



Dining on Strength

By Amy Tenderich

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Five years ago, when I was lying in a hospital bed all dehydrated and depleted, I never could have imagined how my life with diabetes would turn out. Certainly I never imagined myself boarding a plane to San Diego, flying down for the day to stand up in front of a group of 50 women living with Type 1 diabetes to talk about strength. *Strength?*

But last Saturday, I did exactly that. I flew down to a special luncheon hosted by the **Behavioral Diabetes Institute** in San Diego, about a 90-minute flight from my home in San Francisco. I didn't know quite what to expect, other than that we'd be lunching at a beautiful parkside restaurant, and that some of my blogger friends would probably be there. I wasn't prepared for a palm-rimmed room full of attractive, brightly dressed, confident-looking ladies who looked like they might have been there for a conference on Women's Leadership. Yet every single one of them is living with the same struggles I face every day: carb-counting, insulin dosing, highs, lows, uncontrollable mood swings, the burden of schlepping our life-saving supplies all over creation — every bit of it!



I can honestly say that being in a room full of such supportive energy was one of the high points of my new, post-diagnosis life.

The theme of this special luncheon event, organized by Dr. Susan Guzman of the BDI, was “**A Celebration of Strength.**” And I must admit, preparing a half-an-hour talk on the topic didn't come easy. I had to think really hard about the notion of strength. It reminded me of how some

strangers see me testing my own blood and tell me that I'm brave. Does it really make us "brave" or "strong" just because we're doing what we need to do in order to survive with this disease?



On the other hand, doing all we have to do for our diabetes over and over and over again does make us stronger. Of that I am sure.

We're working hard every day to manage our blood sugars, be "good diabetics" and eat the right foods, get the exercise, dose the insulin, take the lab tests, see the doctors, log the numbers — all of that while supporting families and careers and all the "regular" stresses life throws our way.



Michele, who works for Abbott Diabetes, was unabashedly wearing her OmniPod on her arm. I just had to snap a photo of that!

I've met so many amazing people through this disease in the last five years — in particular, truly inspirational women — who've managed to use their diabetes as a source to mine their own inner strength, reach beyond their everyday concerns, and start up things that are bigger than themselves.

The best part of Saturday was hearing the great variety of life stories in the room, as each woman



was invited up to receive a little sterling silver “tree of life” medallion and say a few words:

- * the hispanic woman who tearfully told us she'd had NO diabetes care for her first four years, and only checked her BG once a month. Now her mother is dying and she's turned her own life around.
- * the gorgeous 29-year-old whose diagnosis made it necessary for her to “let go” of her dream of becoming a professional dancer, but who is now still dancing and teaching dance, with her diabetes under good control
- * the woman in her mid-50s, just a few months out from her heart transplant: “I did everything right, and I still got the complications!”
- * the brave mom who attended with her third baby strapped on her in a sling (cutest little head I ever saw!) who now writes a blog over a DiabetesSisters.org about pregnancy and diabetes
- * the thirty-something professional who was diagnosed as a teenager while her mom was in the hospital for something else; she was given syringes and vials and sent home with a pamphlet. Period.
- * the handsome woman in her '60s who was diagnosed with Type 1 in her '50s, also given syringes, but who was told the doctor could see her in approximately 8 months
- * the high school student diagnosed 9 months ago, who looked around nervously, but lit up when she announced that she just found out she made the national volleyball team (!)



I was delighted to meet fellow D-blogger Lee Ann Thill of [The Butter Compartment](#), who flew in from New Jersey for this event - her dream is to teach art therapy to people with diabetes. You go, Girl!

I could go on and on. I would have loved to camp out there and chat with these kindred spirits for DAYS. Fortunately, Dr. Guzman plans to make this an annual extravaganza. In her words: “Diabetes goes beyond a full-time job in so many ways. You have to be creative, and problem-solve constantly, just to survive. We all focus so much on what’s wrong with us... So let’s shift the emphasis.”

I love that. I aspire to live that. And I really did come away buzzing with a new sense of accomplishment following this luncheon. Because even though (goodness knows) we all have a lot of crappy diabetes days, now I’m feeling like we still have a reason to be proud of what we accomplish every single day.