

## "It's Never Too Late"

I am a 36 years old woman. I was diagnosed with type 1 diabetes when I was a 17 years old girl. Wow, have I really had diabetes over half my life? It seems like just yesterday that I was diagnosed! That may be because I was in denial of my diabetes this whole time and just very recently started taking this diabetes stuff seriously.

My story is meant to show people that diabetes is not a death sentence. It can actually be a positive thing if you have the right attitude. The right attitude is not what I had!

I learned the tough way that you really can get complications if you don't take care of your diabetes. When I was first diagnosed with diabetes I stuck to my diet and took all my shots and did everything that I was supposed to do. Then I got angry and rebelled. I stopped taking my shots, I stopped testing my blood sugars, I would make fake blood sugar logs for my doctors, how did I know that they would know that I made them up when they checked my A1C!!!!?? I rebelled for many years. I knew it all and could preach to any diabetic how they should care for themselves but I didn't practice what I preached.

September 1998, my world changed! BIG TIME! I woke up vomiting and unable to keep anything down. I figured it was just another episode of falling into DKA. A trip to the ER would fix that pretty quickly. But this time was different.

After a couple weeks of being in the hospital and having tests done. Docs confirmed that I had a severe case of Gastroparesis, which means the nerve in your stomach has lost the ability to digest food normally. I could not digest food or liquids at all. After not eating or drinking for three weeks I had to have a feeding tube inserted through my belly and had to hook up to a feeding pump for 16 hours every day. I was told I would never eat, drink or be able to work again in my life. I lost a lot of weight and looked like a total different person, I wasn't pretty anymore!

I lived like that for almost two years. I totally shocked the doctors when I regained my ability to eat and drink. Luckily I was able to have the feeding tube removed and I went back to living a very normal life. I went back to my old lifestyle of unhealthy eating, skipped shots, forget to test my blood sugar... But I felt fine. I was able to live without a feeding tube for 2 years.

Until New Years Eve... While all my friends were out ringing in the year 2003, I was in the hospital. The Gastroparesis reared its ugly head again. I was so sick until finally I had to resort to having surgery to have a gastric pacemaker inserted and a feeding tube put back in. This time the Gastroparesis was worse than the time before. The gastric pacemaker surgery has not even been FDA approved and I never thought it would work.

This may sound like a sad story so far, but its not... it's a blessing in disguise. I have learned so much through my illness. I have learned what is important in life. Not to take small things for granted. Also, I've learned how important family is... and so much more.

In November 2004 the pacer started working and I started to eat again. Boy did I have lots to be thankful for that Thanksgiving! I have been given a second chance, well really a third chance at living and getting this diabetes stuff right!

You CAN teach an old dog new tricks. I was once overwhelmed by the thought of having to keep track of my blood sugars, adjust my insulin and everything else that goes along with it. But, I truly have learned the consequences if you don't. It took two times and years of having to live on a machine and not living a normal life, but it finally sunk in. I am blessed.

I eat healthy now and now that I do, I prefer it to my old ways. I count carbs. Test my blood sugar many times throughout the day. Even though not every day is perfect, I'm learning to live with Gastroparesis and relearning how to live with diabetes and fit it into my life. Education is key. Its not as hard as I thought it would be. I'm happy again, scared that I could get sick again, but happy!

My key point is that it's never too late to start taking care of yourself. I thought my life was over... It's just beginning!

*signed, KL 1/8/05*