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Type 1 Issue

Grace Miller

I can't remember life before the illness. The first sixteen years of my life completely untouched by the pain. I'm just like your grandma, but maybe a little bit more severe? Who knows. Diabetes was an old person's disease to me. Not a sixteen-year-old's problem. My body doesn't work. And it never will. I have a useless pancreas and a real type 1 issue: fuck diabetes.

I went in for something completely unrelated. "Any concerns, Grace?" I had made up my mind that I was prediabetic. I told the doctor this, as she rolled her eyes and said, "You have nothing to worry about, but we will run the tests." I did have something to worry about, it's just that no one knew that. The tests came back positive, indicative that I was sick. I was plagued with Type 1 Diabetes. My blood was acidic. My body under attack by itself. For the rest of my life, I would have to work to keep myself in control. A tall order to ask of me. I never said I felt okay, but I had to be.

How do you tell a teenager that they will have to give themselves shots and manage carbohydrates for the rest of her life? You just say it, and then walk away from the fallout. I was barely old enough to understand, a few more years back and I wouldn't have been able to adjust at all.

It was the summer of 2018. I was wrapped in the toxicity of a high-school relationship. Colten was his name, and now I can realize that there was nothing real about him. He looked at me as if I was a butterfly that was trapped in a cocoon. Like some freak of nature. Those first few

months with this illness were absolute hell, and Colten just happened to be standing in the middle of all of it. I grasped at normalcy with him, but when he said that my shots made him uncomfortable, or that I should stop complaining, I felt that normalcy was never achievable. He looked at me, and I felt like a type 1 issue. This feeling never goes away, as much as you wish it or pray it will.

I laid there and screamed. I was tired. Tired of the shots, tired of the pain, tired of the fact that I had no control over what my body was doing. My mom and dad held together my broken wings, destroyed damaged, not functional. They would never know, but they would feel. It was the summer of 2018. I was sixteen. Sweet sixteen doesn't last as long when you feel like you're dying.

I soon became extremely self-conscious. Did it look like I was shooting up illegal substances when I was just really giving myself necessary medication? Does the medical equipment that I wear look like robotic parts? Does my insulin smell bad enough to turn people away from me? Am I just a type 1 issue? I never stopped worrying.

My parents took me to get blessed by a priest when I was diagnosed. It smelt like incense and uneasiness in the room. I thought I understood why they did that, but now, looking back, I have no idea why. It's not like a blessing was going to cure my issue. My parents are very religious. As if I could just pray away the pain of this disease, they told me to have faith. I would need to find meaning in my suffering. But being a 16-year-old diagnosed with a chronic illness, I couldn't, and still can't find any meaning in my pain. How could their god stand back and watch me crumble? Hey Big Guy in the Sky, you have destroyed my life.

Colten and I broke up in 2019. Sometimes I wonder if he remembers what he said to me, what he did to me. "You would be so pretty without those things on you." "I don't know how you can do that; it makes me so uncomfortable." Well Colten, I know I would be beautiful without

this disease. I would be a lot more if I didn't have this type 1 issue. And to be honest, I don't know how I do any of this. I guess I have no other choice. You know, I really don't enjoy any part of this.

I was once told that cinnamon could cure diabetes. Maybe if I would snort it, it would go straight to my head and it would convince my body that it wasn't ill. People are just so blind to what they do not know. Maybe I am just blind.

I adapted. My fingers, after being pricked so many times, looked like they had mini constellations on them. It hurts when you poke your fingers, especially when you are cold. It's harder to get your blood moving. Then, I got a CGM (continuous glucose monitor) and I didn't have to poke my fingers. It showed me my sickness. When I finally got an insulin pump, it turned me into a robot. And people would stare. Until their eyes burned words into my skin. They would write "It's okay to be different, but not that different." I could feel their uneasiness, their lack of wanting to know. Nobody knew, nobody knows.

But I get excited when I meet other diabetics because they know. They know about the stares, the sleepless nights, the pain. They know. They really do.

My uncle was diagnosed with the old person disease as well. But they just slapped type 2 in front of it. He wasn't getting better. It turns out that the docs misdiagnosed him. He's a type 1 issue just like me. Sometimes we compare our A1C's together, like a little competition to see who is doing diabetes better. It's these little games that we play that make it not so bad.

The financial burden of having this type 1 issue is awful. My parents sacrificed so much to get me all the latest and greatest medical equipment. But I can't justify in my brain this spending of so much money just to keep me alive. Like it's a necessity for me to have certain

medications, but who expects someone to pay \$1,000 a month for a life? I can give you the answer: the people who do not know, and who do not care.

I remember the first weeks of college. Stress levels increased my blood sugars. I felt like I couldn't move. But I had to. I had to be human, normal. Diabetes shouldn't hold me back. I'm more than just a sick person. But on these days, I had to allow myself the feeling that diabetes is me. It will always be me. And I used to be ashamed of that.

Then, I met a man who breathes the same as me. I shyly told him I had diabetes, like it wasn't that big of a deal. It turns out, it really wasn't that big of a deal for him. He didn't look away when I gave myself shots. I found a man that sees. Like my parents, he was there unconditionally. He loved me for me. Diabetes and all.

Time heals, but the healing isn't working. Not for me, at least.

My parents were honest. They told me my medication is life support. And then I think to myself "I am a type 1 issue." The kind of issue that doesn't go away. The burden that I put on my loved ones is so large. I never asked them to care that much, but I guess that is their job when I take the form of a sick problem. Today, I feel like a type 1 issue: for my parents, my friends, my husband, and myself.

The man who breathes the same as me suddenly became a new kind of life support. He helped me change my medical equipment. He put stickers over the devices that I wear so it looks stylish. Like "Look at the latest type 1 issue—new floral diabetes stickers." This help, though small, means the absolute world to me.

One day, he looked at me and told me I was beautiful. I cried. I thought that no one could possibly want someone who is chronically ill. How can he believe I am beautiful if I can't believe it myself? He looked at

me and told me he wanted to spend the rest of his life with me. I froze, shocked because I didn't want to imagine a life with diabetes.

When I was first diagnosed, I quit thinking about things that would happen in the future. I didn't want to graduate high school with diabetes, I didn't want to go to college with diabetes, and I definitely didn't want to get married with diabetes. You know what's really funny? I did all three of those with the type 1 issue.

Now as an adult, my worries lie elsewhere. How am I going to afford the next month's refill? How will I maintain blood sugar levels when school is really kicking my ass? I want my parents to be proud of me. They kicked me out of the nest, I am no longer on their life support. I want them to be proud of how I support myself. I am worried about work and if I will be able to pay the bills. I am worried about my husband and how my health affects him. How do I affect anyone?

What having diabetes has taught me: you don't get an off day. Every night after I was diagnosed, I wished that I was dreaming or that the higher ups would find a cure soon. But it's been four years, and I still haven't woken up from this nightmare. It has taught me to ignore, to embrace, and to coast.

Fuck diabetes I say, as if my anger that has been welling inside me will do anything to change the past. I am tired of acting like life with diabetes is just life. Because it isn't. Doctors' appointments, ketoacidosis, extreme exhaustion, tears, needle holes. Is this what a normal life looks like? I try to not let this part of me define my being as a whole. But it is me. And I can't pretend for anyone anymore. I am a type 1 issue.

Like an arrow, I was pulled back to go forward. Here I am trudging along. July 18, 2018, changed me. It hardened me. But I am here. I am alive thanks to the help of so many people.

I am Grace. I am a type 1 issue, the latest and greatest version of who I used to be. I give myself shots, I wear the medical equipment, and can do nothing but smile now. I am alive, on the world's best life support. I pay for my life. Give the companies what they want. I am normal, or as close to normal as I can get. Today I can live with the disease. Maybe one day I will appreciate what this illness has taught me. Maybe I won't be someone's type 1 issue.

Grace Miller is a junior music and English major. She plays the double bass for symphonies as well as the school orchestra. She has been playing her instrument for five years and has been participating in symphony-orchestras for four years. Her personal goal is to teach English at the collegiate level.