

Narrative

Parallel/Theme in common with Black Boy: Self-determination

It was about two months into the 2012 school year, and I was still readjusting from a summer of everything from amateur rocketry to wilderness canoe trips to computer programming. Frankly, it seemed to be shaping up to be a pretty average year. However, it was slated to be far from it, and would end up simultaneously being a complete disaster, as well as a large opportunity for learning and self-growth. Yep, that's right, I'm milking the fact that I have Type 1 Diabetes as hard as I can. I have to stab needles into my fingers every freaking day; I should be allowed to use it as a subject of any personal essay assigned.

Anyways, it was late October 2012, and there my first major symptom manifested. I was thirsty, all the time. For half a month or so, I was that kid, the one who'd always take like five minutes at the drinking fountain, forcing everyone else to use the lower one, where you have to crouch uncomfortably to even begin to reach. And with drinking a lot of water comes having to go to the bathroom every twenty minutes. That month – up until I was diagnosed – I wouldn't have been surprised if my teachers attempted to bust my locker under suspicion of dealing drugs.

One day, as an experiment, my mom gave me a 2-liter bottle of water after dinner. I drank all of it before 8 PM, and was halfway through a second bottle. Thankfully, my mom figured out that something was wrong (other than it just being an exceptionally warm day), and scheduled a doctor's appointment for the upcoming week, and my symptoms certainly did not get better. That Monday, right after my mom picked me up from school, I realized something. I forgot my glasses at home, and I hadn't realized all day. It felt like my (normally 20/35ish) vision was a perfect 20/20. I thought it was simply me forgetting what things looked like with my glasses on (and thinking my vision was at my normal, glasses-less basepoint), but after getting my glasses from home, putting them on, and them having no effect, I knew something was up, but didn't think it was anything other than needing a new glasses prescription.

Five minutes later, I was back in the car and on the way to the doctor. Staring out the window, I was wondering what could be going on – I was feeling fine, but I was drinking the (debunked) daily recommended amount of water every couple hours. I felt fine, but that didn't lend any insight to my strange symptoms. There was no reason that my vision would be so drastically different since yesterday! This time, I somehow convinced myself that my glasses must just have fingerprint oil or some dirt on them, counteracting their vision correction.

I had barely walked ten feet into the doctor's office before the smell of antiseptic hit me, and I almost bent over and vomited right there – I had a small stomach bug that would make itself relevant later. We made our way up to the office, and explained why we were there. The doctor barely hesitated in referring us for a blood

test. In a bit of irony, the moment they brought out the absolutely minuscule needle – thinner than the needles I use to inject insulin – I nearly just walked out. Luckily, they got me to sit through them draining what felt like liters of blood through a needle that, at the time, I could've sworn was a modified turkey baster.

Half an hour later, we got the test results back. I had a blood sugar of 642 milligrams of glucose per deciliter of blood, or mg/dL. I was quickly told that in comparison, an average human has between 80 and 180 at any given time. Suddenly, much of the past month made sense. The large amount of water and what I thought was a stomach bug was the result of DKA, or Diabetic Ketoacidosis, a syndrome where the body has too much sugar in the blood stream for too long of a time. I realized that the headaches and sleepiness I had been experiencing was also a direct result of DKA. Even my changed vision was a result, with extra fluid building up behind my retina, and, as it turns out, temporarily correcting my nearsightedness.

That night, I was checked into Doernbecher's Endocrinology ward, up at OHSU. In a few hours, I was diagnosed with Diabetes Mellitus, Type 1, an autoimmune disease where one's immune system mistakenly attacks one's own pancreas, specifically the Islets of Langerhans, where insulin is produced. This leaves one's body unable to control their blood sugar, and regulating it via insulin injections is necessary, and is what I learned I would have to do for the foreseeable future.

But, at that time, I did make a sort of a promise to myself: I'd actively work towards having the best control over my blood sugar as possible. I read about the repercussions of poor BGL (blood glucose level) management and decided that no matter what, it would be a priority for me. I read about insulin pumps, small pager-sized devices that replace the need for shots by having temporary cannulas inserted under the skin while giving better blood sugar control due to a greater precision in dosing and adjusting insulin.

Normally, people are given the option to move from MDI (multiple daily injections, i.e. shots) to a pump about a year and a half after they're diagnosed. I did my research and found that a pump would not only make my life easier, but also help my BGL control. I worked with my parents and my doctors to get a pump as fast as possible, only about six months after I was diagnosed. Similarly, I was able to get a Continuous Glucose Monitor, or CGM, a small device that uses yet more cannulas and reports my blood sugar every five minutes, allowing for much tighter management of my blood sugar.

Overall, while diabetes in total is certainly not something that I would wish on anybody, it has given me the opportunity to grow as a person, becoming more adept at taking matters into my own hands and working for what's the right thing for me.