

MEMOIRS ABOUT A LIFE
WITH DISEASE

by
Holly Cromer

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abstract - holly cromer's senior project

There is a disease out there called actinomycosis. Most people haven't heard of it. I probably wouldn't have, except I had to be difficult. I was born with the darn thing. Isn't that such a grandfather word - "darn"? Anyway, that doesn't make too much of a difference. What does is that I'm a trouble maker in the medical field. Either that or a god-send. Some infectious disease specialists wait their whole careers to see a case of this, and here I was, just plopped down in front of them in all of my glory. Why such a god-send? An original case, a first, is a great thing to have in any field. It means you're published, you're known, and sometimes commended on any wonderful breakthrough that may come your way. Well, I was the first to be born with this. Lucky me. This is where my project begins.

What is this actinomycosis? It's an infectious disease. It's anaerobic. It's bacterial. It's what I have. Usually, this little friend doesn't show up until a person's later years. Old farmers, people native to India, that's what my doctors knew of it when I came along. In those cases of actinomycosis, it was caused by a rotten tooth or some other type of injury to the mouth. After the initial stimulant, the actinomycetes would gather up, form a cyst, then connect itself to the skin and break through, forming a lesion above or below the mandible. It would seep and look ugly and nasty and stuff. Then, the doctor would either treat it with penicillin or tetracycline and it would go away forever.

That's not what happened with me. You could have guessed that. If it had been the same as the others I wouldn't have much to talk about. But as it turns out, I do. So, please be patient. This is my life I'm telling you about, and for some strange reason I hold it very dear. My first case of actinomycosis was discovered when I was 20 months old. I don't remember it, of course. This is just hearsay. It came in a cyst form in my neck...not anywhere near my mandible really. At the time, all the doctors knew was that they had a baby with a cyst that was causing pain in her neck; and the cyst had to come out soon. After they took it out they did fun tests on it. The bugs weren't killed by the air because the wall of the cyst was protecting them. The bugs were dubbed actinomycosis, and thus my fame began.

My senior project is a group of writings with three main sections: 1)what this wonderful bundle of joy is, 2)how I feel about my life (in general), also answering common questions that people seem to ask over and over again about my situation and my feelings, and 3)many different accounts of instances that I don't believe would have happened had it not been for this disease. Many of those accounts are awfully scary, some others are very sweet, and a few are quite surreal. These are very vivid memories that I have, and I've decided to share them with you. Why? - I don't know. Possibly because it's the flip side of the medical field - the side that any professor or doctor could never attempt to explain...because unless they are sick themselves, they just don't know. It also may help you to sympathize with any other sick people that you may encounter in the duration of your lives. And maybe to express that some of the sickest people in the world look completely healthy.

SECTION 1

With the abstract as a pretty good precursor to what you have just gotten yourself into by reading this, this section is about the disease itself. By dictionary definition, actinomycosis is a chronic infectious disease of cattle, swine, and man characterized by the formation in mouth and jaw and sometimes also in chest, intestines, skin, mammary tissue, or brain of hard granulomatous masses that may break down and discharge pus containing the causative actinomycetes - usu. causes brown corky lesions. Charming. And somewhat confusing, too. I had to read that about five times before I could find how it actually fit together as a sentence. This wasn't enough information to me, I mean, does that give you a good understanding of what this thing is?

Here's some information I found in one of the few medical books that our library has containing anything on this disease. Properties of Bacteria of the Genus Actinomycosis: 1) no nuclear membrane, which means it's prokaryotic, 2) cell walls contain basal mucopeptides and lack chitin, 3) filaments are less than or equal to 1 μ m in diameter, 4) filaments may segment into bacillary forms, 5) reproduction by fission; never spores, 6) growth is inhibited by penicillin, tetracycline, and other conventional antimicrobics, but not by amphotericin B. Okay, this stuff is still pretty interesting, but not very helpful. Once upon a time I took biology. I still don't think I'd know what's going on here.

Now that I've found that the medical definition is no more help than the dictionary, I dug a little deeper. Like I said before, there aren't that many books in the University of Tennessee's library that contain this thing, and even fewer that are dated more recent than 1972 . . . which is when I was born, therefore they wouldn't have any information concerning my case just yet.

Actinomycosis was first recognized in 1876, when Bollinger found the granules in the discharge from a lesion in a cow's jaw. Three years later, Ponfick found similar lesions in humans. In 1885, Israel published the first detailed description of the disease in humans. Actinomycosis was once thought to result from exogenous infection with *Actinomycosis bovis*, a constituent of the normal oral flora of cattle which is probably not capable of producing disease in humans. *Actinomycosis bovis* is what causes the lesions in cows. *Actinomycosis israelii* only produces disease in humans and has not been found outside the human body. It does not spread from human to human. *Actinomycosis israelii* is what I have.

What causes Actinomycosis in humans? Good question. The most common cause is the removal of a tooth or some other kind of mouth trauma. Masses then form containing the infection. They surface and form connections to the skin. Lesions then appear on the skin surface to let the infection out. Sometimes, lymph nodes, sinuses and jaw bones are infected. What I have just described is cervicofacial Actinomycosis. It is the most common form of this disease in humans, but not the only kind. Actinomycosis could also infect the lungs, the gastrointestinal system, the female pelvic organs, the brain, the bone, the liver, the kidneys, and the blood stream.

The course of untreated Actinomycosis is a chronic, persistent infection with multiple lesions/draining sinuses. Complete recovery can be expected in over 90% of cervicofacial and over 80% of gastrointestinal cases. Actinomycosis in the lungs does not have as great of a recovery rate because there's an increased risk of infecting vital organs through the lungs.

The best treatment is penicillin and tetracycline, as stated from before. A few alternate drugs to try are cephalosporins, clindamycin, erythromycin, and chloramphenicol.

Definite abscesses require surgical drainage. If large areas are involved, surgical excision may be a helpful adjunct to antimicrobial therapy. Surgery alone is of little value in achieving complete eradication of the infection. The best way to prevent yourself from acquiring this disease is oral hygiene.

This is fascinating stuff, don't you think? I found other information on middle-aged farmers in the prime of their life getting it, and also several books on gerontology had information in them about old people getting this because they had a rotten tooth. Other than that, I saw tons of awful pictures of the lesions, and other cases, that really disgusted me. They also kind of scared me, too. That could have been me. In a way it is. Yet, I was a little bit more lucky as to not have mine abscess and surface. But right now I'm kind of in limbo. I suppose I need to start in on my own history with this disease at this point, and catch you up to date on that, so that you can understand where I'm coming from. Erase everything that I've just told you while you're reading this next part. It's a completely different case of Actinomycosis. And it almost has no connection to any of the studies that I researched.

I was born on December 5, 1972, in Cleveland Heights, Ohio. I can't remember what day of the week or what time of the day, I just know that that's when I entered the world as we all know it. Twenty months later was when doctors discovered a lump in my neck. It was causing me great pain (which must have been so traumatic that I blocked it out of my mind, seeing as I don't remember it). So, doctors decided to take it out. This lump turned out to be a cyst that contained our friend, Actinomycosis. They were able to diagnose it as such, because the cyst wall kept the air from killing the disease before they could test it. It was an odd occurrence that I was born with this. No one else had been before. There's no telling how I was. Goodness knows that wasn't the last that I'd see of this lovely pet.

It came back a few years later, and a few years after that. Same thing, cyst form in the neck, go in and take it out, should be gone for good. After my third surgery, I went on about five years worth of preventative medication, which equaled up to 4000 milligrams of penicillin a day (2 pills 4 times a day of 500 milligrams of penicillin for five years). The five years wasn't a set amount of time, it was when my family moved from up North to Germantown, Tennessee. After we settled in, we went to see an infectious disease specialist, Dr. Fred Barrett. He took me off of the medication, which confused us. But he said that if for some reason the disease ever did come back, that the number one defense for it would be gone, because the disease would have become immune to it.

Dr. Barrett's theory could prove to be a little bit true. My disease came back when I was 12; it was no longer just Actinomycosis. The disease had mutated, infected the scar tissue, a few other bugs had joined it, and it all inter-wove itself in and out of the neck muscle. One could argue that the disease had been in the process of working around the restraints put on it with the continual dose of penicillin. Others may say that it's just an odd disease making its already unique case a little bit freakier.

Whatever the case, it was back again. I had my fourth surgery on my neck. No, they didn't get rid of it. They did, however, take out two-thirds of the muscle tissue, proclaiming that they had gotten it all . . . and that I'd never have to have surgery on my neck ever again. They were right in that, I'd never have surgery again - because they took out too much neck muscle. But it did come back. I thought it would. They said it was in the scar tissue. How, if you keep having surgeries, incisions and scars, can you ever get rid of all of your scar tissue? You can't. And I think that they knew that. They just were trying to be optimistic.

Yes, it came back when I was 13. They couldn't do any more surgeries, so they hit it with a high dosage of penicillin, and a high dosage of codeine for the pain. And when the penicillin stopped working, we'd try tetracycline for a while. And then, if that didn't work, we'd go back to penicillin for a while. It kept up like that for some time. After a while it went away . . . after a lot of heartache that I'll explain in section three. We thought it came back again in the eighth grade (when I was 14), but it was just referral pain from where the surgeons screwed up the last time they operated. It came back several times more. I lost count. The last time it came back was this last August (1994). It stayed until the middle of December. That's the longest amount of time that I can recall it staying.

My doctors have a few theories on how I was so lucky. One is a sinus duct that leads to nowhere. The stuff it should drain to a gland would just drain to somewhere around in my neck. Another theory is that when my body was being formed, before I was born, a piece of cartilage lodged itself in the back of my esophagus. As my body developed further, and that piece had nothing to connect to, it dissolved, leaving a small hole in my esophagus. Everyone has Actinomyces below their tongue in a salivary gland. They aide in the digestive process. The doctors thought that every time that I swallowed, a few of those bugs would escape out that microscopic hole, and they would collect in the back of my neck, form a cyst, and surface to the front of my neck.

Too bad that these are just theories. It would help if they truly knew what was wrong with me. All of this uncertainty leads to rare doctors and expensive medical bills. Also a small bit of paranoia whenever something decides to twinge in my neck. That paranoia has been increased since last October. I found out that my disease is more serious than I thought it was. It turns out that because it mutated once, it could do it again. And because of when it mutated, I could be in some serious danger later on in my life. It first

changed when I was 12. That was the year that I started my menstrual cycle. Charming, I know. Well, anyway, that was a big hormonal change. And infectious diseases are inclined to change drastically whenever there is a large hormonal change. So what's that got to do with anything? Number one, it means that I shouldn't become pregnant. You go through a hormonal change every week when you are. That would open me up to continual neck problems. Number two, we know that this disease travels. If it goes too far, or if it gets into my blood stream, it could kill me.

I've always known that this was a possibility. I guess I just never knew that it was so easy for it. I figured that the only way I was in any danger was if I let it get out of hand. And, I knew that I'd never let it get that way, because it hurts too much. The vague possibilities that I knew about were that it could infect the muscle tissue around my esophagus and trachea, and then the next time it became active, suffocate me. The other odd possibility would be that it could travel back and attack my spinal cord, and then travel up to my brain. This probably wouldn't have a very nice result to it, either. Still, I never took my situation too seriously, up until now. And I still usually don't, I'm just a little more aware. I suppose that this brings you up to date with where I am now.

SECTION 2

This section I've devoted for answering common questions that people usually have.

Also to express certain feelings I have about my neck and all. The first thing to clear up is that this thing occurs in my neck, not my throat. I don't usually feel it when I swallow; and if it's not active I don't feel a thing. (Except for that one time when the surgeon messed up.) What does it do when it's active? Another good question. It hurts a lot. I can't describe how bad it hurts, or exactly what kind of pain I go through. I don't hurt constantly, and the pain varies. Some of the analogies I used with doctors are "it feels sore, like a stubbed toe", "pin pricks", "stabbing, like a knife", and the list goes on. The only consistent thing that happens is that it restricts my neck movement. Sometimes because the muscles are drawn up by it, others because I'll subconsciously stop turning my head because I know it will hurt if I turn it. And, granted, it could kill me if I let it go. It could probably do so on its own, but let's hope it doesn't try to prove it.

Some people think that I've lived a messed up life. They think that I've never had any fun, and they feel really sorry for me that I haven't had a normal life. That's crazy! I've lived the same life that anyone else has lived, it's just that every now and then I run across a little detour where I have to slow down a bit, and maybe put a few things on hold. I think it's just that I was born with this thing, so I view this as normal. I don't know exactly what life is without it. Every now and then I'll go for a spell without dealing with it. But, just when I get comfortable, and hopeful that I've actually beaten this thing out, it comes back for a visit, just to remind me who's in control.

When I was growing up, when other kids used to find out that I had a disease, they'd get really scared that they could catch it or something. I suppose that was a little hard to deal with. I'd tell them that they couldn't catch it, but then in explaining it, it is and infectious disease. By definition, infectious diseases are contagious. That also messed me up in

getting to go to Girls' State, Governor's School, and other activities that were considered honors to get to go to. They wouldn't let you come if you had a contagious disease. (I did get to go, it just took a lot of explaining to get people to understand that I was not going to infect the whole group.)

At the same time that I don't feel so extremely lucky to have this disease, I also don't feel that I should get tons of pity because of it either. It's hard for a lot of my friends not to think "oh, you poor thing", but, I don't feel that it's necessary for them to do that. It makes me feel worse . . . more diseased, too. I like to be normal; or, at least treated like I am. This is easy for some people. It's similar to handicapped people, I suppose. They don't like for people to help them because they can do whatever it is fine themselves. Well, I'm part the same way, except that it's not everyday things that people question about. It's going out, playing volleyball, being active in any way. Now, if I feel like doing something, then that means that I'm up to it. If I'm not, then I probably won't go in the first place. I don't need my friends asking me every ten minutes if I'm doing all right. Makes sense, doesn't it?

Many people also comment on the fact that I get sick a lot. Well, there's a good explanation for that. My immune system is continually down because it's preoccupied with the Actinomyces. That makes my body a little bit more susceptible to catch anything that floats by. In addition to that, if I get stressed out due to schoolwork, my immune system goes down just a little bit more. That makes it even easier than before. This could be the reason why my parents and I have been forever waiting for May 1995 to roll around. Even though jobs do have their own stresses that come with them, they are on a particular schedule, and they have certain regularities that school does not. The work load that comes with school comes and goes, that's true. But, even when the work load is down for a while, there's still more that I could do. Once I finally land a job, that

stress of having more to do will end at the end of the day. And it will be on hold until the next morning.

Another question that people sometimes ask is how do I not just break down and cry over this disease. It's the kind of thing where I don't concentrate on it enough to let it get to me that way. I don't like to think about it unless it's active. And even then, I'm usually too busy to spend too much time thinking about it.

Do I ever think why me? Sure, of course I do. Who wouldn't. It took a little while for me to learn how to deal with the fact that it wasn't anything personal. My grandmother thinks that there's a reason why everything happens. She thinks that maybe I was strong enough, as well as my family being emotionally strong enough, to handle this kind of strain. There are people younger than myself that have this disease, and she believes that I was the first to help those after me. Sounds crazy, I know, but it'd how she rationalizes why bad things happen to good people.

SECTION 3

This is the section that I've devoted to describing specific incidents that are really memorable to me as either being extremely special, painful, insightful, or whatever. I don't remember much from my first three surgeries. I remember one of the rooms I was in. It had a square window that let the light from the hallway come in all night long. That's about all I remember. But I couldn't tell you which time that was. I think it was the third one. Everything else that I remember is from the sixth grade on up. Here goes.

It started as a small bump. I guess about the size of a dime in diameter. I remembered that it was around the same place that the other ones had been. So, after a few days, I showed mom. She was in the kitchen at the time. I really didn't want to bother her. I mean, what if it wasn't it? She'd think I was a hypochondriac or something. Well, I showed it to her anyway. As it turns out, she was really concerned, too. She felt around a little bit. She got a flashlight (don't ask me why, but for some strange reason, she would always shine a flashlight on it), and then she called dad.

They both agreed that we needed to see Dr. Barrett. So, that's where we went the next day. This was only the second time we had ever seen him. He was cordial. Talked more to my parents than he did to me. He also decided to put me on a small dosage of penicillin, and he'd watch me for a while. Interesting, and unhelpful. The lump continued to grow, and we kept having check-ups. We weren't getting anywhere.

One night, I was doing my homework in the living room as usual. Nothing major. Then I sneezed. I thought my neck had exploded into a million pieces. I had to touch it to make sure that it was still there. Tears were streaming down my face. I was in one piece,

and a lot of pain. For a while, my parents had been throwing around the idea of going in for a fourth surgery. That sneeze kind of decided it.

Nothing too completely memorable about that surgery. It was the first hospital I'd been in that didn't have colored feet painted on the ceiling going to the surgery room. (I guess I remember more than I thought I did.) And I got to pick out a toy before I went in. I picked out this bear that had extremely large ears. I called it Bunny Bear. My mom told me that it had an identity crisis because I named it that. Oh well. As far as I can remember, it went fine. Mom says I threw up all day long afterwards because of the anesthetic. I couldn't tell you. I don't remember that. But she says that I did, so I have to believe her.

That's one thing that I'll always be thankful for. My parents always made sure that one of them was with me at all times. In the sixth grade, I didn't quite understand it. But, looking back at it, I'm really glad that they did stay with me. Mom stayed with me most of the time. She's the one that spent the night on the crummy little couch that was in the room. She's also the one that if, by chance, my IV. was going in too fast and the nurses weren't answering my calls, she would yell down to the nurses desk and make someone come and help me. One night, I woke up in the middle of the night. My mom was knelt down by the side of her crummy little couch, praying for me. That was the strangest thing you could ever experience, listening to someone pray for you. She wished it had been her. She wanted to take my place. And she wanted for me to be okay.

Dad wasn't too scarce. He would take a late lunch to be with me, because mom was a part time teacher at a private high school. So he would stay with me while she went to work. He'd also come over after dinner with Julie and Kathy, my sisters. They visited a lot. I don't think they came every night, but often enough that I can't remember when

they weren't there. It wasn't easy, I'm sure for dad to hold down the home front, but he had help. I'm sure that Julie and Kathy helped. So did the neighbors and the people from church. The United Methodist Women had a homemade three course meal delivered to the house every night that I was in the hospital. Salads, casseroles, desserts, any kind of dish (you name it), we had at our house. And I was stuck eating hospital food, oh well. They froze several of them, because they could eat leftovers for a few days off of what the women would bring. So, I did get a little of the feast. You'd better believe that they ate all of the really good stuff before I got home.

I was in the hospital for two weeks that time. The first week wasn't that bad. Everyone calls you. They send you cards and gifts and other fun stuff. You even get some visits from some of mom's close friends, and people in the church that knew our family. The only thing that kept me in for the second week was the IV. That was the really hard part. People stop calling you, they stop coming by. It's just you and your family, which is okay, really, you just wonder who your friends really are. (Granted, at 12 years old, my friends could really come downtown to see me; and if someone was grounded from the phone? What could they honestly do about it?)

Dr. Barrett wanted the extra medication. That's why I was in that long. He wanted a few more weeks, too. My dad talked me into it. A home IV. That's where you have a catheter in your wrist 24/7. Yuck. I wasn't too keen on the idea to begin with. Had it been up to me, I would have never done it. But, we did. There was a traveling nurse that would come by and check on me, but other than that, she taught my mom how to regulate the medicine. I can't remember how many times a day we did it. I just remember that my mom would come and hook me up in the middle of the night.

That lasted for about two weeks, too. I don't remember much else from that period of time. My mom says that I wore turtlenecks for about three weeks or so after that. In April. I don't remember that either. But she says its so.

About eleven months after all that, it came back. No hospital this time. Just drugs. Penicillin and codeine to start with. Every now and then, we'd change out and try something else. Tetracycline was okay for a while. Then back to the penicillin. Then we tried clindamycin. My disease liked that, and the size of the lump almost doubled in less than 24 hours. So, back to what we knew, penicillin and tetracycline. Oh, and we can't forget the codeine.

That's what made this period of time so interesting. I was in a lot of pain. I can't even describe it. It would be nice to see the day when they'll do neck transplants, so I can get a new one that works. One that also hurts a lot less. That's why I was on the codeine, to kill the pain. In theory, that is. I don't remember any period of time that I was without pain.

Imagine a straight A student consistently failing Spelling tests. I got a 26 on one. I'm surprised I got that many right. I couldn't add or subtract most single digits.

Multiplication and division were out. At the time I was in Pre-Algebra, I figured that Algebra was out, too. Another function that was out, forming complete sentences. I could write a paragraph, and all of it fragments. I'd know that they weren't sentences. That I knew. What I didn't know was how to make them into sentences. So, I started taking more naps, and doing less homework - the stress level was too high.

That led to my parents taking me out of school for the last few weeks of seventh grade. I was brain-fried. I slept 20 hours a day. The five hours that I was awake were never any

more than 45 or 50 minutes at a time. I looked like death, pale skin, circles around my eyes, always tired . . . and always in increasing pain. I could take pills every four hours, and it wasn't enough. Had my mom not been regulating when I took pills, I would have probably overdosed. I'd forget when the last time I had taken some was, and ask mom for more. You took some 45 minutes ago, Holly. You have three hours to go. Two hours. One hour. Fifteen minutes. I was addicted bad. And because I was always in extreme pain, I assumed that I needed more. I was nasty everyone, but they put up with it because they knew that in about five minutes or so, I'd wander back upstairs and fall back asleep. And I did.

I don't know how I ever overcame that. I probably killed all of the brain cells that had that information stored in it with all of that codeine. I just remember being really sick. And then being really healthy. My immune system plus the medication must have beaten it out. Oh, I forgot to explain why we were switching off medications . . . it was called confusing the bugs. In the sixth grade, when the disease had mutated and other bugs joined it, some of those other bugs were immune to the penicillin. So, that's why we'd flip flop the medications; we'd work on killing some bugs for a while with the penicillin, and then the others with the tetracycline. But, while one set was being killed off, the others would start to grow again, and that's why it took so long to get rid of the disease that time.

Around six months later, I'm having pains again. No lump, just pain. Well, it wasn't the disease, which was the good thing. The surgeon from a year and a half ago had done a sloppy job and severed a few nerves while ridding me of my disease. The scar was now tightening up - pulling in all of those open nerve endings with it. So, I was feeling this tremendous pain, for no reason, and there was nothing that any doctor could do about it. It was an interesting time. I started going to the pain center at the Baptist Memorial

Hospital in Memphis. I was the youngest person that they had ever tried to help there. Oh, goody, another first. It wasn't that bad, though. I got to do ultrasound therapy, exercises (oh joy), and relaxation tapes. Those were the best. If I do it right, I can still be asleep in five minutes from going through the motions of those tapes.

It was a pretty good time. I learned how to cope with my pain, something that was probably long overdue. The only negative thing is that I can cope so well that I can ignore early warning signs. I'll not even think twice about it. I can will pain away, if it's not too extreme. Yes, there are times that it gets to be too much, and you can't do too much about that. But, I can't trust pain to be a good warning for another occurrence, because I'll ignore it until there's a bump there to worry about.

I could tell you about the awful neurologist that thought that I was imagining the pain, and did all of these awful little tests on me that hurt, and he still thought I was crazy. But I won't bore you with the details. I didn't tell you about the horrific CT Scan that I had, or the MRI (which really wasn't that bad), or various other tests that involved a simple procedure that scared a lifetime out of a little girl because of a doctor or technician with bad bedside manners. I could also have told you about the time that a doctor injected fluid directly into the scars in my neck. Yes, it hurt. A lot. I don't think all of the pain center's tricks combined could have helped me out that time. The one thing that those instances all held in common was that they all involved people that were freaked out by an odd condition that they had never seen before, and in the process they forgot that a human being was attached to it. They'd leave me in a machine an hour after they stopped testing. Or maybe prick me with needles along my scar to see if it would hurt (of course it did!). I guess my point is that there are dozens of instances that I have left out, because I can't remember them all. It's not easy being head guinea pig.

After the pain center thing, my disease came back several times. I've lost count. The most recent time was this past August, 1994. We did the medication thing. Three and a half months worth of it. It may even be longer than that time in the seventh grade. I got to a point where the medicine was making me sick to my stomach. Also got to a point where some other kind of bacteria was growing in my stomach that made me sick until we could get rid of it. Every now and then I'd stop taking medicine because I'd feel better for a few days. Of course, my neck wouldn't, but what do you expect? Had I not gotten better by Christmas break, there had been talk about another hospital visit. , Probably not another operation - there's not much left in there to take out. Just heavy IV. medication. But it didn't get that far. Before the last week of school, we stopped the antibiotics. And, after being on them for about three and a half months, I caught the first virus floating around after 48 hours of being off of them.

I'm doing all right now. This semester the oddity has been swollen salivary glands. This has happened about four times. So far, it seems relatively harmless. The doctors that I've seen say that it's rare to see re-occurrences of swollen salivary glands, and they're keeping a close lookout for any other signs of anything. As long as they don't prove to be an extension to my disease, I'll be happy.