

El Dorado County woman ready to compete after near-fatal encounter

By Sam McManis, Sacramento Bee

Such plans Nicole Young made for her 40th year. She could hardly wait. In fact, she chose not to. She ramped up her running and bike training early last October so that, by the time the Big 4-0 hit in March, she'd be in prime shape to dominate her new age group.

"I figured, this is the year I'm on top of my game," said Young, a distance runner and triathlete. "I'm just really going to go all-out and kick butt."

Fate, in the form of an overlooked rock on a dirt trail, had other plans. A simple six-mile out-and-back training run near her Shingle Springs home on Oct. 21 changed her life. Nearly ended it, actually.

Young, a two-time defending ironwoman champion of Eppie's Great Race, had just made the turn on the El Dorado Trail and needed to hustle back to pick up her two kids from school. She tripped on a rock and gouged her left knee. Nothing major, she thought. Didn't even hurt. Yeah, it took three stitches to close it later at a drop-in clinic. But Young's an endurance athlete, so she's used to scrapes.

Four days later, a fast-moving antibiotic-resistant bacterial infection, whose genesis was in that seemingly innocuous knee injury, nearly killed her. She contracted necrotizing fasciitis, more commonly and ghoulishly referred to as "flesh-eating bacteria." Five surgeries over the subsequent eight days – and an aborted sixth that would've resulted in amputation of her left leg – saved her life but left her

mostly incapacitated.

Doctors at Mercy San Juan Medical Center told Young, whose kidneys had shut down and whose other organs were compromised during the ordeal, that it might be a year before she could walk again.

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