

healthy valley®



BESTSELLING
NOVELIST
**BRENDA
NOVAK**
TAKES ON
DIABETES

COPD AWARENESS

HEALTHY
BEAUTIFUL
SKIN THROUGH
THE AGES

DIABETES
FOOT CARE

TOTAL BODY
EXPRESS
WORKOUT

November 2012



SCAN THIS QR CODE TO
VIEW ONLINE MAGAZINE

ISSUE 49



BESTSELLING
NOVELIST
**BRENDA
NOVAK**
TAKES ON
DIABETES

By Charlotte Libov

When Brenda Novak's son Thad was five, he contracted a bad case of the flu, and, while he seemed to recover, something wasn't quite right. He was constantly thirsty and always had to go to the bathroom. One day, Thad was begging for a drink so Novak gave him some Kool-Aid, but the sugary drink only seemed to make him worse. This got Novak thinking. She started searching the Internet, then called her doctor, insisting that he see her son. Soon, Novak's worst fears were confirmed, and, upon learning that Thad had type 1 diabetes, the distraught mother collapsed in tears. "When I was nine, a cousin of mine had a baby and I remember her saying that the baby had diabetes and wouldn't last very long. So I was in a panic," Novak recalls.

Diabetes occurs when the body's pancreas, the gland that produces insulin, the vital hormone needed to help the body convert food into energy, becomes impaired. As a result, sugar accumulates in the blood stream. Although diabetes is no longer a death sentence, it remains a very serious disease that, eventually, can damage every organ in the body, including the eyes, heart and kidneys, making it a chief cause of blindness, heart disease and kidney failure.

There are two main types of diabetes, type 1 and type 2. The most common, which accounts for 80 percent of cases, is type 2 diabetes. It usually affects adults and, while the exact cause isn't known, it most commonly occurs in those who are overweight. On the other hand, type 1, which used to be called juvenile diabetes, usually occurs in young people, including children, and is thought to develop because the immune system mistakenly begins attacking the cells that produce insulin, hence the connection between Thad's flu and his developing the condition.

Although Novak knew that diabetes was no longer a death sentence, she also knew that Thad would have to deal with it throughout his life, so she was determined to do all she could to find a cure. But as Novak was only a fledgling author with a growing family and many demands on her time, she wasn't sure how to attack her new goal. Eventually, she decided to launch an online auction. She raised \$35,000 the first year but is currently raising \$300,000 per auction, bringing her eight-year total to \$1.6 million. This makes her annual Online Auction for Diabetes Research one of the largest fundraisers for diabetes and on track to hopefully reach \$2 million next year.

This is no accident because Novak is now a famous bestselling author and the annual auction attracts 5,000 bidders from throughout the world who are drawn by the private meets and luncheons she sets up with her colleagues, who are the who's who of the literary world, including Steve Berry, Barry Eisler, Eloisa James and Janet Evanovich.

But just like she didn't set out to establish the world's biggest on-line auction, Novak also didn't set out to become a bestselling author. She was working as a loan officer when she made the shocking discovery that her trusted day care worker was drugging her kids with cough syrup to get them to go to sleep. The then mother of three (she and her husband, Ted, now have

five children) promptly quit her job and set about finding a job she could do at home.

"I never planned to become a writer. I'm totally left-brained. If you told me that someday I would have been an author, I probably would have laughed," says Novak. She did five years of research for her first book, going to the library at night "with nickels and dimes" to make copies of research books. "I managed to sell my first novel. It didn't save us economically, but it did save me emotionally," she added.

HarperCollins published that book, "Of Noble Birth," in 1999. Honors, acclaim, more books and, most important, enormous sales followed, propelling her onto bestseller lists, where she remains today. She's now the author of 44 books, including two that are about to come out as part of her brand new Whiskey Creek series.

When Novak was first launching her auction, she approached the major diabetes associations, which cold-shouldered the then-unknown author. Then Steven Fishman, a board member from the Diabetes Research Institute in Miami, contacted her. "I flew to the DRI to take a look and was so impressed by everything I saw and learned. I think it was fated for us to come together," Novak says. Unlike other organizations, the DRI is solely focused on scientific research to find a cure for diabetes, which suited Novak perfectly.

Now 15, Thad is doing well. "I love the way he approaches having diabetes. He's a cool kid and very laid back about it," says Novak. But she still gets frustrated with the misinformation and confusion that surrounds the disease. "People think that because we have insulin it is manageable, but it is a very serious disease," says Novak, adding, "So while I'm raising money, I know I have to keep spreading awareness."

