



WISDOM LOST

Understanding how seemingly unrelated events over time affect your body.

A true story of denial, pain, guilt, redemption, and learning over a period of 20 years.

By Richard Davids

This is Richard's second health novelette. His first is 'My Year With Cancer' – an internationally distributed novelette about bladder cancer therapy, healthcare, and cost.

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Your body is like the Internet; it's interconnected in ways even Elon Musk does not understand. Little things here and there affect something somewhere else. It could be an infection in an ear, or in a tooth, or nose, or throat. Finding the cause of an infection and its effects takes some investigation and correlation of events through time. This journal is not about an extremely serious disease like cancer or dementia. It's about a low-level infection that festered for years. It is a matter of connecting the dots over time to cure the cause. Here is my story.

Let me start at the beginning. Where else would you start a story? It is June of 2002. My dentist in California, Dr. Kyoto, cemented a full crown on **wisdom tooth on the left lower jaw**. I forgot whether the tooth was split or cracked but it needed a full crown, so the damage was substantial. Now the location is important if anything is to come of this story.

In July 2002, Julie, my future wife, and I flew out to Narragansett, Rhode Island for me to meet my future in-laws. I didn't know that they would be my in-laws at the time, but it turned out that way. We stayed in her Mom's house on Harbor Island in Narragansett.

The Tooth.

One night, the 'no see ums' invaded the bedroom through the window screens. I woke up to the torture of these little gnats biting every bit of exposed skin. To make the torture more exquisite, I felt periodic pressure explode in the newly crowned **wisdom tooth**. The periodic pain prevented any meaningful sleep. The next day Julie, I, and the new-to-be-sibling in-laws drove up to New Bedford to visit the Maritime Museum and enjoy lunch.

During lunch, my distress was obvious. The grimacing and painful expressions caused concern. It felt like a vise squeezing my jaw and then the vise would release, and the pain would dissipate. The next day my soon-to-be mother-in-law called her dentist and made an appointment for me. The dentist confirmed the newly crowned **wisdom tooth was infected**. I received a dose of antibiotics and was instructed to have my dentist back in California fix the problem.

With the infection knocked down, I returned to California in a week. Dr. Kyoto said it was safe to take the next step – a root canal. Oh great. He made an appointment for a local periodontist to perform the 'procedure'. Do not kid yourself; it's surgery. I won't go into details about how he attempted first to perform the root canal without Novocain. After I informed him that no topical was applied and that I was not numb, he apologized and proceeded to administer 4 ampules of Novocain.

Once I was somewhat numb, he drilled into the crown to relieve the pressure. He cautioned me not to breathe in for a few seconds because drilling into the crown would release the bacteria in the cavity. It's not a good thing to inhale dead or living bacteria into your lungs.

When he breached the gold crown and reached the infected area, bacteria spewed out of the hole. It was stinky. He said the periodic pain I experienced was the release of gas emitted by

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the bacteria in a tiny space. Like in a tooth cavity in my left lower jaw. He installed the pin and sealed it up. This is as close as I can remember regarding the events.

Now remember, **the infected wisdom tooth is on the lower left jaw**. After retiring in 2007, Julie (new spouse), our doggy Darcy and I moved to West Kingston, Rhode Island.

The Ear.

In 2015, I got an **ear ache** in my **left ear**. Not wanting to overburden the emergency room, I decided to visit the new '30 minute' service at the local pharmacy in Wakefield, Rhode Island. The nurse practitioner examined the left ear and flushed it. She flushed both ears as I remember. 'Nice and pink', she said. The ear drum was visible and clear. Great.

Within 2 days, I felt the pain again in my **left ear**. It felt infected again, so I scheduled a quick visit to my regular primary care doctor, Dr. Nitin. He prescribed Amoxicillin, a mild antibiotic. The **left ear** infection cleared up in a couple of days. However, within a week black sludge was oozing from my **left ear**. He prescribed a stronger antibiotic – Ciprofloxacin. It's a second level antibiotic administered when other antibiotics do not work. Several days later, I went for an audiogram at a local ENT. After the test, I described the feeling of paranoia (a side effect of Cipro), and he encouraged me to stop Cipro. So, I did. The infection cleared up in my **left ear** and did not return. In a follow up with my primary care doctor, he said I was really sick.

Fast forward to 2017. I got urinary bladder cancer. I started intravenous Cisplatin and Etoposide chemotherapy throughout 2018. My chemo lasted for 5 cycles. Each session within a cycle takes 3 days. The total chemo lasted about 6 months. Sometimes, I would go home with a needle stuck in my arm for the next day's session. Then came the 7 weeks of radiation.

I went for another dental cleaning in 2018 and consultation with my regular dentist Dr. Joe Jr. A 3D scan revealed the **infection in wisdom tooth in the lower left jaw was worse**. Since I was receiving the most toxic type of chemo, my oncologist cautioned my dentist not to do any oral surgery. If the tooth infection spread, it would compromise my immunity which was severely reduced by the chemo. It might result in death which I did not want. So oral surgery to pull the infected tooth and clean out the infection was delayed.

The Tooth Again

After the chemo and surgeries, I had another dental cleaning with X-rays in 2021. The X-ray showed the center of the tooth was cracked and exposed. Eating food would force debris into the root and bone to fester and make matters worse. It looks like one root is split completely, the result of the root canal pin breaking the root. You can see the two main roots in the photo below with the left root split.

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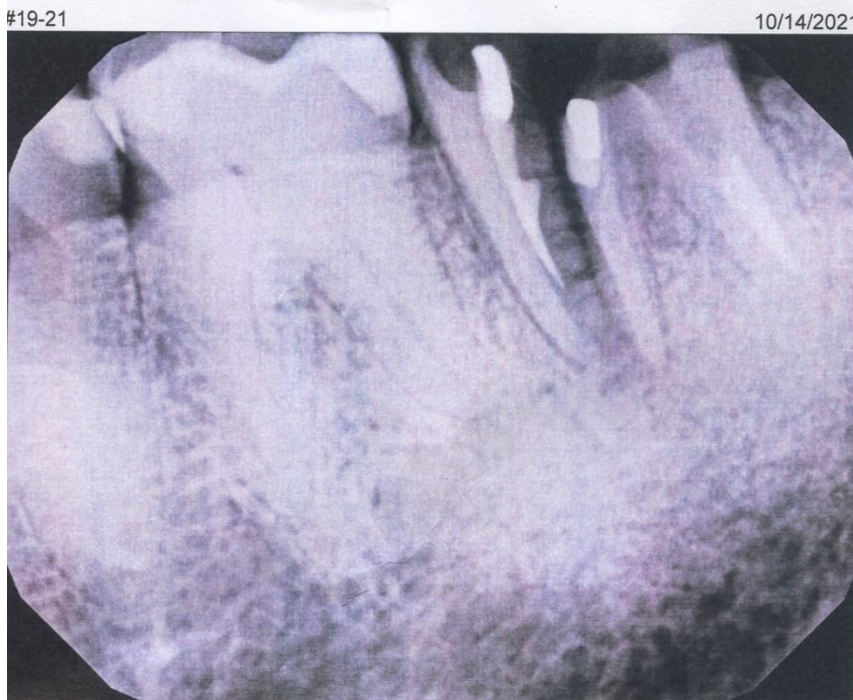


Figure 1 - the split #18 molar in the lower left jaw.

In early 2023, I had two sessions of cleaning and x-rays to make up for the 2-year gap in my regular dental appointments. After the cancer and chemo, I felt tired and fatigued and just did not feel like getting prodded and poked with sharp metal objects like needles and pins. The syndrome has a name – Cancer Related Fatigue (CRF). At the 2023 cleaning, my great dental hygienist Donna said the **wisdom tooth**, now identified as **#18**, is still infected. Drat. I dreaded the consequences – a ‘pull and plug’ implant with more needles and pain.

In June 2023, the full crown of #18 wisdom tooth put in 2002 popped off. It was a complete gold crown with the root canal post attached. I felt no pain or discomfort. I got a good 20 years out of the tooth, so I was not surprised; disappointed but not surprised since I knew I needed an expensive implant.

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Figure 2 - the full gold crown that popped off #18 molar.

The Eyes.

In August 2023, I **experienced double vision**. I have never experienced double vision before. I had 3 episodes over 3 months. The first episode occurred in August. I was sitting down and reading the news on my iPad. I looked up at the Baccara rug and the geometric pattern shifted. The double vision lasted about 3 seconds. Freaked me out. Then about 4 weeks later I had a second episode while I was walking Ziggy, our most fabulous doggy. The road got blurry, and it shifted into a double vision. The third episode occurred about two weeks after the second episode while I was driving. I closed one eye which eliminated the double vision, pulled off the road into a quiet little park and rested. This episode lasted about 3-4 seconds.

Could the bacteria in the **infected wisdom tooth** cause the double vision episodes called optic nerve stroke or ischemic optic neuropathy or diplopia or Transient Ischemic Attack (TIA), or several other names? There are several causes – **infection**, low blood sugar, stress, fatigue, brain tumor. I feared the worst things like brain cancer or brain tumor and ran with it.

The Throat.

I had a scheduled cleaning in October 2023, during which my excellent dental hygienist, Donna, took another X-ray of the tooth and showed me the infection in the **wisdom tooth** was much

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worse. 'It's really infected and has to come out'. I guess I was in denial for many years and felt rather guilty about not having the tooth removed long ago.

I really was not surprised at this point, so we scheduled an appointment with Dr. Guiseppe, the periodontist at the dental clinic. I contacted Dr. Nitin and told him I had an infected tooth (again) and he prescribed an antibiotic, doxycycline hyclate. I noticed that I had a **slight sore throat**, too. I started the round of antibiotics as a prelude to getting the **infected wisdom tooth** pulled and plugged.

Dr. Guiseppe, the periodontist, **removed the infected wisdom tooth** and inserted a plug for the new crown to be installed later in 4-6 months. There was much squirming and thrashing in the chair as he pierced my gums with the Novocain needle, injected it directly into the infected hole in my jaw, yanked out the split tooth fragments, scraped out the infection with little scraping tools and drilled a hole in the jaw bone for the plug. Bone conduction transmitted the sound and vibration of the scraping into my inner ear; much like a snow plow on a rough gravel road. Dr. Guiseppe then packed the hole with a dead person's mashed up bone stuff and stitched a flap or two of my gum over the plug for safe keeping. I left relieved but somewhat poorer by \$1,430.

The whole process took about 90 minutes.



Figure 3 - Post installed into lower jaw.

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The Nose.

About a week after the **extraction of the infected wisdom tooth**, I noticed something different about my nighttime breathing. For the longest time, I could only breath through my mouth while sleeping in bed. My nose just didn't want to work at night when I'm laying down. Of course, Julie complained of my bad Yeti breath but in retrospect, the infected tooth and nasty bacteria deteriorating in my wretched mouth might have caused the bad breath. Poor Julie worried that the disgusting foul order meant lung cancer.

After the **infected wisdom tooth** was extracted and I finished the dose of antibiotics, I noticed I could breathe again through my nose at night! It was a miracle! What gives? Could it have been some kind of sinus infection that irritated my mucus membranes in the nostrils? I did not take any antihistamine or decongestant to relieve the distress. Yes, I did take a dose of antibiotics, but I had taken antibiotics previously and still could not breathe through my nose sleeping at night.

I believe the bacteria from the infected molar took up residence in my nasal passages and caused a **low-grade inflammation** - a **sinus infection**. I cannot prove it with the scientific method but only coincidentally.

The Optometrist.

The double vision episodes bothered me. To rule out any ocular malfunction from an injury or disease, I scheduled an appointment with my optometrist, Dr. Jared. Dr. Jared evaluated my intraocular pressure, visual field, binocular vision, anterior chamber posterior exam, stroma, and a bunch of other stuff. I had a complete eye exam. He listed things like diplopia, vitreous degeneration bilateral, low risk open angle with borderline findings, and bilateral mild pinguecula, and presbyopia.

However, no serious problems were identified. Most were issues associated with someone my age. Dr. Jared recommended that I get an MRI without tracers. I have not had a double vision episode since the infected tooth was extracted. I can breathe normally through my nose. The sore throat disappeared. My ears are clean and clear, too.

Learning.

One thing I did learn is good dental care improves your general health. All sorts of bacteria take up residence in your mouth. Bacteria that live in your mouth can cross over into the bloodstream. Fact. Bacteria like Porphyromonas, Streptococcus, and Actinomyces species can spread and cause periodontitis. These bacteria are found in dental plaque! Bacteria in your mouth can be sucked into your lungs and cause pneumonia or heart problems. Who wants that!

For years, we're told to brush and floss our teeth. I believe the words 'brush' and 'floss' are weak, flimsy, and mediocre words. Brush and floss are as motivating as 'eat your peas and carrots'. Therefore, we need a new vocabulary when discussing dental hygiene. We need more

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dynamic, vigorous words to describe these functions. With the motivation and insight from my fab dental hygienist Donna, I worked out **3 things to thoroughly clean teeth and gums**. These 3 things are done in sequence and take 3-5 minutes. You can spare 3-5 minutes to prevent debilitating respiratory or heart problems.

The **first thing is scrubbing** rather than brushing **both the gums and teeth**. **Scrubbing** is much more vigorous than merely 'brushing'. I brush my doggy; **I scrub my gums and teeth**. And use an electronic toothbrush; they do more of the work than a dopey manual toothbrush. Most people stop at the gum line, but you have to exercise the gums, too, and harden them up. Scrubbing the gums reduces pockets of space or openings around the teeth but under the gum that get filled with diseased bacteria. You don't want that to happen.

The **next thing is 'picking'** with a curved GUM soft pick. Yes, there are short versions and long versions, but this curved type is longer and allows you to get way in the back of your mouth. Why do dentists insist on getting a tiny bit of string into your mouth with both hands to floss? It's ridiculous! Although I did have a girlfriend named Mary who could stick her whole hand up to the wrist in her mouth. That was amusing. I use two or three picks per session because the pointed tips can bend and make finding that little crack between your teeth difficult.

The **third thing is flushing**, not rinsing or worse - swishing. I rinse the fine chinaware carefully in the sink. Rinsing is wussy when it comes to cleaning your teeth. You really want to **agitate** and **flush out** the particles of rancid disgusting food that picking with a GUM soft pick dislodged. Move your cheeks and tongue around to agitate the liquid all around your mouth. I use a 50/50 combination of hydrogen peroxide and Parodontax. Never use straight hydrogen peroxide.

Connecting The Dots.

I believe that my periodic sore throats, ear infections, episodes of double vision, and sinus infections are interrelated events caused by an infected tooth. Bacteria caused the infection. Did the crown installation introduce bacteria into the tooth cavity? Did the root canal allow bacteria into the tooth cavity? I don't know for sure, but an infected tooth can cause multiple problems. Considering the bacteria had 20 years to float around and nest in my sinus membranes, inner ear, and elsewhere, I'm lucky nothing worse happened.

I asked my periodontist if the infected tooth and bacteria could affect my vision, breathing, ears, and throat and he said: "They're all interrelated". I asked my optometrist the same question and he said: "Definitely not!". Optometrists are more like physicists than biologists. I think primary care physicians should ask about any other infections when being treated for an ear or throat infection. But maybe I expect too much from a single health care provider.

I asked ChatGPT, the Artificial Intelligence (AI) application, what would cause ear infections, sore throat, double vision, and sinus infection. Here's AI's answer:

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Experiencing multiple ear infections, sore throat, double vision, and sinus infections could potentially be attributed to various underlying causes. However, these symptoms together can indicate a range of health issues, including:

1. **Upper Respiratory Tract Infections:** Viral or bacterial infections affecting the ears, throat, and sinuses can cause these symptoms. Conditions like sinusitis, otitis media (middle ear infection), and pharyngitis (sore throat) might occur concurrently.
2. **Allergies:** Chronic sinus infections and sore throat could be linked to allergies. Allergic rhinitis (hay fever) can cause sinus congestion, leading to recurring infections, and throat irritation.
3. **Sinusitis:** Inflammation or infection of the sinuses can lead to congestion, pain, and recurrent infections. This can cause pressure behind the eyes leading to double vision.
4. **Ear Problems:** Chronic ear infections might be due to issues like eustachian tube dysfunction, which could lead to repeated infections and possibly affect vision in rare cases.
5. **Neurological Conditions:** Double vision (diplopia) could be indicative of neurological issues or nerve problems affecting the muscles that control eye movement. Conditions such as multiple sclerosis or myasthenia gravis might present with such symptoms.
6. **Autoimmune Disorders:** Certain autoimmune conditions can lead to frequent infections and other systemic symptoms affecting various organs and systems in the body.
7. **Other underlying health issues:** Diabetes, immune system deficiencies, structural abnormalities, and environmental factors could also contribute to recurrent infections and associated symptoms.

No mention of other local infections like an infected wisdom tooth as a plausible underlying cause. I guess AI isn't so smart...,

Perhaps we expect too much from health care providers to understand the interrelated complexities of the human body and ask the right questions. That is why it's up to you to connect the dots, do the research, and solve your problem with help from whomever and whatever means you have available. And if you have a split or cracked tooth, get it removed.

Wisdom lost; wisdom regained.