

Joslin Diabetes Center
Medalist Program
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To Whom It May Concern:

A letter to celebrate my brother!

It was October, 1970. My little brother, Alan Levine was 7 years old. I was 14 and my younger sister was 13. We lived in Baltimore County, Maryland. It was a typical suburban neighborhood.

Our parents worked so my sister and I took care of our brother when he came home from school. He was 7 years old. He had been complaining of stomach aches a lot. I thought he was faking to not go to school! I am not sure why as my brother was so smart and had no trouble with the academics in school. He had friends and was an active, normal 7 year old. He was going to the bathroom a lot and not eating a lot.

The morning I remember was a week before Halloween. I am not sure of the exact date! My mother decided that she was tired of the complaints of stomach pain so said she was taking him to our pediatrician! Dr. Kramer was a no nonsense doctor! He had taken care of all of us! My mother trusted his judgment.

My sister and I went to school and mom took Alan to the doctor. When I got home, no one was there. My mother called and told us that they were at the hospital. We found out later that at the doctor's office they did blood work and a finger stick. Alan's sugar level was so high that mom was told to take him to Sinai hospital immediately. He was in danger of going into a diabetic coma!

It was a scary time for all of us as we knew nothing about diabetes in the family. We knew that it was hereditary and that daily injections of insulin were needed. I did not know anyone who had the condition. Alan spent about ten days at the hospital. I remember visiting him there and learning how to give an injection. We had to practice on an orange.

While at the hospital Alan and my parents had to learn what was involved with living with diabetes. There was an outpatient support group, Happy Hills Clinic, I think. The people there were helpful to my parents.

We had to change some family eating habits. We had to be aware of the signs of highs and lows. Since Alan was only 7, it was a lot for him to deal with. My father took charge of giving the injections and making sure Alan did the urine tests.

I remember when it was time for Alan to return to school. My mother had to go and leave orange juice and candy in the nurse's office in case of a sugar low. I think the school had not had a diabetic student so they were nervous!

The first summer after diagnosis, Alan was encouraged to attend Camp Glyndon, an overnight camp for diabetic children. Alan did not want to go! None of us had ever been to an overnight camp. My parents were told that it would help him and he would have fun. It turned out to be the best experience for him. He came home happy and more aware of his disease. He went on to attend the camp every summer and returned as a counselor as a teenager. It was a wonderful place for the children to be with others that have the same condition.

Over the years Alan learned how to handle the injections and testing himself. He played soccer in high school and excelled academically. Alan had wonderful friends in high school that looked out for him. I remember one night in high school, Alan's friends brought him home after drinking too much! Mom and dad were out of town! I was up all night worried about him having diabetic issues due to drinking!

I am so proud of the man my brother has become. He went to college at the University of Delaware to major in geology. He enjoyed photography. He managed his diabetes and learned what happened if he was not careful! When he graduated from college, he decided to pursue a masters degree in geology. He went to Arizona State. My parents were so nervous about him driving across the county with a dog and a tent! All he took was what would fit in the car! He camped out along the way and took some amazing pictures!

I have been amazed and a little nervous about my brother camping in very remote places. There were no cell phones in those days! I will never forget him driving through Death Valley and worrying because we had no contact unless he could get to a phone or send an email.

My adventurous brother has done many exciting things! He has traveled and studied soil at Mt. St. Helen's after the volcano erupted! He has camped in remote places all over the country and managed his diabetes. Over the years he has traveled all over the world for his job. He has made friends everywhere he goes.

He now lives in Saskatchewan, with his wife. They both are amazing photographers. My brother cooks and bakes! He keeps his diabetes under control. I still feel a little nervous when he is out in nature sleeping in a tent but he has chosen the life that he loves and enjoys despite the diabetes. He is proof that you can live with an often difficult disease.

I tell many people about my brother and his journey to show that it is not easy but you can live a normal life. In my opinion, he deserves an award for living 50 years with diabetes!

Judy Griffith, Alan's big sister!