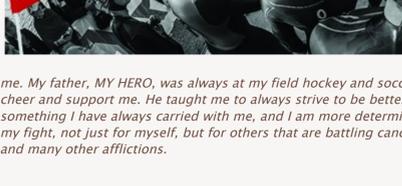
The doctors thought that I would have to re-train myself to walk again, but that running—especially marathons, might be beyond reach. Of course I was definitely afraid of this, since I have been an athlete all of my life, from field hockey and soccer, when I was younger to running, as I grew older.

What about cognitive function?

I was definitely afraid of losing some cognitive function. Even now, when I am very tired at the end of a long day, I have difficulty with saying the right words and tend to slur my speech. It seems like the words I want to say are on the tip of my tongue, but I can't seem to get them out.

How were you feeling after that initial surgery? What functions had you lost? What was running through your mind?

I was definitely in pain and was afraid I would not be able to move and afraid of loss of functions. Of course they tested my extremities to be sure I could feel my legs, toes, etc. immediately after the surgery and to test my strength. Everything went well, and as I gained my strength back, I stood and then started my first steps. I was determined to recover quickly and to not give up. As my strength improved each day, I used the hospital ward hallways as a circuit and tried to go further each day with my friends and family beside me in case I fell.



There is so much involved with fighting cancer. Chemotherapy, radiation, surgeries. I can not even fathom how much pain you endured. Something kept you from giving up, may I ask what shifted inside you to make you so determined to fight to regain your abilities? Did you have a strong support system?

I have been lucky with a strong family, especially my parents. They have always been there for me.

My father, MY HERO, was always at my field hockey and soccer matches and would cheer and support me. He taught me to always strive to be better and to never give up. It is something I have always carried with me, and I am more determined than ever to continue my fight, not just for myself, but for others that are battling cancer, over-active bladders and many other afflictions.

How long was the road to recovery, and what did it entail?

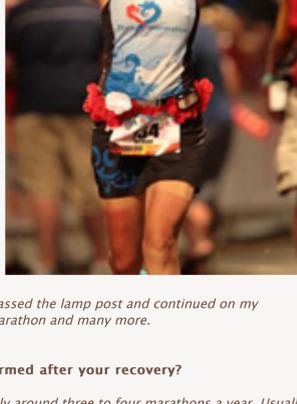
I guess I didn't feel fully recovered until I was able to run the Marine Corp Marathon in the fall of 2005. I first felt the symptoms of my brain cancer while running the Marine Corp Marathon in 2004 and had my first brain surgery in the spring of 2005. I did my first 5K about two months after the surgery. I originally was just going to walk the 5K, but when I was about halfway through, I heard my father cheering me on, so I started jogging slowly and kept it up until the finish. I started then very slowly trying to build up my endurance, though I definitely had bad days and weeks were my body wasn't physically able to do what my mind wanted. I did it though, and managed to make it back to where my long journey started.

Running is a huge part of your life. How did it feel when you began training again? Was the love of running one of the things that kept you so determined to regain your strength?

I learned from my father to be independent and that I could do anything I set my heart and mind to. Running was always a way to push my boundaries and to see how far I could go. After the surgery, I was determined to get right back to where I was before and to not let this change how I lived my life. Running was a way to test myself and push my boundaries all over again. It became a yardstick to measure myself by and I was determined to not come up short.

Describe the first marathon after your recovery. Were you afraid? Were you in any pain? How did it feel to cross that finish line?

As I said above, the Marine Corp Marathon was where I first felt the effects of my brain cancer and it was the first marathon I attempted after my surgery. I was definitely afraid, but I didn't want to let my cancer change how I lived my life. In 2004, around mile 18 of the marathon, around Hains Point in DC, I felt a "pop" in my head and was disoriented. I stopped along the road as runners streamed past and leaned over trying to figure out what was happening. I distinctly remember looking up at a street lamp, as I fought to clear my head and continue on. I managed to finish the marathon, but I knew that something was wrong. What I originally thought was an inner ear infection ended up being brain cancer.



So, as I ran the Marine Corp Marathon in the fall of 2005, I was definitely apprehensive, especially as I approached Hains Point. As I rounded the turn near the bottom of Hains Point I started to look for the lamp post that I remembered so vividly. I spotted the lamp post and stopped for a moment thinking about how far I had come, since I was last there. It seemed like my steps grew lighter as I passed the lamp post and continued on my journey, knowing that I could finish this marathon and many more.

How many marathons have you performed after your recovery?

Since my recovery, I have averaged probably around three to four marathons a year. Usually one or two in the Spring and one or two in the fall, so I would say I've probably run around 30 marathons, give or take a couple. I think the most I've done in a year was five, the Shamrock Marathon and Boston Marathon in the spring, and the Air Force Marathon, Steamtown Marathon, and Marine Corp Marathon in the fall.

Tell us about your race of a lifetime, the Ironman, and how you won the chance of a lifetime.

In order to gain entry into the Ironman World Championship, you have to qualify based on your result time from a previous triathlon. Unfortunately, I was never fast enough in all three sports (swimming, biking and running) to qualify, as the spots are very few and the competition is incredibly difficult. So, over the last seven years, I would enter the Ironman lottery hoping to gain an entry slot. Unfortunately, I was never able to win a slot. However, this year Ironman gave athletes the opportunity to submit videos to its Facebook page as part of the "Kona Inspired" competition. Hundreds of us shared our respective inspirational stories about why we wanted to race in Kona. From there, it was left up to the fans, as they voted online for slots. There were three rounds of voting - hundreds of entries for just eight race slots. After nearly two months of waiting, I am thankful to have been chosen as one of the Kona Inspired winners. It was my chance of a lifetime and something I will never forget, especially all of the support I received from the community from my friends, family, and many others that took the time to watch my video, hear my story, and help me reach my goal by voting for me.

I read that there is a special little girl, who is battling brain cancer, who you The Team Inspiration Organization was working on to compile enough air miles to fly her and her mother to Kona for your race. Did they reach their goal?

Yes, they reached their goal! Anya and her Mom Karen came with me when I went to Kona, Hawaii. My parents and a few friends were able to come, as well. It was truly an amazing experience, made even more special by having Anya, my parents and friends to cheer me through out the long day and to meet me at the finish line! It is something I will never, never forget.

What would you say to those facing health challenges that feel hopeless?

My favorite word is "Hope." I believe there is always hope, no matter what the circumstance. So much so, that I had the word tattooed on my inner left wrist, so I can see the word as I run, to remind me where I've been, where I'm going, and why I fight as hard as I do. I have been blessed with a great family and friends that have supported me over the years. I would ask those that are struggling with their health, to reach out to others for help and to feel hope again. Whether that is through your friends and family, through your church, through the hospital staff, or the many others that support people in need. Hope is there, waiting to be discovered and believed.

You will be featured on the Discovery Channel, on March 9th for "The Silent Epidemic of Overactive Bladder: Challenges and Barriers." What are some of the biggest challenges of Overactive Bladder you face, especially as an athlete?

Because of my brain cancer, I have also had other medical issues to deal with. Over the last several years, I have had increasing issues with the operation and function of my bladder. I am a patient of Dr. Tiffany Sotelo from the George Washington University Hospital, in Washington DC. She is the Head of the Pelvic Floor Center, as part of the hospital, and has been wonderful. I have had two surgeries for the implant of a neurostimulator to help control my bladder functions. Though these surgeries have helped, my bladder has continued to decrease in capacity and has reached a point were Dr. Sotelo is concerned about the function of my kidneys. I will undergo a cystoplasty (bladder) augmentation to relieve the stress on my kidneys and hopefully allow me to better control my incontinence.

I guess the biggest challenge is how my incontinence has affected my daily life. Now when I go to work or travel, I'm always looking for where the restrooms are located in case I have an emergency and have to rush to one. I also have to self-catheterize at work, though where I work there is medical treatment office for employees, so I am able to go down to the office and self-catheterize in private, rather than having to do this in a normal business office restroom. It makes it a bit easier, though I do have to plan for this, as it is not too close to my office at work.

As an athlete, I still have to worry about when I can't control my bladder, but I have increasingly learned to be a bit bolder and to not stress as much over it. When competing, I bring along catheters to use (I also have a great friend who runs with me and is kind enough to carry things for me) and will go into a "port-a-potty" and self-catheterize when I need to, but sometimes I will just "let it go" and then splash myself off with cups of water at the water stops along the way. I also bring a change of clothes, so I can quickly rinse off and change into fresh clothes when I'm finished competing. I guess it helps that my friends all understand and it makes it less of a worry that I will offend someone.

How has having to self-catheterize impacted your life? Does cathing make it more difficult to participate in marathons? Was this discouraging at first?

See above. It was difficult at first, but I'm not one to shy away from a challenge, so I've grown a bit bolder. Sometimes people along side me at the event will ask me if I'm okay, I will tell them a bit about my story. They are always amazed and encouraging, once they know I'm okay.

How has 180 Medical impacted your life?

Being able to self-catheterize is a huge blessing. I feel embarrassed, and giving me the ability to live a more normal life. I am able to "go" when I feel the need, without the fear of an "accident" or having to rush. I can take my time and go when my schedule allows. This has definitely increased my feeling of confidence and freedom, whether I'm in a business setting or out on the road running a race. 180 Medical has answered my medical questions when I call for support and has been very prompt with supplying me with my catheters on a regular basis.

Do you have any advice for others beginning self-catheterization?

You can do this! It may seem difficult and embarrassing at first, but after a bit of practice it will become so much easier and give you the freedom to live a more normal life. This is something you can do for yourself and not be dependent on others! That is such a great feeling and helps build confidence in yourself, knowing that you are able to do this!

I feel so strongly that knowledge is power and so admire you for using your voice to inspire and educate others. What are some of the unexpected blessings that have come from your challenges?

Throughout my journey, I have met some truly amazing, caring, and giving people and feel blessed to have them in my life. From all of my co-captains on Team BT for the Race for Hope - DC, my medical doctors and the nursing staff, and all of the others battling cancer, incontinence, and many other medical afflictions. Their spirit, determination, and compassion continues to amaze me and gives me strength to continue with my fight.

Team BT

Never, Never, Never Give Up!



To learn more about BethAnn, visit her website: <http://www.teambt.org>

The program about the BethAnn Telford's overactive bladder will be part of the [Discovery Channel](#) program called "The Silent Epidemic of Overactive Bladder: Challenges and Barriers," which is set to air March 9. Check your local listings for times in your area.



About the Author:

Trish Eklund has worked for 180 Medical for almost three years, as the Nebraska Office Coordinator. She lives in Nebraska, with her husband and daughters. She is a feature writer for [www.bigblendfamily.com](#) and [www.herviewfromhome.com](#).

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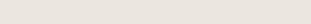
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