

(1) Tell me about your background.

Well, I've lived in Bicester all my life. Mum has been a... she's been at home, Mum, really, most of my life. She only started back full-time to work once I went to secondary school. My Dad works in our family business. He's one of the managers in our family shop selling furniture, so we've always been quite comfortable - never felt we've really struggled with money, and we've always had the things that we've kind of wanted, I suppose.

And what are your early memories?

Early memories are probably of quite a happy household, lots of family things going on together, grandparents always being around, family holidays, camping, going to the beach, that kind of thing. Yeah, we've always been really close and done lots of things together.

Have you got brothers and sisters?

I've got one sister. She's called Sarah and she's two years younger than I am. I'd like to think we got along all the time, but we are like chalk and cheese, so we probably fight as much as we get on.

And what are your memories of school?

I always loved school, actually - really been quite a studious little person. Always done reasonably well, actually, and mostly looked forward to going to school, rather than trying to keep out of there.

What kind of school did you go to first?

I went to the normal primary school just down the road, and then on to secondary school in our local town.

Now, while you were at primary school you were diagnosed with diabetes. Can you tell me how that came about?

It was really all down to my Mum, or I feel it was. She was really vigilant, and I remember particularly one day where we'd gone shopping with my Grandma and sister to Oxford, and I was just constantly, constantly thirsty. And we had to keep stopping, going to buy drinks, going to the loos, keep going, just... I didn't stop being thirsty the whole time, and I don't know how soon after that - it didn't feel like very long looking back - Mum got me an appointment at the doctor's. Went down to see the GP, he took some urine samples, and went back the same day and he said "you've got diabetes", and rushed me into the John Radcliffe. Mum was... it was supposed to be down to Mum, really, that it was caught so soon. I wasn't even dehydrated enough to need a drip, which is apparently really rare. Usually people are put straight onto a drip when they're diagnosed.

But you say you were rushed to hospital, so there must have been some sense of urgency?

I think of it as being rushed, because I remember being in the doctor's surgery saying "yes, she has got diabetes, she needs to go in", and coming straight home, packing my things in a little case, and Mum and Dad coming straight to take me over to Oxford, which, I suppose, seems strange at the time, because normally Dad would be at work and I'd

- (2) be at school. So, I guess in my mind it seems like it was rushed, but it wasn't a big panic or anything; everyone was really calm.

How long were you in hospital?

Ooh, thinking about it, it didn't seem like a long time. I guess it must have been about a week; I can't remember exactly. I can't remember feeling particularly scared or traumatised - I think my Mum was more upset than I was - and I think I just thought... I didn't feel ill, and I think I was dying to get home again, really.

What do you remember about your time in hospital?

Being able to pick my own lunch from the menu. The nurses - I had one injection done by the nurse, and from then on they made me do my own injections, which I thought was a bit sca... not scary, but I thought it was a bit unusual, because I didn't expect adults to let a small child of ten years old be in charge of giving injections. But I guess it was really good, because I was never really fazed by it; it just felt normal as soon as I started.

Were you scared of injections?

I was absolutely petrified of injections when... well, before the diagnosis. But, I don't know - I guess I must have taken it all in my stride, really, because I didn't seem... don't remember thinking "oh my goodness, I've got to do all these injections. I'm not going to do it - it's too scary". I just remember thinking "this is how it is; I've just got to get on with it".

How were you taught to do injections?

Interestingly enough, my memories of that aren't actually that clear. I just really think it was a case of them saying "this is how you do it. You just need to get on and do it with the minimum amount of fuss". I remember Mum practising on oranges though.

Was that what she was taught to do by the hospital?

Yes. It was, I think... I mean, thinking now, I can't imagine wanting to inject my own child; not that I've got children. But I guess the idea with the oranges was to get Mum used to putting a needle into something, but I don't remember me being nervous about it.

And you weren't told to practise on an orange?

No, I practised on me! I just... every time I needed an injection, the nurse would be there to supervise me, but I was doing it myself and following instructions.

Did all your education come from nurses or from a doctor?

It must have come from doctors, but I just remember the wonderful diabetes specialist nurse that I had at the time. She was just amazing. After I came out of hospital, she came every morning and every afternoon to do my injections with me, so that meant her being in Bicester for half past seven every morning, just to supervise me for say the ten minutes it took to sort out drawing up the insulin and doing the injection. I thought she was amazing.

And you had the same person when you were diagnosed in hospital and for the follow-up?

Yes, same lady - Sally Strang. I don't know if she still does diabetes specialist nursing now, but I remember when I moved from the paediatric clinic to the adults, that I really missed Sally.

Were you on a children's ward when you were in the JR?

Yes, I was. I remember it was ward 4B, because it said... there was a big poster along the wall that said "follow the bees to 4B", little bees all down the corridor.

(3) What were you taught in hospital about monitoring your sugar levels?

I think, because I was so young, I knew I had to do blood tests at least once a day, and it was very much down to Mum and I as a team to read the result. And I knew the boundaries of what the levels should be, but other than that, it was a case of, I guess, getting into a routine. I think that's what they were really teaching me when I was first diagnosed.

What were you using?

For the blood testing? Oh, a horrible machine, where the pricker came really fiercely and fastly into my tiny little finger. It was the only one they had at the time, and I used to hate it. I hated the blood tests more than the injections. And it was very difficult for me to actually fire off the blood testing pricker myself, so I used to hold the finger and Mum used to be in charge of letting the pricker go.

You don't remember what it was called?

No, I don't. I can picture it in my mind. I don't think I ever knew what it was called, actually.

And what were you taught about diet?

I think it was, for me, that sugar wasn't going to be allowed any more: no more sweets, no more cakes, no more icing on birthday cakes, that kind of thing. But I do remember really well, my Mum, the first shopping trip after I was diagnosed, I can remember her picking up the cans, looking at the labels on absolutely everything. And I think the first packed lunch she did for me took her about half an hour to decide what to put in there, to count up all the carbohydrates and exchanges, make sure I had fruit and bread. And I just remember it taking

her so long, and me just not wanting to eat the food anyway when it got to lunch time.

This was 1988. I mean, were tins well labelled in those days?

I think they were reasonably well labelled, but I think before I was diagnosed, we didn't even think twice about them. I didn't even notice that they were on tins then, and I don't think Mum did either. But the dietician and the diabetes specialist nurse showed us how to look on the tins, what to look for under the carbohydrates, and also to look on the ingredients list to see how high up sugar comes on the list of ingredients.

How did you adapt to changing your diet?

Adapt is an interesting way of putting it. I don't really feel... I feel like it was just that's the way it was and you just had to get on with it, really. I do remember my sister still having sweets, and I remember in arguments, she used to go "I'm glad you're diabetic, I'm glad you can't have sweets" as a way to hurt me, and then she used to go off and have her sweets. But I don't really remember resenting not being allowed the sweets and sugar. I think the thing that I didn't like more was the fact that I had to have a certain amount of food at a certain time. I remember the arguments... well, not so much arguments, but I remember Mum saying "you must eat another potato, Emma", and me going "I'm really full, I don't want any more", and having tears over the fact that I had to eat more than I wanted to, or that I was still hungry and wanted more, and Mum saying "I'm really sorry, you can't have anything else. You've already had your carbohydrate for this meal".

It sounds as though your mother found this all quite distressing?

I think she did, actually. I remember when I actually got on to the children's ward at the John Radcliffe, I kind of didn't take it all very seriously at the time. I kind of thought "the adults are in charge, they must know what they're doing, they must be doing the right thing", so I didn't feel particularly scared. But I remember Mum sat at the end of the bed, and all the doctors had come round, and she just burst into tears and said "oh, my little girl gonna die", and them going "no, no, no - don't worry about that", and me thinking "good grief, this is a bit serious now".

(4) If she thought you were going to die, that would suggest she didn't know very much about diabetes?

I don't think we did, actually. Before I was diagnosed, I can't remember anybody else that we knew having it, and I can't think that my parents knew many people with diabetes. So, I think it was probably the fear of the unknown, and the protective mother thinking of the worst case scenario.

Anyone else in the family have diabetes?

Not before I was diagnosed. Since then, my Dad has had diet controlled diabetes. I can't remember exactly when that came on, but just recently he's gone onto

tablets. And my late uncle, he had a similar thing, starting off on diet, then tablets, and he progressed to injections.

Was there any discussion when you were diagnosed as to why you developed diabetes?

I think, at the time, they had the theory that it would be either some kind of illness, either a virus or a certain kind of cold, that would trigger it off, or possibly an emotional event, but I actually... we couldn't think of any stressful thing that had happened recently or any kind of cold or virus that I'd had. So, it was all a bit of a mystery.

Did you understand much about diabetes yourself?

Before I was diagnosed, I didn't have a clue about diabetes or what it meant, or I think the fact that it had a big medical sounding name probably made me think it was a little more serious than it actually was. But whilst I was in hospital, the specialist nurse was really good at explaining that it was to do with the pancreas and that it produced this thing called insulin, which helped get the energy from my food into my body cells, and for some reason I didn't have any insulin any more, so I needed to have injections to make sure I could get all the energy properly. I think that kind of knowledge grew as time went on, really, through going to clinic. And I do remember vaguely some kind of booklets with... Rupert Bear was the character that they used in the booklets, but by today's standards, they probably weren't especially child-friendly. But at first, I didn't really know why I was even in hospital. I remember the little girl in the bed next to me said "oh, so why are you in here?", and I said "well, I think I might have diabetes, but I'm not really entirely sure".

When you came out and started meeting friends of your own age, can you remember what their reactions were?

I remember I went round to my best friend's house with my Mum, and her Mum was there, and we sat down and we all talked about it. And we had a nice cup of tea and digestive biscuit, which was the most exciting cake or biscuit I had at the time, and talking about what it all meant. Because I spent a lot of time with Emily, I think it was important that she knew what was going on as well. And I remember I got a huge card from all the children in my class. It was - when I was diagnosed - it was about three weeks, two or three weeks before I was due to go away with the school for a week's residential. I think I was more upset about missing the residential trip than I was about the diabetes. They said at the hospital, if it had been a week earlier that I'd been diagnosed, I would have still been able to go on the trip, but it was just too soon from coming out of hospital, so I missed out on that, which was a bit upsetting for me, I think.

And what about reactions in the family?

Everyone in the family was just amazing. I remember lots of flowers, lots of cards, people came to see me. I think the first presents I had were the diabetic chocolates, which, oh, looking back to them now, they were awful, but at the

time it was better than not having anything at all. Yeah, everyone was great, particularly my Grandma, who managed to adapt all her cake recipes to include sugar free or fructose, that we used at the time. Loads of fruit cakes and things, and she'd scour all the shops and things to find different things for me to try.

(5) And how did your parents cope with you having diabetes?

I think, after the initial shock, they dealt with it really practically. Mum and Dad got really involved with the Oxford Diabetes Parents' Group. I remember we did summer fêtes, we went to the firework displays, met other people with diabetes, although never got really socially involved with them; just at the diabetes places. And I think I realised how good the way my parents dealt with the situation was, because there were lots of people that I came across that - they seemed to think that diabetes was the most important thing in their life and everything was so strict, and my parents were laid back. And I don't mean laid back in a sense that they didn't care about the diabetes - I mean laid back, they didn't make a huge big thing of it, they didn't draw attention to it. You know, if people bought us chocolates for Christmas, my sister and I, Mum and Dad would take them and obviously they'd say, you know, thank the friends for the present, and then after they went they'd said "right, okay, you're not allowed those, but it was really nice of them to think". So, you know, I think their laid back attitude helped me to cope with it, and I didn't feel different, and I didn't feel that my diabetes stopped me from doing anything. I mean, the first summer holiday we had after I was diagnosed, we went to Ibiza. That, just to me, looking back, goes to show that Mum and Dad weren't going to let it stop us doing anything. And even to the point where, you know, we went to the clinic, we got the letter so that we could take the syringes through customs, and that probably is quite a scary thing if you've never taken anything through like that. But Mum and Dad just took it all in their stride, and off we went to Ibiza, had a wonderful holiday, didn't even get stopped in customs, didn't even need to show the letter. So, yeah, I think it's really helped me as a person to come to terms with it.

Do you mean there wasn't any sense of insecurity surrounding having diabetes?

Yes, I didn't feel different from my sister. You know, Mum didn't used to go "oh, you must only have this because you're diabetic, and Sarah must have this". We all had the same food, and although Sarah wasn't... it wouldn't have been fair for Sarah not to have sweets, it wasn't fair for her to eat them in front of me, but we still... Mum and Dad dealt with it that they would make sure I had some diabetic sweets to have, and Sarah had some sweets for her to have, so both of us were getting sweets and neither of us was missing out.

And you say you all had the same food. Do you mean that the whole family adopted a suitable diet?

Yes. Mum tried to do healthy food for me, but then she would turn it into that would be our meal for the whole family, so we'd have a lot more... everyone had wholegrain bread, everybody had bean soup if I had bean soup, we all

changed from having sugar to sweetener, that kind of thing. You know, Dad had sweeteners in his tea rather than sugars, and it all... it just made me feel included, and not this strange little girl who's completely different to everybody else.

(6) And how did your sister react to you having diabetes?

Well, she did taunt me during arguments when we were small and bickering, but that's what children do, isn't it? I think, because of the way my parents handled it and they were so conscious that they didn't want me to feel different, I think, if anything, sometimes Sarah might have felt different, in that she wasn't special because she didn't have diabetes. And everyone was making a big fuss to make sure Emma got diabetic sweets, but what about Sarah? She'd quite like some normal ones. But I don't think it caused too many rifts between us, but there was definitely something there, I would say.

And what was it like for you at school?

I remember it feeling a bit like an event when I went back into class. Everyone was so pleased to see me, and I had this... I told them all about it, and then Mum came in and I had a special box with digestive biscuits, glucose tablets, a spare blood testing kit, and I think everyone was quite normal about it. But if I felt low in class, we'd get the box out and my teacher would sit with me, and I'd do the blood test but she'd watch to make sure everything was going okay, and we'd time it all. And it just... it was good, the support that the school gave, and I also think they didn't make a massive thing of it. You know, I could cope with it in my own way in the classroom, without everyone in the whole school having a big announcement "Emma Cherry is diabetic. She's special - keep an eye out for her" kind of thing. So, I think their attitude reflected the way my parents had dealt with the situation. I don't know if that was because my Mum was one of the school governors and had a lot to do with the school, or just because that's the way the school was.

Would you have done blood testing in front of other children?

I don't think I ever really thought about whether I was doing it in front of other children or not; I just used to do it if I needed to. I didn't go off anywhere into a special little room to test my blood. I would sit at my seat in my desk, and the teacher would sit next to me. My friend would probably be interested to make sure that I was all right, but I don't remember any children shying away or being ushered away to check the bloods. So, I think my whole class must have dealt with it on reasonably laid back way of doing things.

(7) And did you have to do any injections while you were at school?

Because of the regime I was on when I was first diagnosed, I only did one injection in the morning before breakfast and one before supper in the evening, so I didn't actually need to do any injections at school.

You can't remember what the insulin was that you were taking, can you?

I can, actually. I was on Human Protaphane, and it was only the long-acting type of insulin. It's a tiny, weeny amount, compared to what I'm on now. It was about four or six units, I think, and now, being on ten units for breakfast, that's a really small amount. And I stayed on just the long-acting for quite some time - I guess it must have been quite a few months, and then I mixed long-acting with short-acting, and still carried on having two injections a day.

At what time were those two injections?

The morning one would have been at about half past seven, about half an hour before breakfast, and then I used to do the evening one, I think it must have been about half past five-ish.

And how did you manage your diet through the school day?

The thing I remember most was the snacks in between meals - not wanting them. So, break-time would come, and half past ten I would have two digestive biscuits to eat and an apple, or something like that. And I just didn't want them at all, but I knew that I had to eat these blinking digestive biscuits. I can remember it now - I can almost taste it in my mouth, munching through those biscuits thinking "I've got to eat them - just eat it, get it down you". And the same again in the afternoons, when I had snacks at about half past three, so that would have been after school. But that was probably the thing I had the biggest issue with in the diabetes, not wanting snacks. I remember arguing with Mum about it as well, and her going "I know you don't want it, but you've really got to, otherwise you'll be ill".

And how much exercise did you have while you were at school?

I think we used to have PE about once a week whilst I was at primary school, and about... we'd go swimming once a week as well. I was never overly keen on PE, although I loved swimming, but I got even more keen on these sports after being diagnosed, because it meant I could have a mini Milky Way before I went off to swim, which was obviously an added bonus, because it was the only time it was really allowed in diabetes, to eat the chocolate.

(8) Tell me about moving to secondary school, and give the year, if you can?

I moved up to secondary school in 1989, I believe. I don't remember the first year being too much of a problem diabetes-wise; I just remember being excited about the different lessons and meeting new people. But after I'd been there about a year, so I guess in the second year, about 1990-'91, I went over to a different insulin regime, where I went from having two injections a day to having four injections a day, which meant one long-acting insulin injection before bed and then short-acting insulin before every meal, which meant I had to do injections at school. But the school were really great. I didn't feel comfortable doing the injections in the classroom at that stage, and didn't really fancy the idea of sneaking off to the toilets to do it, so arranged with the nurse at the school to use the medical room every lunchtime. So, I used to nip in there, do my injection before lunch, and then go round to the canteen. They were really good,



actually, because they arranged for me to have an early dinner pass to get into the canteen first thing, which meant no delay between injections and eating. But other than that, I don't remember the new regime creating much of a problem. It actually pleased me, because it meant no snacks in between meals, which was my biggest pet hate, and it meant I could do things a lot more easily than I did with the two injection regime. Say dinner was going to be delayed by an hour and a half, it wasn't such a big deal, because you'd delay having the injection, therefore there wouldn't be any knock on effect of high blood sugars, and I just loved it. I didn't mind the fact it was twice as many injections.

Did you have any problems with high blood sugars?

From time to time. With the two injection regime, it was so rigid that if you needed to deviate at all, like you were late home from school therefore you were late for tea, or your lunch wasn't at twelve o'clock, it was at half past one, two o'clock on the weekends, it just knocked things out of sync - there was no flexibility to it. But the pen regime was a lot more like your body would work with the insulin, which meant I could have breakfast at nine o'clock if I wanted, instead of eight o'clock every morning. It meant that I could have lunch at any time that I liked, or if I'd had my tea and a friend phoned up and said "ooh, come round for pizza and a video", before I couldn't have had the pizza - I'd have just had to go "oh, you guys have it, I'll watch the video". With the new pen, I could just have an extra injection and I could still have a bit of pizza, which was just amazing for me.

Did you ever end up in hospital with high or low sugar?

- (9) Right, well, we just stopped the recording there so that you could go and ask your mother the answer to that question, so tell me what she said.

Well, after a few minutes of discussion with Mum, we've kind of narrowed it down to me having been in hospital around '90-'91. I can't remember the exact circumstances leading up to it, but Mum said I'd been grumpy all week, a pain in the neck to live with, and she'd just sat me down to say "what are you doing? Get your act together" and I apparently passed out. So, went off into hospital, I think in an ambulance. And I think it was because it was still early days for us, Mum hadn't recognised the signs early on, and the blood sugars had obviously been building up, and it went so far because we were inexperienced in dealing with those problems.

And did you have any problems with low blood sugars?

I have never really had much of a problem with low blood sugars. I think that's because I've been better at eating naughty things when I shouldn't than actually being tighter on the control.

And when you changed to four insulin injections a day, can you remember what the insulins were?

Yeah, the long-acting one was actually the same as I'd been on previously, and I

think it was called Human Protaphane. I remember it later changed its name to Human Insulatard, even though it was the same insulin. And the short-acting one was Human Actrapid.

And how were you finding having injections by this time, at secondary school?

I was finding that my tummy was a very useful place, because if you go out for dinner in a restaurant, you can easily lift up your t-shirt, do the injection at the table with nobody noticing. But the injection sites were fine. I've never really had a big problem with lumpy sites or anything like that; however, blood tests were a bit different. I've got really bad veins for taking blood from, and interestingly enough, the consultant who took blood from me when I was first taken into hospital when I was first diagnosed, we had an understanding that he was not allowed to try and take blood from me again, because I had such a tough time the first time round. So, I'd see him every three months, I think it was, at the paediatric clinic, and we had this agreement that Dr Dunger would not be allowed to try and take blood, and somebody else would have to do it.

(10) Now, we've covered your move to secondary school. Tell me about your teen years.

Teen years were very interesting in all aspects: discovering new things, meeting new people, going to sixth form, all that kind of thing. I do remember once I got to the age where you go to the pub for a drink, that does have serious effects on the diabetes, 'cause whilst alcohol's really sugary and you'd think would put your blood sugars up, it also makes your blood sugars go low because of the alcohol effect. So, trying to get a balance between being high and being low was really difficult, and when you're a teenager, you've got enough things to worry about, other than blood sugars and how much you can drink.

So, how did you adapt to that?

I adopted a policy where I'd have one drink then I'd have a diet Coke, and then I'd have another drink and then I'd have another diet Coke, which meant I could have as many drinks as my friends had, but I'd only have half as much alcohol. And it actually worked really well, especially when I got up to university. But university years for alcohol, I probably drank far more than anyone with diabetes, or anyone without diabetes probably should, but I don't think it did me too much damage, because it was only for a small period of time. But if you went on like that, drinking every weekend, it wouldn't do your diabetes any good at all.

And what about all the other teenage forms of behaviour: smoking, drugs, staying up all night. Did you do anything that affected your diabetes?

I think whilst I was at university, the going out to the student union probably at least three or four nights of the week didn't really help with the blood sugars, and I probably ran a lot higher, regularly, than I should have done. I did end up in hospital a couple of times because of prolonged long blood sugars which led to ketones, which meant I got really dehydrated and ended up needing to go on

a drip and get things back on track. But I think, because you're all over the place anyway when you're a teenager and you're at uni, it's not surprising that the diabetes care slips then.

What medical care were you receiving during your teens?

I was still going to the clinic at Oxford - same kind of care from the diabetes team there; that never really changed. I think it was just me that changed, being a teenager and being a lot more carefree than I had been. Certainly when I started having to feed myself at university, and didn't have wonderful Mum cooking me all the diabetes-friendly foods, I noticed that, you know, white bread all the time, cornflakes all the time instead of Weetabix, that kind of thing creeps in. And perhaps the subtle changes like that contribute more towards the higher blood sugars, hence it was easier for me to get ill with ketones than it had been before.

(11) And while you were at university, were you always treated at the JR?

In the beginning, the idea was that I would stay with the JR, because I was going to be coming back home after I'd finished uni, but I actually settled down in High Wycombe and thought "right, I'm going to be here permanently, I really ought to change the diabetic clinic". I went to the one in High Wycombe, but actually didn't like the doctors and team there as much as the Oxford team. I think it was probably because Oxford was so familiar, and I'd been there so many years that I actually changed my mind and moved back to the Oxford clinic. But since then, I've moved back to the area anyway, so it worked out in the long run.

Is it important, do you think, to have familiar medical staff?

I think it is, actually. I mean, I've always had the same GP the whole time, and I think if you know the doctors well, you can say "okay, it was my fault. I did actually have that huge piece of chocolate cake. No I haven't been doing as many blood tests". But if you go to a stranger that perhaps you've only seen a couple of times, or maybe never before, you are less inclined to tell the truth, and more to want to say what you think they want you to say.

How much contact did you have with the medical profession during your teens and your time at university?

I would probably say that I only really saw them when I went to clinic appointments, which by that stage were once every six months. I was quite sad when I left the paediatric clinic at Oxford, because there you go every three months, and then every year you have like a MOT, where they check absolutely everything. And it's like you only ever really had three months to go wrong before you saw them. But moving to uni, where all the changes were happening, you're less likely to ask for help when you're in that age group anyway, and I felt "oh, I wish I could be at Oxford paediatrics, because at least they could whip me into shape once every three months" and I couldn't falter as easily.

What did 'whipping you into shape' consist of?

Usually Dr Dunger saying "you're hopeless", writing it in my notes with a smile on his face, saying "you must do more blood tests". And I remember once, we had this agreement that I could come back in three months, rather than a month, if I agreed to send him, through the post, blood tests for a full week, one for every single day. And I remember writing it out on writing paper and addressing it and putting it in the post to him. But he actually got me to do them, which was amazing at that time, because I was really not keen on blood tests at all.

And during your teens and your time at university, how did boyfriends react to you having diabetes?

I think they were as laid back about it as I was. I remember the first boyfriend I ever had - I told Dr Dunger at the paediatric clinic in Oxford that I had a boyfriend, and he said "oh right, you can bring him with you next time. I believe in boyfriend power, perhaps he can get you to do some more blood tests"! And they've really had... I think every boyfriend I've had really has had quite a good attitude towards my diabetes. I've said "look, this is what happens. If I pass out or look like I'm going to pass out, give me sugar, or call a doctor if you're really worried", and fingers crossed and touchwood, I haven't had to actually have anybody out, up to now.

I like the idea of boyfriend power. Did you actually take your boyfriend with you?

God, no! I thought "no, I'm going to have two of them pinning me down", so I didn't take him! But he thought it was hilarious when I suggested it to him.

(12) And after university, did your diabetes affect your choice of career?

No, it didn't, but I think that was because I was never really interested in the kind of things that I couldn't have done if I'd have had diabetes. I guess that was kind of lucky for me, 'cause if I'd wanted to be a train driver or in the army or something, I'd have been thoroughly and utterly disappointed. It didn't really affect my choice in jobs, and even now I don't find that it affects it too much - only that if you have a cold and you're off for a couple of days, you're probably off for a couple of days more than everyone else, 'cause you've got to get your blood sugar sorted as well.

So, tell me then what jobs you've done.

Okay, well, I spent a long time studying at uni trying to get a textiles degree. I actually changed direction completely. I've done retail work in the past, working in shops. It's quite a bonus, actually, being a diabetic, 'cause it meant I had to have my lunch at a reasonable hour, rather than getting it put off till about three o'clock in the afternoon, so that was a bonus. Currently, and previously, I've been in customer service, which I do now, and I've just been promoted to a team leader's job, so I'm looking after my own team, which is great.

Back in the retail days, did your bosses or colleagues mind that you had to have lunch at a certain time?

I don't think they minded in principle, but I think when it meant that they all had to take an extra turn of having a really late lunch or the really early one, which people hated especially, they might have been secretly a little bit resentful. But I thought "oh, lucky me being diabetic, I can get to have my lunch at a decent time".

Did the people you worked with seem to know anything about diabetes?

People either say "I don't know anything at all" or they'll say "oh yes, my sister's got diabetes" - or my Mum or my cousin or somebody that they know from school. So, actually, since I've got older, I've noticed that people seem to know more about diabetes. When I was first diagnosed at sort of ten years old, people didn't really know at all or really understand. They thought it meant you couldn't have sugar at all, any time ever, whereas it's more complicated than that.

Do you find that they make any assumptions about the fact that you've perhaps eaten too much sweet food, or...?

Interestingly enough, the situation cropped up last week, where one of the ladies had brought in cream cakes for her birthday, and she was offering them around. She said "Emma, have a cream cake", and I went "no, no, really I mustn't", because I'm actually trying to lose weight, and the other lady that worked there said "no, Emma's diabetic, you shouldn't keep trying to shove cakes and sweets in her direction". And whilst I thought "oh, how nice of her to think and act on my behalf", really, people should just... if you don't want it, it could be for any reason, not just diabetes.

(13) So, generally, has diabetes fitted in quite easily with your work?

Most jobs I've had it has, however, over the last sort of five months I've been on a secondment to the training team for customer service, the company I work for, which has meant that I've been up and down the country at various different places training up new customer service reps. Staying in hotels - probably Monday to Friday, on my own, having diabetes - has been slightly scary for me, because, whilst I'm quite laid back about it, if you're in a hotel on your own where nobody knows you, if, god forbid, you passed out in the night through high blood sugars, there would be nobody there to notice that you hadn't got up or hadn't come into work. So, from that respect, I've been trying to be a lot tighter with the control, and in turn that's made me have more hypos, because I've been being stricter. So, yeah, I think that has affected that particular job, but moving into the new position now, it will be a lot more routine based, so I should be fine.

Was that the first time in your life that you'd ever felt at all insecure at having diabetes?

Actually, yes, it probably was, because whilst you can be independent at home, there's always somebody around, just in case it goes wrong, that will notice if you don't get up in the morning. But staying in a hotel, nobody knows that I'm there to get up, so they wouldn't notice. And I think... I had one really bad hypo whilst I was in... I'd just got out of a hot bath and I was talking to my Mum on the phone, and I just drifted off. And Mum shouted down the phone "Emma, Emma", and I sort of came back to. And she was worried and I was worried, because she knew I was in Manchester, she was down here just north of Oxford, and if I didn't get up or I passed out, there would be no one there to know. So, she frantically wrote down the hotel name and telephone number, what room number I was in, and made me promise to ring her when I woke up in the morning, otherwise she'd ring me, and if there was no response she'd ring the hotel. So, we got round it the end, but yeah, I did feel a bit insecure.

Thinking of the future, perhaps marriage or whatever, would... No... How shall I express this? What kind of support would you be looking for?

I think when I finally settle down, living with my current partner, I think I need to have someone that's not going to be constantly on at me about it, but knows what to do if needs be. I'm lucky enough to have a partner who has medical issues of his own, so he knows what it's like to need to be aware of things, but not make a massive fuss about things.

(14) That sounds quite a fine line to tread between knowing enough and not making too much fuss. Can you give me some examples?

I'm trying to think of a good way to express that, actually. My father would say, if I was going out for the day, "have you got your insulin, Emma?" as I'm about to walk out the door. And I think "of course I've got my insulin", you know, it's second nature, whereas Ian would probably not say "have you got your insulin?", but go "ooh, are we going to be having lunch out?", more like a leading question. So, if I know I'm going to be having lunch out, then I know I'm going to have my insulin; that kind of thing. In the same way that I would never say to him "have you got your asthma inhaler?" as we're about to walk out the door, but if he went "oh, I haven't got my inhaler," I'd just turn the car round and go back and collect it, without a huge panic.

Has your diabetes limited your activities in any way?

For me, not really. If I'd have been a really, really sporty person, wanting to do mad skydiving and that kind of thing, I think I might have been slightly disappointed. There's only really one thing I can think of that I'm really, really disappointed that I can't do, and that's scuba diving, because I would love to do that, but other than... I mean, that's just one small thing. If you think of other problems other people have, lack of scuba diving's not really that bad.

And have there been any changes in your treatment in recent years?

My treatment's really just plodded along as it has been. The only major change is that I changed from Actrapid insulin to Humalog insulin, which is a lispro

fast-acting, even more fast-acting than the last one, which means it's even better for me, 'cause I can... it just works so much faster.

And how do you see the future?

The only thing in the future that I'm a bit apprehensive about is obviously if I want to go ahead and have children at some point, because you've got to be really careful with your diabetes, make sure everything's running spot on for quite some time, before you can even consider trying for a baby. And obviously the whole way through the pregnancy, it's not just my health that's going to be at risk if the diabetes isn't right, it would be the unborn baby as well. That is probably the scariest thing I can think of. But, if I handle things properly when the time comes, it's just going to mean extra planning, which other people don't have to think about it.

Have medical staff talked to you about what it would be like to be pregnant and have a baby?

I think they're kind of nervous to ask in case you're not at all interested or you go "my god, no, not for at least another ten years". I've asked sort of tentative questions, you know, "how much time really do you need to have your blood sugars absolutely perfect, before you can even contemplate trying for a family?". And I think the information's all there for when I want it, but I don't want to know too much about it now, because I'm not planning a child right now this minute. Yeah, I think medically it's all there for me. My friend does keep telling me, if you have children, people with diabetes apparently have massive babies and it's a real problem, but that's just an old wives' tale, I think, because nobody in the medical profession's actually told me that one.

(15) So, how big a part of your life is diabetes?

I guess I don't really don't think about it being a part of my life at all. It's just that's the way it is, like getting up in the morning, and doing my insulin before breakfast is just like getting up and brushing my teeth when I'm getting ready for work. I don't really think about it. I don't think "oh, Emma Cherry - diabetic". I just think it's another thing that I have to deal with. I guess I think it would be strange if I didn't have it. I can't actually remember what it's like to go and have dinner without having to do an injection first. And I wonder, if they ever found a cure, how I would deal with a cure and not having to worry about blood tests and injections, and all that kind of thing, that are just second nature now.

Are there any positive aspects to having diabetes?

Definitely: healthy eating. I'm very lazy person. I don't want to go to the gym, and probably if I didn't have diabetes, I might have a lot more sweets and chocolates, and probably be even fatter than I am now.

Would you have any message for someone who was newly diagnosed with diabetes?

I think I've probably got more of a message for parents of young children that have just been diagnosed. My parents were really laid back. Whilst they took absolutely everything in and took it all really seriously, they never made me feel like I was different in a bad way. And I think, knowing other people with small children who have taken it all so seriously, and, you know, not being relaxed about it at all, it's really an advantage to make it feel like it's just another thing, like doing your injections is just like cleaning your teeth. It's one of those things you have to do, that's irritating at times, but you just have to do it, and if you do, you'll feel much better for it.

Well, doing injections may be just like cleaning your teeth, but there are other less routine aspects to diabetes. How did your parents cope with those?

Again, in their same laid back manner, but with the seriousness when needed. I remember one night, and I must have been about twelve, I'd fallen out of bed. I was having a real low, and I'd actually wet myself, and my legs wouldn't work to get back into bed. And I remember feeling horrified that I couldn't even get back into bed off the floor, so all I was left with was the option to call for Mum and Dad. And they both came along, they got me into the toilet, sorted me all out, changed the sheets on the bed, and never even mentioned the next morning that I'd wet myself. I mean, how embarrassing for a twelve year old girl, they wet their self, their Mum and Dad had to help them into the toilet. You know, they did the necessary, but they didn't dwell on it the next day. They didn't go round telling everybody in the family "oh God, Emma had an awful hypo in the night. She wet herself...". They never made a big issue about it, but they were there when I needed them, which is the most important thing.