

Breakneck Speed

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Boofff! The gate dropped and the eight BMX bike riders peddled hard down the ramp and onto the dirt racetrack. Each rider pedalled hard and took the first jump, then the second. They soon rounded the berm, and my dad was in the lead. He'd never before won a race and here he was at a state series competition leading the pack. It was soon after he'd taken the first berm, that I realised something was terribly wrong...

It was the beginning of 2011 when I decided to sign up to my local BMX club. Every Saturday I raced at the club and once a year I competed in a state series where all the BMX riders within SA came and rode against each other. As my dad watched me race each week he started to realise that there were a lot of other fathers racing with their sons week to week. Rather than standing on the sidelines, he preferred to gain some exercise and race with me as well. So at the beginning of my second year of competition, Dad confidently joined in too. That year was awesome. I loved feeling the cool breeze blow through my legs after a race, as well as the lolly bags we received if we did well in a race. Another component that made me love that year was the fact that my dad was racing with me.

It was to be my second state series, and I was looking forward to the day ahead. There was a queue by the kiosk and blue marquees were set up around the track for shade. It was a disgustingly hot day and not the most pleasant to be wearing a long shirt, long pants and a helmet. Dad had finished one race and was lining up for his second. As I sat under the shade, I searched the ramp to try and see if I could locate my dad balancing against the starting gate.

The race started well and Dad was in the lead. It was soon after this point that I then realised something was terribly wrong. All the other riders jumped over him and continued their race. Dad was left there tangled in his bike. Soon St John's Officers were attending to him. All racing was stopped as a gazebo was set up over him because of the intense heat. His face was covered in blood. He wasn't breathing and his head was starting to swell. They had to get his helmet off in order to give him oxygen. He was also heavily concussed and they feared there may be spinal damage.

When Dad missed that jump and crashed head first into the mound ahead of him, he didn't realise that he would wake up a week later in hospital with no memory of what had happened. Turned out, he'd broken his thyroid cartilage in his neck and

he required a few stitches on his chin. Surprisingly, he suffered no damage to his spine. In order to create more beds on the ward, he was discharged from hospital early after getting the 'all-clear' on a barium swallow test. This test was done to show that he had no perforation in his oesophagus. But after starting back on a soft diet, his breathing started to deteriorate. He was rushed back to hospital again where it was discovered that, in fact, he did have a hole in his oesophagus and the food he'd been eating was causing ectopic gases from his stomach to come back up and cause a pus-filled infection. He required emergency surgery that night, and was moved to the ICU ward in an intubated coma.

During the following week good friends and family members supported our family. Mum and my three other siblings were invited to stay at our friend's place for a week for easy access to the Royal Adelaide Hospital and to help with babysitting. They distracted us from the severity of Dad's situation by showing us movies, taking us to playgrounds; cooking caramel popcorn and generally helping us take our minds off what we didn't want to think about. And, of course, we received lots of prayer.

After Dad recovered from his infection, he was able to receive another lot of surgery to repair his initial injury. The doctors screwed a dissolvable plate into his neck to help repair the broken thyroid cartilage.

The day Dad finally returned home, there was much excitement for we had not properly seen Dad in around three weeks. He could only whisper and couldn't interact too much. It took several months for him to fully recover. Amazingly, the only long-term effects from his injury are a reduced vocal range, a lower speaking voice and an inability to multi-task like he once could.

It's amazing what faith in God can do. We witnessed with our own eyes lots of little miracles through the provision of meals, babysitting, financial support, free physiotherapy and chiropractic help, as well as prayer and emotional support. At one stage one of the doctors came to Dad and said, 'Your wife must be a praying person. The hospital staff don't know how you didn't break your neck.'

Neither Dad nor I ride BMX any longer. I'm not fussed about that but I'm certainly glad and grateful he's still around to do his job of being my dad.