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# GUEST WRITER: EMILEE HERRINGSHAW



I work as a medical assistant in dermatology and aspire to become a physician, with a focus on procedural practice. I graduated from the Morrissey College of Arts and Sciences with a Bachelor of Science in Biochemistry in 2016. I earned the honor of induction to Alpha Sigma Nu and The Order of the Cross and Crown. While at Boston College, I co-founded The Medical Humanities Journal of Boston College, as an initiative to illicit recognition for the power of the patient voice. In addition, I served as an Orientation Leader through The Office of First Year Experience, and General Education Tutor at The Suffolk House of Corrections through 4Boston. Currently, I serve as Co-Chair of the Membership Committee for the Young Leadership Committee of JDRF, a group oriented to treat, prevent and cure Type 1 Diabetes. Through the convergence of my roles as a provider and a patient, I have developed an enduring desire to advocate for individuals managing various medical conditions.

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# TWO COOKIES AT MIDNIGHT

EMILEE  
HERRINGSHAW

Living with diabetes presents a collection of complex challenges. Embedded within the regimen are competing, and often contradictory, forces that make control very difficult. The nature of an autoimmune disease, through which the body performs a self-destructive act, represents the innate conflicts that surface in management, control, and lifestyle.

I've learned how type one diabetes is much more of an art than a science. As a biochemistry major, I studied and comprehended the discrete molecular phenomena that influence my blood sugar levels. While able to understand the mechanistic basis for individual factors, I'm still in awe about the integration of such forces and how they shape the essence of the disease.

Age 5. 12 am. Instead of waking up to "Rise and shine," I hear my mom whispering, "Hey Emmy, eat this," while streamlining an extra gooey chocolate chip cookie toward my buck-toothed mouth. While this would be classified as a lucid dream for many kids around age 5, this was a typical and unwelcomed experience for myself. I was jailbound for playing a few extra rounds of Cops and Robbers. It always showed up later. Tag, you're it.

Funny, the same cookie that caused a high blood sugar (or was it the cookie?) earlier that afternoon brought me reprieve a few hours later. This is an inherent facet of diabetes; what helps in one moment may harm in the other. The conglomerate of factors that influence levels on a daily basis are unquantifiable. Through experience, trend analysis, and a little bit of faith in the system, a personal management style emerges.

In time, I've learned how to integrate my condition into my lifestyle and strongly claim my resilience, confidence and ownership of management. Not long ago, close personal friends, much of my community, was alien to the reality that I was managing Type 1 Diabetes and all the factors it contained. Would they support me had I elicited awareness? Undoubtedly, but I was barren in my reality. I became shackled by the idea that not letting anyone know, by silently accommodating the demands a defunct organ, I was maintaining my prerogative to keep things going the way I thought I best could.

There is a continuous process of negotiation, and sometimes, you wonder who you are bargaining with. At age 20, I still have the cookie battle—and not in the conventional oatmeal versus peanut butter sense. Just this morning, I encountered a series of problems with my medical equipment. Subsequent changes in my infusion site, which delivers insulin from my pump, failed. Just failed. If the equipment that is supposed to save you, serve as your lifeline, dies—then what? It can be frightening, and elicit a fear of "What if this never works again?" It never gets less scary, or less frustrating.

And then there is the invisibility factor. But it's more like a ragged cloak with holes. Sure, I can test in private and filter the publicity of my medical diagnosis as much as I wish. But the heavy bags under my eyes, the persistent cough, the small scars left on my finger tips from countless rounds of testing are clear. Staying up extra late to cover material presented in a lecture when your blood sugars just weren't right, or encountering an unexpected delay to studying, has an impact. And it's not just physical. It's tiring, emotional, intertwined, and conflicting. There's no sugar coating that.