

Tomorrow Is a New Day (Take one day at a time)

My story is about never giving up. Tomorrow is a new day and a new beginning.

My life was forever changed when my father passed away suddenly on December 18th, 1973. I was 5 years old. It is a day that my mom, my 4 brothers and I rarely discuss because it is too painful. My dad also had diabetes. Like father like daughter, I was diagnosed at age 14. I was a freshman in high school. Back in 1982, I had to test my urine to find out my blood sugar. I remember the strip always seemed to turn dark and would always be around that darn 240 number. Normal blood sugar is between 80 and 120. It was very defeating. I didn't have access to an endocrinologist or any other specialists at the time. I went to a Physician's Assistant. After less than a year, my vision already began to blur. I was always frustrated, ashamed, and felt very alone. I felt as though I was the only person with diabetes that could not control my sugars, my eating or my weight. For the most part I was never overweight but I felt so uncomfortable in my body. I remember taking a whole sleeve of graham crackers and hiding it under my bed. Then after dinner I took a glass of milk with me to my bedroom and ate all of the graham crackers. I had 4 brothers and it made me so frustrated that they could eat whatever they wanted. I participated in cross country, basketball and track but never did well. I always became run down and struggled because I didn't know how to balance my eating, blood sugars and exercise.

When I went to college I rebelled and ended up in the hospital during my first semester with ketoacidosis. I desperately wanted to be in control of my diabetes but always failed. I tried laxatives to lose weight after reading an article in a magazine about Jane Fonda and how she used laxatives to lose weight. I was so disgusted. During college I struggled with anxiety and depression. I never addressed my diabetes. I just thought my eating was out of control. I went to Overeaters Anonymous. I read the book, Carbohydrate Addict. I was convinced I must be addicted to carbohydrates because I was always out of control. I never connected this to my diabetes. I didn't know about any diabetes support group.

After college I realized that if I just skipped my insulin shots, I could eat whatever I wanted and lose weight. Woo hoo! It's a win-win situation or so I tried to convince myself that it was. I knew deep down that this was not healthy. What I didn't know was that I was slowly killing all of my organs. My vision was blurry and my kidneys ached. I only took enough insulin to get through the day. When I woke up in the morning, my focus was completely on food and nothing was off limits. I tried to convince myself that I was happy being skinny. But I was really just isolating myself and I felt very alone in my struggle. I knew that at some point, I would hit rock bottom. I had a skeleton in my closet, it was my secret and I was not ready to let it go. I wanted to be the one in control and not let anyone take that away from me.

When I started working full time, I really tried to be "good." I would eat very little during the day, but in the evening I would just eat whatever I wanted and not take my insulin. It was like I waking up every morning with a hangover. Then I would start the vicious cycle all over again.

In the spring of 1995, I finally hit rock bottom but I didn't know it yet. It started with a nervous stomach and insomnia. Then my back started aching. The pain in my back was never ending. I just wanted to relax and get some sleep. I tried relaxation tapes. They didn't help. I took hot showers to relieve the back pain. I was so desperate that I would fill the bathtub with water and lay towels on the bottom. I would try to fall asleep and relieve the back pain at the same time. I also hoped that I didn't drown myself. It felt like hell. The smell of food made me feel sick and if I ate food, I would throw it up. I was feeling so exhausted and confused that I just didn't know what to do, what was happening to me or who to turn to for help.

I was fortunate enough that the nurse at the school I was working at reached out to me and helped me realize that I was depressed and needed help. I remember the sense of relief I felt because she recognized that I was desperate. I checked myself into the hospital and stayed for a week. I started on an anti-depressant medication. Labor Day weekend I drove back home to Iowa to see my family and I remember just feeling like I was in a daze as I drove. While staying with my mom, we watched a newsmagazine interview with Paula Abdul. She talked about her battle with bulimia. During the commercial break, I went into the bathroom, threw up and clogged up the sink. My mom was livid. I was so out of control. I was too scared to wake my mom up when I drove myself to the emergency room at 4 am in the pouring rain. That moment is still fresh in my mind.

One thing I will never forget is the emergency room doctor's comment to me. He asked me why I decided that I had an eating disorder in the middle of the night. I was shocked and didn't respond. I was admitted to the eating disorder ward. I was very angry. I felt I didn't belong there. I had diabetes, not an eating disorder. Can I take it all back? I struggled for months. By the end of August, I was so depressed that I was put on a feeding tube and given ECT treatments (shock treatments). I finally started getting better but still struggled. In October I was discharged but had to go to a partial program. I obviously was not ready and went back into the hospital. Finally in December of 1995 I was released. But I had to go to a care facility and earn my way out. I was still angry and just wanted to be normal again. In May of 1996 I was discharged from the care facility.

The real work was just beginning. After living with my mom for a while, I eventually moved back to Illinois. I was always searching for someone that could help me and understand what I did to myself. None of the doctors ever addressed the issue of me using insulin to control my weight. Was it taboo? I still felt that I was the only one who played that deadly game.

I finally found a dietician and doctor that introduced me to counting carbs. Seems so simple but it was a step in the right direction. I still struggled but I knew that I had to keep trying to change my ways. Most of the time it was one step forward and two steps back. If I started to feel like I was gaining weight, I would skip my insulin shot. I couldn't completely give up control.

In the summer of 1999, I was stressed out from my job. My blood sugars and eating were completely out of control. I brought home work and worked on the weekends. My living situation was not a positive situation either. The back of my eyes were bleeding from high blood sugars. My vision was blurry. I didn't have desirable insurance at the time. I had to

take a bus from work to get to the doctor. It was humiliating because I was always the only young person in the waiting room and I felt like everyone was looking at me and judging me. They could only see the cover of my book but not the story inside. They couldn't see my organs and the damage that I already had caused. I felt completely devastated and I just wanted to give up. I can't count how many times that I cried at the eye doctor's office, in my car and at home. It wasn't until years later that the doctor said that I was going blind if I hadn't turned my health around. I had more laser surgery on my eyes to stop the bleeding. I also just got used to my vision being blurry. My goal was just to survive and get through each day. When you are in a bad situation, it is sad to say that you just get used to it.

At that time I also had to go to the doctor because of pain in my toe. Again, my insurance was very limited and I had to go to a specific place and doctor so that it was covered. I already had neuropathy (slow circulation below my knees). It was a result of having consistent high blood sugars. If I cut my leg from shaving, I didn't know it until I saw the blood streaming down my leg. Yuck! The doctor informed me that I had a bone infection in my big toe. Again, I felt devastated because I thought, this is it, I'm going to lose my foot. Shortly thereafter, I met my future husband. From the very beginning, he didn't judge me and always supported me. I was completely honest with him. I ended up having surgery and taking time off from work. Again I survived another chapter in my story of fighting diabetes.

On our third date Ted cooked dinner for me. For dessert he gave me a choice of chocolate or vanilla sugar free pudding. Ha ha. I was very impressed. He was actually interested in me and my struggles. Ted would read information on the internet about diabetes and tell me about it. I still struggled and I had a long way to go. Being educated, aware and willing to change helped me to keep trying. There were times that I walked one step forward and two steps back. One thing that I had to keep telling myself was that tomorrow is a new day. Move on! I remember the conversation that Ted and I had a few months after we started dating. We were eating lunch and he said that if I didn't plan on taking care of myself, then we shouldn't stay together. Wow, that really hit me.

Before we were engaged, Ted encouraged me to try the insulin pump. Before I was on the insulin pump, I gave myself multiple insulin injections every day. In January of 2001 I started on the insulin pump. That was another big step in the right direction. The pump was programmed for my needs. It gave me better control of my blood sugars while giving me more freedom to eat when I wanted. When I went on the pump I began to open up about having diabetes when people would ask me about it. I began to OWN my diabetes and feel proud to talk about it. Within months my A1c went down 2 points but I still had a long way to go. The urge to skip my insulin to control weight was always in the back of my mind. It was like an alcoholic tempted to just take one drink and not go off the wagon. I walked a fine line. Ted and I were married on October 13th, 2001.

Ted gave me a palm pilot so that I could keep track of my blood sugars. He bought me books about diabetes including the book, DIABETES BURNOUT. I felt that this book really was about me and it made me realize that I wasn't the only diabetic who struggled.

My sugars were under better control and I could actually start exercising on a regular

basis. Exercise was and still is my anti-depressant. Exercise gave me energy and confidence. It helped me control my eating which also helped me control my blood sugars.

Ted and I wanted a family and I was willing to do whatever I had to in order to have a healthy pregnancy and a healthy baby. It was very scary because my doctor was very honest with me about the odds against me and the stress it would put on my eyes and kidneys. I was dedicated to keeping my blood sugars under control. If I didn't control my blood sugars, then my baby could have serious birth defects. I stayed positive and worked very hard. In October of 2003 we were blessed with our son Michael and in December of 2004, we were blessed with our daughter Skylar.

We are a healthy and active family. My children take great interest in watching me test my blood sugars and reading the numbers. They understand that the juice boxes are for Mommy. My special treat is usually a piece of sugar free bubble gum.

The fear of gaining weight is always with me. Instead of making that my focus, I must choose to focus on things that I am passionate about. For me, I know that I absolutely cannot isolate myself and focus on eating. I must focus on sticking with my routine, eating healthy, keeping my blood sugars under control, getting enough sleep, exercising and taking one day at a time. I wish I could say that I am perfect, my blood sugars are perfect but that is not true. I am constantly trying to do better and trying to stay positive. If I am feeling "fat" I focus on something else positive that I can accomplish. Instead of focusing on me and how uncomfortable I feel. I focus on my husband, children or helping others. I enjoy learning more about eating healthy, exercising and diabetes. It has taken many years of trial and error to figure out what foods satisfy me and keep me healthy. I am very particular about my food but it keeps me under control and balanced.

There have been many times in my life that I have felt complete devastation and have asked myself if I could keep fighting this disease. But after I have gotten through each crisis I have felt a new sense of hope and determination to keep fighting. I wish I could say that recovery was easy and that I was healthy after a week, a month or even a year. It took me years to be a healthy person with diabetes. The regret I feel about the decisions I made in the past are very painful. I take one day at a time. I have learned and continue to learn how to take care of myself and focus on balance. Instead of ignoring my diabetes, I choose to welcome the challenge.