

The Magazine About Beauty, Health And Wellness

Fall/Winter 2010

Glow

www.GlowBeautyMag.com

BEAUTY BOOSTERS

Radiant Skin

Luscious Lips

Beautiful Eyes & Brows

BODY BEST

Real-Life Before & Afters

Future Breast Augmentation

Kinder, Gentler Body Sculpting

MOOD NEWS

Inner & Outer Beauty


Beat Seasonal Depression

Sensory Healing: Smell & Taste

PLUS . . .

Female Sexuality Finds a Voice!

CAROL ALT
The **Raw** TRUTH



Brenda and Thad Novak

A Call to Action Against Juvenile (Type 1) Diabetes

By Melissa Bourbon Ramirez

“You may never know what results come of your action, but if you do nothing there will be no result.” – Mahatma Gandhi

It was May and my son was in fifth grade. His teacher emailed to ask if I could talk to him about his trips to the drinking fountain. He was leaving his seat too often and it was becoming a problem. I questioned him and all he could say was that he was always thirsty, crazy thirsty, and he felt like he needed to drink water all the time. I gave him a water bottle to keep at his desk. Problem solved. Then his teacher called to say he was using the bathroom during class time – to the point that she felt he was abusing the privilege. I began observing him and noticed that he was urinating all the time. Obviously, all that water he was drinking had to go somewhere. When I asked him about it, he said again that he was so thirsty all the time.

Then I noticed that he was sleeping. A lot. When he began to urinate during his sleep, something he hadn't done since he was three-years-old, I took him to the doctor. They performed a routine urine test and sent us home. Later I got the phone call telling me to bring him back in so they could repeat the test. When I pressed, the nurse finally said, “There's sugar in your son's urine.”

I didn't know the implication of this, but I got the sense it wasn't good. Back in the doctor's office, they repeated the tests, and did a blood draw. My son's blood sugar was over 550. “He should be in a coma,” the nurse said.

“It looks like he has diabetes mellitus,” the doctor said. That's when I started crying.

“Am I going to die?” my son asked.

I didn't have an answer.

Twenty minutes later, he was admitted to the hospital and I felt helpless. The reassuring speech like the ones doctors give patients on television never came. I stood back and watched my child receive the first of thousands of insulin injections and all I could discern from everything going on around us was that his life would never be the same.

If you've ever felt the helplessness that comes with the diagnosis of a disease, you're not alone. We all encounter situa-

tions or problems which leave us floundering, unsure of what to think or what to do. When we're faced with a life-changing event, like having a child diagnosed with Type 1 diabetes, most of us, myself included, become overwhelmed by the onslaught of information, stymied by the steep learning curve we now find ourselves experiencing, and steeped in a new world of medication, insurance, hospitals, blood sugar testing, and insulin injections. We know we're powerless to change what's happened, and so we simply stumble through, day by day, learning how to cope. Eventually, we begin to accept what's happened and we try to help our child accept this new life and a changed future.

Two Types of Diabetes

Understanding begins with knowledge. Diabetes is a common word. So common that we've all heard it, but many don't know what it actually means. Diabetes means your body cannot regulate or breakdown the glucose (sugar) in the blood. It's as simple as that. The majority of people who have diabetes have Type 2, or mature onset diabetes. Type 2 diabetes typically strikes people in their adult years; however, our Western diet has contributed to epidemic diagnoses in children. With Type 2 diabetes, the body doesn't respond properly to the insulin the pancreas releases and blood sugar isn't broken down to be used by the cells.



Type 1 (also called Juvenile diabetes or diabetes mellitus), on the other hand, is an autoimmune disease in which the body attacks the islet (insulin-producing cells) in the pancreas. The islet cells are actually destroyed by the body's T-cells.

Onset typically occurs during youth or adolescence, hence the moniker Juvenile diabetes. Without those islet cells, and the insulin they produce, glucose can't enter the body's cells to provide them with energy.

Diabetes dates back to 1552 when an Egyptian physician documented frequent urination as a symptom for the disease on papyrus. It was later described as the body melting both flesh and limbs into urine. The 19th century brought research and some understanding of the disease, but until the 1920s, being diagnosed with diabetes was a death sentence. It wasn't until the 1970s that home blood glucose meters

even with excellent resources like efficient glucose meters and insulin pumps. The body is unpredictable, yet good control is essential to good health.

We need a cure.

Taking Action

It's a special person who can do more than tread water after life-altering news. The person who grabs the reins of adversity and tries to create a new direction or a new future, is someone who climbs over – or around – obstacles rather than throwing up their hands, turning around, and staying on the tried and true path of acceptance.

It was a shocking experience that jump-started Brenda Novak's career as a best-selling author – she caught her day-care provider drugging her children with cough syrup to get them to sleep all day. That was when Brenda decided she needed to quit her job as a loan officer and help make a living from home.

"When I first got the idea to become a novelist, it took me five years to teach myself the craft and finish my first book," Brenda says. But she sold that book, and the rest is history. Her novels have made the New York Times, USA Today and Borders/Waldenbooks bestseller lists and won many awards, including two Rita nominations, the Book Buyer's Best, the Book Seller's Best and the National Reader's Choice Award.

Brenda and her husband, Ted, live in Sacramento and are proud parents of five children – three girls and two boys. When she's not spending time with her family or writing, Brenda is usually working on her annual fund-raiser for diabetes research – an online auction held on her Web site (www.brendanovak.com) every May. Brenda has raised over \$1 million to date.

were developed. Each decade, strides are made. Today, with proper health care, a person with Type 1 diabetes can live a long life, although health risks still abound (like kidney and eye disease). Good blood sugar control isn't easy,

And let's face it, it's far easier to take the safe route than try to forge through a forest teeming with obstacles, but the people who pick up a machete and plow through the undergrowth, creating a path for others to follow, are the outliers. They are the change-makers, and if not for them, progress would be stymied. Brenda Novak is just such a person.

Her story is similar to mine. At five years old, her son, Thad, began getting up during the night to use the bathroom, something he'd never done before. He would beg for water constantly. He couldn't make the five-minute drive from school to home without pleading for a drink. Brenda remembers telling him, "Thad, anyone can make it five minutes!" Of course she had no idea what was actually wrong. That weekend the family went on a picnic. They'd taken Kool-Aid to drink. Thad kept telling his mom he was thirsty, and because she didn't generally give her kids a lot of sugary drinks she was very sensitive to how much he was having. He kept needing more and more and more. That's when she knew. The sugary drink was only making the problem worse. His body couldn't break down the glucose he was taking in.

Then the diagnosis came. Type 1 diabetes. Thad would face a lifetime of injections, a future potentially wrought with complications that could affect his nervous, renal and cardiovascular systems. It would be a future of blood sugar testing, insulin injections, doctor's appointments, circulation problems, and myriad other health risks related to this autoimmune disease. One thing kept circling in her head. No cure.



Brenda wanted to fight back from the very start. "My child was threatened, and I was heartbroken to learn the possible (and likely) side-effects. I just didn't know HOW to fight back, what I could do. I had five little kids and was just beginning a writing career. Financially, we were in no place to invest or accept risk. For two years, I pondered HOW just one person could help."

Mahatma Ghandi said, "You may never know what results come of your action, but if you do nothing there will be no result." Brenda embodies Ghandi's philosophy of action. She had the nugget of an idea – a fundraiser with proceeds going to fund diabetes research. She attended other fundraising events to see how they were run. When she went to a silent auction for one of her children's schools and saw how poorly attended it was, she remembers thinking, "There's got to be a better way than trying to get a lot of people to come out to one location at one time." And then the lightning bolt struck. She realized that, thanks to her career, she'd already established a steady stream of traffic at her Web site, a stream she could present with the opportunity to make a difference.

That epiphany led to the first annual Brenda Novak's Online Auction to Benefit Diabetes Research. It raised \$35,000, not the million that was her goal, but enough to prove that the idea had merit. The auction rapidly became her passion. She continued to build it, and the next year the proceeds doubled. They have grown ever since.

Hope

Since Thad was diagnosed with Type 1 diabetes, Brenda Novak has dreamed of raising a million dollars for research, and more than that, she's dreamed of a cure. Initially it didn't seem like a viable possibility. "I just wanted to throw everything I had at it, do all I could to stand on the front lines to protect my son and the millions of others who are facing the same threat."

Ghandi also said, "Be the change you want to see in the world." When Brenda began her online action to raise money for diabetes research, it was a way to take control of an uncontrollable situation. By year 3 of the auction, when the proceeds had doubled for the second time, she began to see the true potential. It started as a grassroots effort to make a difference, and people were willing to step up and join forces with her. "I find it very touching – all the good in the world. Together, we can do anything."

Making an Impact

There have been so many advancements in diabetes research in recent years. Brenda recently toured the Diabetes Research Institute at the University of Miami last summer and came away feeling inspired and hopeful. "It feels as if the scientists are close in so many regards. This disease isn't a mystery. We know what causes it. With enough research dollars and focus, we can win. I have no doubt."

So many causes are worthwhile and require resources, but diabetes is personal for Brenda Novak. She works off a "symbiotic" model. "I want everyone who supports the auction to come away with something for themselves. The donors get the advertising/promotion value. The shoppers get very cool items they can't find anywhere else. The researchers get the necessary money they need to continue their work. Diabetics get the hope that someday they can throw away their testing kits and needles and live normal lives."

Thad's diagnosis was Brenda's call to action. "I felt it deep in my heart and could not deny the passion and determination it aroused." There's no denying that one person can make a difference. November is National Diabetes Awareness Month. Brenda is just one person. Imagine the power of standing together to fight, grabbing the reigns and plowing down our obstacles. As Ghandi said, "If we do nothing, there will be no change." Instead, let's stand up, side by side, and create the change we need. ❖

Melissa Bourbon Ramirez (Misa Ramirez) is a well known author and freelance writer, whose credits include the Lola Cruz mystery series, children's books, two middle grade series for girls in development, and featured articles in *Woman's World* and *Romance Writers report*. As a parent whose son has also been diagnosed with disease, she is a sponsor of Brenda Novak's Online Auction to benefit disease and joins Brenda in her quest for a cure.

