

Childhood Memories Awakened

Category: Awaiting a Diagnosis

written by Jennifer Caputo-Seidler | August 9, 2025

All my childhood summer memories revolve around the pool in our backyard. Shamu floats. Diving for coins. Endless laps to create a whirlpool. Reenacting iconic scenes from *Titanic* on days when the water was cold.

All those days at the pool also meant a childhood full of sunburns. Though my parents slathered me in sunscreen, I burned easily. I have fair skin—fair enough that I always select the lightest tone when choosing a foundation. I also have too many moles to count. My sole saving grace is that, as a 20-something in the early 2000s, I never got in a tanning bed.

Though I try to be attentive to my skin, I can't be certain if each mole was there the last time I surveyed my skin.

Do those borders look irregular? I fret to myself. Is this one bigger since the last time I looked?

I see a dermatologist every six months. Only once in the last three years did I escape my appointment without a biopsy. It seems as if new, concerning changes appear even within these short intervals. Each biopsy is followed by a week-long wait for a phone call that delivers news of mild or moderate dysplasia. Sometimes, if the margins are positive, I have to return for a larger excision.

Each time I wait for that call, my mind takes me back my residency at a cancer center. In those days, we treated melanoma patients with IL-2, a drug that required constant vigilance for hypotension, pulmonary edema, and rapid deterioration. Though I understand rationally how far melanoma treatment has come since then, my anxiety invariably places me in one of those third-floor beds until I receive the biopsy results and know I'm safe. At least for another six months.

*Jennifer Caputo-Seidler
Tampa, Florida*