



Diabetes Revisited

I have had type 1 diabetes for 60 of my 73 years. I was diagnosed at 13, living in a working-class town of 1,200 people. Everyone there knew everything about everyone, so my diabetes became a major topic of conversation. Because of all the questions and what seemed to be condolences, I became terrified about my condition.

My family doctor told me that I would have to learn everything there was to know about type 1 diabetes and my body. In fact, he told me that I needed to know more about diabetes than he did! His guidance helped me become more relaxed and positive about my condition. He also advised my parents to send me to the Joslin Clinic in Boston. I will never know how my parents managed financially to do that, but they did.

People in my hometown were incredibly helpful, too. When my friends and I went to the drugstore soda fountain after school, “Doc” Watts made sure to always have sugar-free soda on hand, even though it was not easily available at that time.

My first physician at Joslin was Elliott Joslin himself. I can see him now, walking down the hallway with an arm around my shoulder, sharing words of wisdom about how to approach diabetes. Joslin taught me about “carb counting,” and I remember my first food plan: 65 grams a day of protein, 150 of carbohydrate, and 45 of fat. After my first visit, I tried to use all of my 150 carb grams at my family’s Thanksgiving dinner—not the best thing to do! Joslin taught me that three things equally impacted my diabetes—insulin, food, and exercise—and that the goal of diabetes treatment was to have normal blood sugars, not to be on a diet.

Ten years or so later, I lived on the Upper East Side of Manhattan and attended Columbia University, some 30 blocks away. I learned

that if I walked to school, I could eat an ice cream cone! It was then that exercise became an important part of my life. Today, my usual weekly exercise regimen consists of four aerobic workouts, one Pilates session, and regular 2- to 3-mile walks with my husband.

In my many years with diabetes, I have gone from testing my urine, which showed “negative” only when my blood sugar was less than 180 mg/dl, to becoming what my husband calls his “bionic woman”—insulin pump with remote control, continuous glucose monitor, the works. I am fortunate to have had no diabetes complications. Technology has greatly improved the control of diabetes and holds even greater promise in the future.

Living with diabetes for the past 60 years has enlightened me, not only about diabetes but about who I am. I’ve treated my diabetes with the necessary respect and understanding, always remembering that it is an important part of me. Type 1 diabetes is a difficult road to travel, but those with the condition (especially teenagers) need to know that, like me, they can lead a life that is happy and fulfilling.

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