

Diabetes Camper's Perspective

Several years ago when our son was not feeling well and didn't look good either, we had no clue he had diabetes. The only thing he wanted to do was drink and sleep, and he had lost weight. Finding out what was physically wrong with him was a shock. "Nobody in our families had it", was the answer we gave the doctors when they asked us which side of the relation had diabetes. Later that summer at my husband's family reunion, relatives who learned that Landon was recently diagnosed with diabetes informed us that "cousin so-and-so", and "aunt so-and-so" had diabetes.

One of my first reactions to the diagnosis was to cry. How could this be? The word diabetes now sounded so scary and what did it mean? Diabetes is such a puzzle and I don't know that I will ever fully understand everything that comes with it. Landon had tears a couple of times at the beginning. But it did not take him long to proclaim "I'm glad I have diabetes, because I could have something that's worse". Landon, who just recently turned 15 years old and became an Eagle Scout last summer on his golden birthday, is usually pretty cheerful about whatever life dishes out – which has not always been desirable as he also faces other personal challenges.

The brochures from the American Diabetes Association state that teenagers often are not very conscientious about their diabetes. Landon is no exception, as we pretty much have to stay after him to take care of himself and usually stay in close proximity to him. There is one place, however, that he can go for a week during the year on his own without us having a single worry. Lions Camp!

Landon was diagnosed with diabetes in March of 2002, when he was 11 years old. He was taken via ambulance from the clinic where we had taken him, to a hospital in a neighboring town, where he spent two days in intensive care and two extra days in the regular unit. During the last two days, our whole family underwent diabetic training (including giving each other shots – Landon has Type I Diabetes and requires insulin shots throughout each day). After he was released from the hospital, he went to his first follow-up training/nutrition counseling and insulin-adjusting appointment, where we were told that the diabetic clinic was closing its doors due to budgeting and that we would need to find another place for his diabetic care. I asked them if they knew about a diabetic camp where Landon could go for additional diabetic training support, as I had read about camps which were sometimes available for that purpose. Since their doors were closing, they did not have any camp information to offer, as they would no longer be working on diabetic issues.

At this time, we were left without the support system that had been helping us manage Landon's newly diagnosed condition. We had been able to call them daily for insulin adjustments. Landon's father filled in while we were looking for replacement help, and he did an amazing job with his new knowledge. We checked various facilities and found one that we could go to for diabetic assistance. Life was different and something we all needed to get used to. I don't mean to sound negative, but honestly, nobody would wish for an ongoing illness that can cause such serious effects to body organs/functions and even be life-threatening. What comforts me as a mother is the realization that there are so many efforts being made to improve treatment of diabetes and/or cure it, that I feel that things can only get better.

During this time of Landon's early diabetic history, I had gone to our local post-office and as often happens visited briefly with the Postmaster, Steven Schlender, who is also one of our neighbors. Our Postmaster, is a member of our community's Lions Club. Upon hearing that Landon had been diagnosed with diabetes, he informed me of the opportunity for kids with Diabetes to attend Wisconsin's Lion's Camp at Rosholt. Bingo! This is what I had been wishing for! He told me he'd get more

information. He did not let any grass grow under his feet, as he called me with the information that very day, and encouraged me to call to make arrangements quickly so that Landon could still get in. I did, and Landon attended. He had such a wonderful time at Lions' Camp.

What does camp mean for all of us? It is one week during the year that we get a reprieve from the worry that comes with our son's illness (as medical staff and diabetic supplies are provided at camp) and also some well-needed time for Landon to have some space from the watchful eye of his parents. Even more than that, camp is a wonderful opportunity for Landon to be with other youth his own age, who are going through the same type of experiences that Landon is going through. These youth can relate to each other in a way that nobody else can. Landon expressed after camp one year, "I was thinking that I had to hurry up and check my sugar level so that my group didn't have to wait for me to eat, and then I realized, HEY WAIT A MINUTE!!! We ALL have to check our sugar levels!" And then he laughed.

The first year we took Landon to camp, we had a wonderful experience both when we dropped him off and again when we picked him up. We were registering him in the lodge. As I was taking care of the registration, my husband said he'd go get the luggage. Landon was off making new friends, which he is very good at. When my husband came back with the luggage, he asked, "Guess what our son and his new friend were talking about?" I guessed, "Girls?" He replied, "No, they were asking each other what their blood sugar levels were at when they were diagnosed with diabetes." We both smiled. Where else but at Diabetes Camp? When I came to pick him up, as we were saying goodbye and walking out of the campground, one of Landon's counselors called out to him, saying, "Remember, what makes you different is what makes you special!" How thankful I am for a place like Diabetes Camp.

We are very thankful to the Lions members and what they do to support the Lions Camp. This fine effort enables many children with various life challenges the opportunity to attend a special place for a week each year with a whole camp full of youth who are experiencing similar trials. These youth have fun together, support each other, learn important lessons, make cherished memories, and create lifelong friendships.

If you are a Lions member and are reading this, THANK YOU so much for all that you do for these kids. Thank you to dedicated members like Steve Schlender who serve in their communities and help families realize a meaningful wish for their child. This mom/family really appreciates what you all have done. One final note: if you have never been to your Lions Camp to see what you have accomplished, please go to visit it. It is BEAUTIFUL!!!

Retta Raddant, Mother of Landon
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