

DIFFERENT LIKE YOU

Meet teens whose unique experiences might make them seem as if they're from another world—when in reality they're just like you.

“My Dog Could Save My Life”

By GRACE CHAMBERLAIN as told to JANE BIANCHI

Grace, 16, has to keep constant tabs on a condition that could kill her. But fighting diabetes (with the help of her black lab!) has only made her stronger.

Photographs by
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THIBODEAUX

Back in first grade, when I was 7 years old, weird things began happening to me: Out of nowhere, I started wetting my pants like a little kid, and my breath smelled really gross, like rotten eggs. Then one day, a teacher found me roaming the halls of my elementary school. I didn't know where I was or even my own name.

I was rushed to the hospital, where the doctors discovered I had developed a disease called type 1 diabetes. At the time, I barely understood what that meant, but now I'm pretty much an expert. To put it simply: If you have type 1 diabetes, your blood sugar can swing too high (which can trigger kidney damage, a heart attack, a stroke, or blindness) or too low (possibly causing a seizure or a coma). What's extra scary for me is that I'm a “brittle” diabetic. This means my blood sugar level can swing quickly and very dramatically in either direction—and I could die. To top it off, there's no cure.

When I first heard the news, all I cared about was whether or not I could still eat my favorite food— scrambled eggs and sour cream. (After all, I was only 6!) Once I heard the answer was a “yes,” I was happy— nothing else bothered me. Boy, I had no idea how much my life was about to change.



This is Jackie. She's been trained to smell my blood sugar levels—I take her everywhere!

MANAGING MY DISEASE

Keeping diabetes under control is almost a full-time job. If you don't have the disease, your blood sugar is automatically **regulated**—it's something you never have to think about. In my case, I have to check my levels by poking my finger with a needle about 6 to 12 times a day. It grosses some people out, but to me, it's no big deal. In fact, when I'm sleeping, my parents take turns doing it for me at midnight, 3 a.m., and 6 a.m., and I don't even wake up!

But even with all that monitoring, there's still a chance that my blood sugar could swing dangerously high or low. That's when Jackie comes to the rescue! She's my alert dog—a black lab that's been trained to actually *smell* my blood sugar levels. If she thinks they've dropped or **elevated**, she alerts me by giving me her paw, whining, or scratching the floor. She'll even pull the covers off me if I'm sleeping! (That's why I have holes in all of my blankets.) I love her so much.

FEELING DIFFERENT

Explaining my condition to other kids hasn't been easy. When I met my best friend Joanna, the first thing she asked me was about the fanny pack I always wear around my waist. It's actually an **insulin** pump, which helps keep my blood sugar in a healthy range, but I was worried that she'd think it was weird. So I lied and said it was a phone.



I'm so lucky to have Joanna as my best friend. We've known each other for eight years!

To donate to Grace's charity bike ride or watch a short documentary about her, visit midnightthreandsix.com

When I finally came clean, she didn't care. I felt so relieved.

Other people haven't been as cool, though. In elementary school, I had to go to the nurse a lot because I was too young to test my blood myself. Kids would say, "Oh, she's such a crybaby. She just wants attention." At the time, I was too scared to confront them, so I played it off as if my disease wasn't serious. But it *is* serious—

really serious.

In fact, last year, my friend—she was exactly my age—died of diabetes in her sleep. Going to her funeral was so incredibly sad and hard. It was a frightening reminder that one day I could be here—and then one day, I could just not.

LOOKING TO THE FUTURE

Though I'll probably have to monitor my blood sugar forever, scientists are working on devices that could make it easier. But they need money first! That's why my family, Joanna, and I are all traveling to California in October to do a 105-mile bike ride—we'll be fundraising for diabetes awareness and research.

And yes, 105 miles sounds far, but having type 1 diabetes has made me a stronger person. I know that if I can manage this disease, I can handle anything. ■

3 THINGS GRACE WANTS YOU TO KNOW

1

Do your homework.

Not all diabetics are the same! Type 1 diabetes is less common than type 2, and it happens when your immune system attacks the cells that produce insulin.

2

You shouldn't be scared.

There's no reason to be afraid of me because I sometimes have to prick my finger. Deep down, I'm still a typical teenager, just like you!

3

Don't make assumptions.

Sometimes people see my dog and assume that I'm blind. But I'm not! There are many kinds of service dogs, and Jackie is a diabetic alert dog.

GRACE'S FAVORITE THINGS ★★★★★



▲ **DREAM JOB:** I want to **rescue dogs** from shelters, then train and rehabilitate them.

▲ **FOOD:** I always dip **scrambled eggs** into **sour cream**. I just love them together!

▲ **BEVERAGE:** **Juice**, because it can literally save my life. I always have it in my purse in case my blood sugar dips.



◀ **PLACE THAT I WANT TO VISIT:** I want to travel the U.S. and go to every state that I haven't been to yet. I just went to **Utah**, and the mountains were so cool!

▼ **MUSIC:** I love **Sam Smith**—his voice is so soothing. And I like **Taylor Swift** too. Her songs are fun, and she's very classy. That's hard to find in famous people nowadays!



▲ **MOVIE:** Of course I love a dog movie! My favorite is **Homeward Bound**.

▶ **CELEB:** **Nick Jonas**. I'm not obsessed with him or anything, but it's cool that he has shown people that you can have type 1 diabetes and still be normal.



▲ **BOOK:** I like to read **Cesar Millan's** books about dog behavior and training.



▼ **TV SHOW:** **The Office** is my favorite. I like how much it makes me crack up! I probably laugh too hard at it—especially the main character, Michael Scott.



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