

Terri Jaksha's Comeback Bio

This is my story of perseverance and hope. It starts in October 2016 when I lost my beloved mom to lung cancer (just a few years after my dad suffered the same fate). The day after her funeral, at age 49, I was blindsided with a (colorectal) cancer diagnosis of my own. Prior to cancer, I had done a few sprint and olympic triathlons, but thought I was done competing as I arranged for someone else to raise my two teen girls in case I didn't survive (I was a single mom at the time). I spent that Thanksgiving, my 50th birthday, Christmas and New Years getting chemo and radiation treatment, at one point hospitalized for 8 days due to complications.

Celebrating New Years Eve 2016-17 with daughters while hospitalized during cancer treatment



Thankfully I pulled through and immediately started researching nutrition as a way to prevent the cancer from coming back. I found that all the meat and dairy I had been told to eat during my 25 years of competitive bodybuilding often fueled cancer growth. Literally overnight I went plant-based, desperate to see my girls graduate high school in 5 years.

Soon after, I married my best friend and training partner in April 2017, and he encouraged me to return to triathlon training. I started back slowly, hoping to do a sprint tri in 2017, but ended up completing 2 sprints and 2 olympics that summer. I learned (and saw first hand) that the plant-based diet not only helped me survive cancer, but also supercharged my training and helped me recover faster than ever.

That next winter I dreamed of moving up to the next level of triathlons in 2018. After getting my 1 year cancer-free check-up in March 2018, my husband Pete and I signed up for a local 70.3 triathlon and marathon in prep for a "someday" Ironman. But a week later, I missed a step at the gym and fractured my left foot. It was a Lisfranc fracture, which required surgery to permanently implant 2 plates and 10 screws. I was devastated. I had clawed my way back from cancer, only to be sidelined by a freak accident on my way to the treadmill for a workout no less!

Repairs to my left "Frankenfoot" due to Lisfranc fracture



I refused to give up, and got back to training as soon as allowed. I missed 1 month of swimming, 2 months of biking, and 3 months of running. The surgeon and physical therapists said my healing was remarkable. Many people with that injury never run again. Five months after the injury I completed my first 70.3 triathlon, and six months post-injury (October 2018) I completed my first marathon - my hometown Twin Cities Marathon. With two major comebacks and our prerequisites complete, we excitedly signed up for IMWI 2019.

Twin Cities Marathon 2018 Finish Line



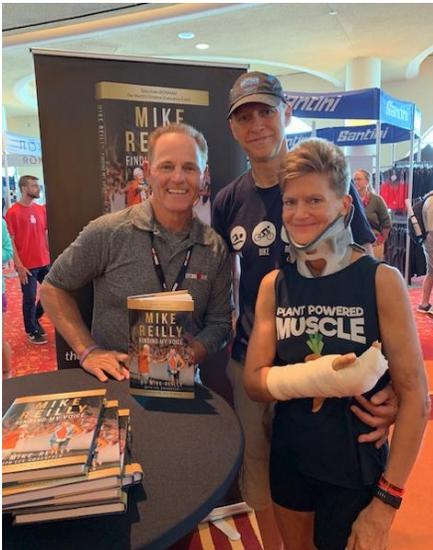
The summer of 2019 was packed with trips to Madison to practice riding "The Loop" and putting in the crazy miles required for a full Ironman. Then three weeks before IMWI, I headed out for my last 100 mile training ride before taper. I was on a familiar bike path in Elm Creek Park near Minneapolis. But 40 miles into my ride I crossed a long wooden bridge over a swampy area. At the end of the bridge, the pavement took a sharp right and headed up a hill. Little did I know (due to heavy tree coverage in the park), there was a man over twice my size coming down that hill towards me on a bike. As he came around the corner, he crossed into my lane and crashed into me, throwing me and my bike backwards. My helmet cracked on the pavement but saved my life. I suffered a concussion, broken neck which required surgery and more hardware, cracked ribs, and several fractured and dislocated bones in my right hand. Once again, I was devastated. To have come that far and to be so close to my dream race to have it all taken away in an instant.

On ventilator for days following surgery to repair broken neck, and hand surgeries to repair fractures and dislocations



While I lay in the hospital, I encouraged my husband to keep training. Then two days after my 2nd surgery, I headed to Madison, not as a competitor, but as a Sherpa (in a neck brace and hand cast!) I wanted to be there to experience the event and cheer Pete on, even though watching everyone else live their dream triggered many crying fits that weekend. I was thankful for all the wonderful people who offered encouragement, and enjoyed meeting Mike Reilly and Emilio Aguayo Munoz (the men's 2019 pro winner from Spain). I pledged I would try to come back from this setback as well.

Meeting Mike Reilly and Emilio Aguayo Munoz at IMWI 2019



The next few months were the toughest of my life. Another hand surgery and endless physical therapy. I was in a neck brace day and night for 3 months, unable to drive. I struggled to eat, bathe, get dressed, and work (as a computer programmer) one handed. And the final blow was my marriage couldn't withstand this latest adversity and ended in divorce. There were many dark days when I didn't think I could go on. Some well-meaning family and friends suggested I just "slow down" and give up my Ironman dream, but my heart told me to stay the course.

Back in the saddle!



One of many PT devices to help repair my hand



As I started to resume training that winter, Covid hit and closed the gyms and pools. Thankfully I had a treadmill and Kickr bike trainer at home, so I continued training for IMWI 2020 (just had to wait for lakes to thaw to OWS!) My hand could no longer operate manual shift levers, so I picked up a bike with electronic shifting (big THANKS to whoever invented that!) I hoped September races would still happen, so I trained and trained. I rode 20 (solo) centuries on 20 consecutive Saturdays in 2020. I got the news that IMWI was postponed as I drove to Madison for a training weekend in July. Heartbroken again, I still made the trip and rode the Loop 3 times that Saturday. Then I returned on September 13, the day of the cancelled race, and rode the Loop 4 times – 156 miles in one day!

Covid training at Devil's Lake (check out the sign!)



Rode 4 x Loop on IMWI 2020 day



After a short break for the 2020 holidays (and a third hand surgery), I started training again in January 2021. Thankfully no new setbacks in 2021, and my dream came true of becoming an Ironman in Wisconsin on Sept 12, 2021. I was honored to be highlighted at the event for my Comeback Story.

IMWI 2021



After IMWI, I continued riding and tallied 21 century rides (100+ miles) in 2021. Then in addition to working as a software engineer and training for another Ironman event, I also decided to start my own nutritional coaching and motivational speaking business in 2022. (Go big, or go home, right!?) I'm super excited to teach others the power of plants and help them fuel their health comeback as well!

Finished 2021 Strong!

Terri's Tri Training		
2021	Miles	Kms
Swim	193	308
Bike	3,960	6,336
Run	1,038	1,661

New direction in 2022!

