

## Extreme Roadrash: Cause, Effect, and Lesson Learned

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A while back, the Speedfreak staff was cruising the internet, when we came upon a photograph. A pretty blonde girl in a topless photo. But wait...what's more? The pretty girl is covered in road rash. Speedfreak went on the search to find out the story of this girl, how it happened, what's rumors and what's truth. With some searching of the internet, we were able to track down our girl, and Speedfreak had the chance to sit down and find out the true story of how a strong soul bounces back from near death.

### ONE YEAR HAS PASSED

It's hard to look in the mirror and think that my scars are already an entire year old. Touching my stomach and rib cage, I can't imagine looking this way and feeling this pain for the rest of my life. I still feel as if at any moment I will wake up from this terrible dream and be comfortable in my own skin once again. Knowing that it's real, that there is nothing I can do to change it, I am reminded of my mistakes every minute of everyday. I am also reminded how lucky I am to be alive as I close my eyes and remember why I still feel pain after an entire year of healing. Imagining that if I had not survived the accident, I wouldn't have anything to touch at all, I smile when my fingers run over a thick layer of scar tissue in place of my once soft skin. I know my life has a purpose, and I strive everyday to live up to the task that has been placed at my feet.

### THE ACCIDENT

It was a beautiful Sunday morning even through my blurred vision. I was on the back of my friend Shaun's GSXR 750 and was excited to be on a sport bike, even if it was as a passenger, after a long streak of no riding whatsoever. I had shed my prescription glasses for a pair of sunglasses, my cowboy hat for an oversized helmet, and quickly thrown on a pair of capri jeans, tennis shoes, and a sweatshirt over my bikini. I thought nothing of the fact that I had practically no protection against the asphalt if anything were to happen. I figured that we couldn't get into a wreck, it simply wouldn't happen to me. It's amazing how fast life came at me that day.

Approaching mile marker seven on highway 550, I noticed that I had to start fighting the wind to stay behind Shaun without pulling on him too much. I placed my hands on the gas tank and pushed myself into him as much as possible without crowding him. As we came around to the right and went down the hill, we kept accelerating.

I was scared, but thought I could handle the force of the wind as it suddenly picked up much more than in the moments before. I started to slide back on the seat and felt the cool air fill the small space between my chest and Shaun's back.

I felt a rush of wind hit my face like a brick and our bodies separated in an instant; my visor had come completely open. The force pulled on my face and helmet so hard that it sent my head up and backwards, ripping my entire body off the back seat with it. I remember thinking that if I grabbed Sean's t-shirt I would pull him down with me, but it was already too late to try and grab a hold of him. I was only in the air for a split second, but an eternity of thoughts ran through my mind. I had no idea what excessive speed I was about to hit the ground at or the damage it would do to my body, I just thought about how my life had led to that point. I remembered the basics of surviving a fall from a horse without injury, which I had done a few times in the previous year, and simply let myself go. I knew there was nothing else I could do.

When I hit the ground, it was as if every breath I had ever taken rushed out of me in an instant. I could feel every inch of my body hitting the road; tumbling, sliding and grinding into the unforgiving surface. In my helmet, which seemed so small and yet completely empty, I could hear my whimpers as I fought to breathe and my prayer to God as I gave into the asphalt. In a matter of seconds, I had come to the conclusion that I was going to die, and I was ok with it. I knew this was far worse than anything I had ever gone through and I was convinced I would not live to see the next day. My eyes were closed as I finished my 522 foot tumble down highway 550. I never lost consciousness, but I remember wishing that I had.



At first I couldn't feel anything. A few moments passed before anyone was at my side, and I had the chance to try and move myself. Immediately, I could tell that I had lost my left shoe as my toes were burning on the hot road. My right foot felt stiff, completely unmovable, and I thought it was probably broken. I noticed that my knees were uncovered when the little pieces of what I thought were gravel scraped against my skin, only to find out later that they were my actual kneecaps grinding against the pavement below them. My right arm was trapped underneath me and my shoulder felt hot. My left pinky was the most noticeable pain in those first few minutes, a throbbing and stabbing pain, as it bled profusely right in front of my face. I could smell my blood as it pooled beneath me on the road.

By the time the ambulance came and rolled me onto my back, removed my helmet, and called the helicopter, I felt as if I had been cooking on the street for hours. Every nerve ending in my body was on fire; tingling, scorching, and burning. I had not gone into shock, and the adrenaline had worn off almost instantly. Not being able to move was the worst of it. I wanted to pull my arm out from underneath me. I wanted to get off that hot road. I wanted the sun to stop shining so brightly on my naked back. I wanted everything to just go away. But it didn't. The people who sat on that road with me and came to my rescue saved my life. I wanted to die, but they wouldn't let me give up, they wouldn't let me close my eyes and go to sleep.

The helicopter ride was fast. The morphine had kicked in just around the time we landed at the hospital, and the rest is somewhat of a blur. I remember hearing a doctor saying I had lost my entire left breast. I remember another asking me if my family had been called. A third doctor asked if she could take pictures of my wounds for documentation. When it came time to clean off my skin, the doctors decided that a surgical debridement of the dead tissue was necessary, along with invasive repair to my pinky, right big toe, and left side from hip to armpit. I don't even remember being put under, and the rest is lost in the six hour surgery that followed.

## THE HOSPITAL

I woke up wrapped like a mummy. I was on my back in an air bed, in a room I had never seen. Did I dream that Shaun had come and held my hand? Why were my parents here? I didn't know what was going on, so I tried to sit up. Then I felt the intense pain on my back, my side, my shins, my feet, my thigh, my hip, my forearms, my wrists, my shoulder, my fingertips, my ribcage, my stomach, and my chest. It all came at me in one large rush, and I knew exactly where I was and remembered what had happened. I spent the next three weeks waking up to the exact same confusion, rush of pain, and realization of my surroundings. My condition never seemed to change for the better, no matter how many times I went through the process of attempting to sleep it off. The worst part about the pain was that it never completely subsided unless I was sleeping, and I had nightmares of the accident every time I slept. I couldn't escape what had happened to me. On the rare good days, my Dad would brush my hair for hours; it was the only thing that helped me forget what I was going through.



My road rash was so severe that my skin was not going to grow back on its own. I had lost too much surface area for the doctors to simply suture me together and send me home. After the blood loss had been controlled, the skin loss needed to be addressed. I was to receive full thickness skin grafts. Literally, the doctors had only 2 places on my body to harvest healthy skin. My thighs were the only two places that had not received any abrasions. In order to help my open wounds heal, the doctors had to cut off a thick layer of healthy skin from my thighs and place it over my burns, surgically stapling the new skin in place. This was the only way to “fix” me, and I didn't even have enough skin to graft all of my wounds at once. The doctors had to choose which areas to

graft first, and which ones would have to wait.

Wound vac: a slang medical term that will give me goose bumps for the rest of my life. When a patient receives a skin graft, a suction cup is placed over the completed surgery in order to increase blood flow from under the new skin. These devices are called wound vacuums, and they ensure that the burn tissue does not die, but rather joins with the new skin to create a layer of dermis where none would have grown without the graft surgery. It feels like a leech, a constant sucking on the most painful abrasion you've had in your entire life. Multiply your worst skinned knee as a kid by 50, add it to 55 percent of your body, and then let someone suck on it with a handheld vacuum for 24 hours a day; only then will you know what it is to experience a wound vacuum on a fresh skin graft. Each graft received a dose of the painful sucking and after three weeks I was free from the noisy machines.

The only thing worse than the wound vacuums were the dressing changes. Even thinking about the pain today makes me sick to my stomach. In the areas the doctors were not able to graft within the first three weeks: my back, chest, rib cage, side, and stomach, they did daily dressing changes to make sure the wounds were being kept clean. My bandages acted as my skin where the graft surgery had not yet taken place. Every time the doctors changed my dressings, it was as if they were ripping off my skin. The oxygen hitting the open burns was enough to make me scream. Cleaning the wounds with water would send me into a rage. It is safe to say I would have rather been lying on that road again than go through a daily dressing change. This lasted the entire two months I spent in the hospital.

Physical therapy, as motivating as it was supposed to be, was just as painful as anyone can imagine. Struggling to sit up in bed, hold myself up without help, and lay back down without hurting the open burns on my

back proved itself to be a daunting task. Attempting to stretch my skin, which was tough and thick as leather, once the grafts were slightly healed, made me wince and fear that I would lose all motion in my wrists. I remember getting dizzy just from trying to stand up, blacking out and throwing up from a wheelchair ride down the hall, and crying at night because I couldn't get up to go to the bathroom on my own. All the abilities I took for granted in my everyday life had come back to haunt me, to teach me a lesson on why I should be thankful for every second I am breathing.

Everyday I would dread the moment the doctors came into my room. Whether they were coming to do a conscious sedation for my daily dressing change, whisk me off to another surgery, or put me through physical therapy, my attitude worsened everyday towards the people who were trying to save my skin. It drove me to act bitter towards the people who cared about me the most; my parents were there every day and I know it must have been difficult for them to put up with me. The pain I went through pushed me into a deep depression, but I refused to be put on medication for anything of that nature. I was taking 20 pills with breakfast and dinner every day, I didn't need to add to that number. I was asked several times if I wanted to talk to a psychologist about the accident, talk about the nightmares my nurses always reported me having at night, but I denied the willing listener. In short, I made sure I paid for my mistakes dearly, not only physically, but emotionally as well, and everyone around me could see the old Brittany fading away.

After my final skin graft surgery on November 16th, I woke up feeling as if my back had been completely replaced. The noticeable difference between the open wound and the grafted burn was enough to lift my spirits. I was able to lay comfortably for the first time in two months. I knew the time had come for me to get out of the hospital and start the real healing: returning to my normal life. I had to beg my doctors to let me go home. I couldn't stand the thought of returning to a physical rehabilitation hospital. With fresh donor sites on my left thigh and a throbbing pain worse than most I had felt, I walked down the hall on the fifth floor three days after surgery so I could go home. I cried with relief when they signed my release paperwork.

## GOING HOME

I walked slowly into my house for the first time in over two months. The smell alone was enough to make me smile, as Thanksgiving dinner was being prepared for the next day. The warm air, the sound of my dog yelping at my return, the softness of my own bed sheets,

and the glow of real sunlight pouring in through the bedroom windows gave me the most comfort I had experienced since the accident, and compared to the hospital, it was heaven. I was not on my own by any means; my Mom had to help me shower and give me my blood thinning shots twice a day in my stomach. Walking from my bedroom to the kitchen made me break a sweat, as my muscles had not been used in two months. I still had open wounds, was using a personal walker built for full body support to move around, and couldn't even dress myself, but I felt a happiness that seemed almost unfamiliar.

Coming home was the best thing that could have happened to me. The doctors gave me a month before I would be walking without the walker, but I threw it in the back of my closet after the third day. I ditched my bandages after a week and started wearing jeans ten days later. I was determined to feel normal again, or at least appear normal to the unknowing passerby. I began driving after only two weeks out of the hospital and started living my life as if I had never fallen off that motorcycle. My friends and family could see how quickly I was becoming myself again. I truly believe being around such wonderful support helped me heal as quickly as I did.





I was still attending physical therapy, but was improving at speeds that amazed even my own doctors. I was walking up stairs without a second thought and riding the stationary bike with ease. It still hurt to do normal things, even bending my knees to sit in a chair would send pain up my legs, but I learned to ignore it all. I was so used to the way my skin ached, including the itching and burning I would feel every second, that it was as if I never really felt it anymore. My mind had blocked it out and unless I stopped to notice it, the sensitivity and uncomfortable nature of the healing skin grafts wasn't even in my thoughts.

The morning my hair started to fall out I knew something was wrong. I had been out of the hospital for an entire month but the medication I was taking had just started to leave my system. The combination of chemicals that had kept me alive and comfortable in the hospital was now killing the living cells in my scalp and face. After a week of pulling chunks of my own hair out and watching my eyelashes and eyebrows fall to my cheeks, I felt like a cancer patient taking chemotherapy. I cut my long blonde hair short to try and save as much of it as I could, but it never stopped. You could see through the few thin strands left all the way to my scalp and I even had a couple completely bald spots. I finally had had enough and decided to simply shave my head and get it over with. I cried as the rest of my hair hit the bathroom floor that night.

After everything I had suffered as a direct result of the fall: 55 percent body coverage of third degree burns, severed tendons in my left pinky finger, a severely dislocated right big toe, and a large amount of blood loss; what really slowed the healing process was what I experienced in the hospital. Indirect results of the accident due to a prolonged hospital stay: pneumonia, urinary tract infection, pseudomonas infection, blood infection, a blood clot in my left leg, yeast infections, anemia, 3 blood transfusions with 1 adverse reaction, 8 surgeries, 31 conscious sedations, countless skin debridements, and undiagnosed PTSD and depression. With these things in mind, the loss of my hair seemed minimal at most. My hair would grow back. I was alive, and thankful for that everyday. I knew that what I had gone through would give me the strength to survive anything else God had planned for me in the future. As long as I could walk, talk, and breathe, I was always happy to be on this earth and would never take the blessings in my life for granted again.

## RETURNING TO RIDING

My heart felt heaving knowing something I loved so much had almost cost me my life. I knew the mistakes I had made and the consequences I never wanted to face again. I couldn't imagine not riding because it was one of my few joys. I knew I would never again ride without my gear. Even on a hot day and a short trip, my helmet would always be on my head and I would make sure it was functioning properly. I was back on a motorcycle as a passenger a few times before I was rid of the fear I felt. Once I was able to go highway speeds, I knew I was ready and able to ride again. I wanted to feel the freedom that comes with being alone on the machine and rolling on the throttle, putting the rest of the world on hold.

I bought my 2006 Yamaha R6s on June 22nd from a local dealer. With help from a very close friend, I was reminded of the basics of riding every morning for a couple of weeks in free lessons that were tailored to my needs as a rider. I was taught the importance of knowing that while on a motorcycle, literally anything can happen at any time. Riding prepared for the worst possibilities will always protect you from injury in even the smallest wreck. I know I never want to feel the way I did in the hospital again, and anything I can do to keep that from happening, I will do every time I get on a bike. I learned some new skills in that first month back on



the road, but I also learned some important things about myself as well. I learned how strong I really am, especially after returning to the sport that changed my life after almost claiming it.

## THE FINAL OUTCOME

My road rash will take several years to completely heal and will never look or feel normal again. I have conquered the only fear that kept me from riding and I will never put myself in the same position to receive such injuries as I have lived through this past year. I stress the importance of wearing full gear to each and every person I ride with, talk to, or even who happens to read my story. I believe that my experiences are a lesson to every type of rider or passenger. I would never wish the pain I felt and still feel today upon anyone in this world. It is completely avoidable with a few extra layers, and I can't say it enough: it is undeniably worth it to gear up. Everything I have gone through this past year will not be in vain if my testimony is enough to save someone's skin.

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