

Personal Essay

“Challenges are what make life interesting; overcoming them is what makes life meaningful” (Joshua Marine). Although it took some time to accept this quote into my way of thinking, it is now the attitude I possess in life. The challenge I speak of is being diagnosed with Type One Juvenile Diabetes.

I was 14 years old and it was the summer before my freshman year in high school. I had been having a few typical symptoms of Type One Diabetes (thirst, excessive urination, and slight weight loss) but I put it off as results of the rigorous basketball workouts that I had been enduring. Since my mom is a nurse, we both came to the conclusion after a few weeks that this was not normal behavior. As the result of my blood sugar level came back to me in the doctor’s office, I quickly discovered that 368 mg/dl was not a healthy level. It was the scariest feeling to be told that I had an incurable disease that I knew nothing about.

As we packed up my things and headed for the hospital, I had no idea what to expect. It was strange to not feel sick or disabled but to know that I had a disease. The nurse came in and drew my blood - something I soon found out that my body did not like, as I almost passed out. The rest of my stay at the hospital (which fortunately wasn’t as long as they had anticipated thanks to my mother’s previous medical knowledge) was full of information and waking up every few hours for blood sugar tests. But with the support that I received from my friends and family, I was able to handle this. If not for them, I know that my transition into my new life would have been more difficult.

The first several months in the “real world” were spent learning about my disease and educating myself. It was very important to me that I become knowledgeable and self-sufficient. Having this diagnosis occur during the first week of school, I now had to think about adjusting my school and sports lifestyle to fit my new needs. One of the first challenges was planning my meals since I was not on the Intensive plan yet. Having a restricted amount of carbohydrates per meal was somewhat challenging. After a few months I knew that this would not work with my lifestyle in the long-term, so I switched to the Intensive plan. I love this plan and it has been something that has helped me to feel just as normal as anyone else, even though I can now look at just about any food and know approximately how many carbohydrates it contains! Another challenge was getting over my fear of needles and administering my own insulin shots. This took only a few weeks because there was no way that I was going to make myself rely on someone else to do that for me. As far as social issues go, I was afraid that kids would label me as “the diabetic” (especially because there was no one else in my grade that had this disease). I was afraid that they would judge me and think of me differently because I had to keep a snack or juice with me in gym class or take a shot before lunch. Soon enough, I realized that these fears would not materialize. My friends and peers didn’t treat me any differently, and they accepted me for exactly who I was. I could not be more thankful for having

such an understanding group of people surrounding me who made the everyday facts of Juvenile Diabetes seem more manageable.

Three years later, I feel like I have found a good balance in my life for managing my diabetes. I am more comfortable with myself and what I need to do to stay healthy and I don't let it interfere with any of my aspirations for life. It has made me thankful for many things. I am grateful that I was diagnosed at an age where I could independently take care of myself and understand what the disease was and how to deal with it. I am also glad that we made the decision to go to the doctor and get checked out after only a short amount of time of having symptoms, before severe problems set in. Having Juvenile Diabetes has also improved my organization and perseverance skills. I make sure to keep enough supplies with me at all times and I always plan ahead now. My perseverance skills have also been tested many times. Dealing with school and homework plus sports and extra curricular activities is enough to keep anyone busy, and dealing with another huge responsibility of keeping up with my diabetic health can get overwhelming at times. When I feel that way I take things one day or even one task at a time. I feel like dealing with these challenges has made me a stronger and more capable person. Finally, what I am most thankful for is having a disease that is treatable. I know there are far worse diseases out there and I feel blessed to be able to treat mine and lead a normal life that has just as much potential as anyone without Type One Diabetes. It is inspiring to know that there are so many passionate individuals in the world seeking a cure or higher technology for easier management. I realize that a lifetime of being diabetic will present challenges in my future, but I'm determined to persevere through the journey.