

I was 15 months old when I was caught stealing. Not candy or toys, but sippy cups of water. Not a common habit of a toddler right? I was just so thirsty. As a second child, my mother knew this wasn't normal behavior for a child. She called the pediatrician, who saw us and did some bloodwork. We were then told to go to Stanford Hospital where a team of doctors were waiting for us. After hours of uncertainty and fear, I was diagnosed with Type One Diabetes(T1D). No one on either side of our family had T1D. From then on, the way I went through life would never be the same as other kids. I had to have injections of insulin every time I ate, sometimes up to 8 times a day.

As I transitioned to primary school, and especially during junior high, I hid this part of myself. Anxious about fitting in, I went from shots to an insulin pump with this complex system of wires and tubes weaving under my clothes. A symphony of alarms and beeps accompanied me as I walked through the halls. Hyper-aware of the devices on my body, I would wear long sleeves and pants in the California summer heat to ensure these sites were unseen. During sports practices I would rip the visible sites out of my skin, wipe off the blood, and rejoin my activities, hiding from judgment.

Told by my parents and doctors not to define myself by this disease, that I'm more than my high and low blood sugars, the truth is that diabetes is a defining characteristic of my life. The average diabetic makes roughly 300 more decisions per day than an ordinary person just to survive. I've come to accept this part of who I am, that I don't have to cut holes in pant pockets to hide away my insulin pump tubing or be insecure about having my T1D on display. It wasn't until I reached high school and got to introduce myself to a new group of peers that I finally felt comfortable enough to share this part of my life.

When I came to this realization, I spoke to my doctors to find resources and learned that there is a lot of support in the T1D community here in the Bay Area. These support programs, such as diabetes camp, where I could meet other kids with T1D, helped me to decide to use my newfound confidence to make changes. I organized fundraising teams for diabetic research and throughout my 12-year effort-won multiple JDRF Golden Sneaker awards for my team's efforts. From the time I was diagnosed, my parents had me participate in any studies that Stanford had for T1D. Without participation, there will never be a cure. I'm now an ambassador at Tandem Diabetics, an insulin pump company, and Stanford Health where I mentor newly diagnosed diabetics and their families in my area. The life of site changes and needles is all I've ever known, but many of the other diabetics I've mentored were diagnosed in their teens and needed help getting through this beginning phase, I had the experience to help.

Without Type 1, I wouldn't be as resilient as I am today or have the impact of the T1D community I've helped foster.

I've had the opportunity to both lend and receive support, strengthening my own morale as much as my peers. Through connecting with newly diagnosed teenagers, it helped many others as well as myself to feel more confident and resilient to the disease. Helping others learn the curve of life with diabetes, reinvigorated me to be more active in my own care as well. I learned to take an insecurity that only a few years ago I wouldn't speak of, and make it into something that I can confidently and openly say defines me.