



The Camp Newsletter

October 2019



A SWEET STORY FROM A PARENT OF A DIABETIC CAMPER

My 14 year old daughter, Nikki, was 6 years old when she was diagnosed with Type 1 Diabetes. She was a perfectly active, healthy, happy, typical kid before the diagnosis. The days/ weeks/ months after were flooded with questions about what her life would be like now. The only answer we were willing to settle for was “absolutely no different!”

After days of education from our endocrinologist we found our footing again. We tackled this head-on and haven't stopped since. To this day, we manage to keep her life and our lives as normal and typical as the days before her diagnosis. Someone once told us, “It takes a year of living through this, to see the light”. Sounds dramatic- but to this day, it's one of the most accurate statements I've heard. Exactly within that year, this massive learning curve of how to correctly and efficiently ‘chase numbers’ really did become second nature. As a family, and a team, we made the vow to never treat her like she was a diabetic. We felt the disease needs to work around her life, not the other way around. She was diagnosed in June-days before her summer at day camp. We called the camp in tears, and they said, “We got this”. I spoke with the owner and nurse about a game plan, and she was off to the races. It was that simple. It is all about a clear and realistic game plan. Once everyone felt organized, knowledgeable, and equipped, the rest was truly easy. She never skipped a beat and I made sure the camp was as comfortable with our health care plan as we were with them taking care of her. I will never forget the day I brought in Nikki's supplies and juice into camp. It was a week before camp started and when we entered the health center there was another little girl kneeling down getting her ‘bolus’ injection (shot of insulin to cover for food). They looked at each other, laughed, and became instant best friends. They even went away two summers later to sleepaway camp together. Now they are both JDRF ambassadors. Talk about making lemonade....

Over the next few months, we realized day camp, school, field trips and sleepovers all became pretty easy and extremely manageable because we were always right there. The real challenge was now thinking about *sleepaway camp!* My husband thought “How could she ever go?”

I responded with “How could she NOT go?” I said we will pick a camp that we trust and that trusts us right back. We did just that. When she was diagnosed, I thought sleepaway camp was un-doable. WOW, was I wrong!

We toured and immediately fell in love with the reassurance and support they offered. We spoke with the camp owners and doctors and they reassured us this will work. Not only did she go, she flourished and excelled physically, socially, and emotionally.

- **She became an independent and amazingly controlled type 1 diabetic - because of camp.**
- **She became confident in her ability to manage her numbers and herself - because of camp.**
- **She became aware of her highs and lows and how to best care for her needs - because of camp.**

For the past 8 years she proves to be in the best health after camp—ironic because we aren't the ones taking care of her! Her diabetic success is shown by her A1C (3 month average of blood sugars) following the summer months! We end up thanking the camp team more than her medical team.

When she first went off to sleepaway, just like with day camp, we sat with her 'team'. The team consisted of head nurses, her head counselor, her 'go-to' counselor, her division head and of course, Nikki—even at the young age of 9.

We came up with a clear and precise schedule of when to test and what to do with each range of numbers. We discussed: the meals, the carbohydrates, what to do when she's high (hyperglycemic), what to do when she's low (hypoglycemic), where to store her juice/gummies/snacks, who will be contacting me with her blood sugars at night (which the camp was kind enough to offer). We discussed how she should test before swim time and activities involving water. By the end of the conversation, everyone was not only on board, but eager to meet her and become part of our village. The camp not only embraced her, they adopted her for 7 weeks. They made her feel empowered, safe, controlled, and no different than any other camper. In essence, day camp and sleepaway gave us her 'normal' pre-diabetic life back. Her knowledge and awareness of the highs and lows of this disease (*pun intended*) came from her camp experience, not the endocrinologist, not school, not even us as her parents. *Her gift and freedom to attend camp was life-changing.* The camp empowered her by empowering themselves with knowledge to safely move forward. The staff was smart, open minded, and quick learners of a few simple steps, and most importantly- they all stayed focused yet calm.

Diabetes will not be what defines her. To this day, the camp tells me that the most helpful thing I ever did for them was create a bright and organized binder that was their bible for the summer (both day camp and sleepaway camp).

Inside the binder was:

- Updated health care plan supplied by the doctor
- The daily/time schedule for her testing (breakfast, lunch, dinner, before bed/swim) and IF she felt low
- How to proceed when she is in range, above range, or below range
- Emergency phone numbers at a glance if ever needed
- Checklists of supplies to be packed for day trips and overnight trips.
- Step by step instructions for inserting the insulin pump when she wore a pump for a few summers (super easy once it's done one time.)
- Step by step instructions on how to inject the insulin pen (super easy once it's done one time.)
- Step by step instructions on how to use Glucagon in case of emergencies (no different than an epi-pen)
- The best snacks to give when high or low
- Medical doctors' phone numbers and emails if questions arose
- Pages of Q/A's of anything one could possibly ask during the summer

I made 3 of these binders. One was kept in her bunk for counselors to review, one at the infirmary for reference, and one in the Girls HQ as her juice/supplies were also stored there. After her first 2 summers, no one referred to or referenced the book anymore—which I found victorious.

The three ingredients for success are: ***mutual trust, communication, and creating a daily plan that works for all.*** Everything else falls beautifully into place when everyone, including the child and his/her parents, are compliant, responsible and reasonable. Knowledge is power...and our daughter's camp experience gave her exactly that.