

I'm different. I was born different than all my friends. I'm not talking about the way I look. Everyone looks different but, I'm different on the inside. I'm a diabetic. I really don't remember the short period of my life that I didn't have diabetes. That's probably a good thing. The one thing that I do know is that I am different.

Diabetes became a part of my life when I was three years old. My parents' tried to make me feel as normal as possible, but certain situations always reminded me that I was different. For example, when I was younger and I played sports, parents would always send a drink and snack for the team to enjoy after the game. My mom would send a special snack just for me. I was different. When my classmates would bring treats to school, I would have to bring the snack home or eat a special treat that my mom had sent to school. I was different. Before I could eat lunch or any food, I would have to prick my finger and test my blood sugar. I was different. My friends could eat a piece of candy or candy bar whenever they wanted, but not me, I was different.

When I was first diagnosed with diabetes, I accepted the multiple finger pricks and daily shots rather well. It just became a way of life. As I grew older I didn't like being different. I struggled with the multiple blood tests, and I just didn't like being different. Not only was I different than all my friends but as it turns out, I was also a different type of diabetic. Several times a year I would have diabetic related seizures. We never really found out why I had the seizures; we were told I was just different. I don't remember having any of the seizures. I do remember waking up and the paramedics would be working on me. They were all so nice. They would offer me ice-cream, and they would come and visit me the next day. Sometimes they would bring me teddy bears or special treats. I really started to form a bond with some of the paramedics and firemen. I believe this was the first time I realized that being different wasn't so bad.

My parents tried very hard to help me lead a very normal life. I'm not saying they didn't try their best, but there are some days that it is just not fun to have diabetes. Halloween is one of those days. When I was young, I would go trick-or-treating with my friends and get a huge bag of candy. My mom would let me keep some of the candy but we would always end up with a huge bag of candy and I was not allowed to eat it. I earned this huge bag of treats, and there it would sit haunting me, reminding me once again that I was different. It didn't seem fair. I remember getting really angry. I never wanted to see another piece of candy again. My parents could understand my pain. They came up with a plan to let me trade my candy for a special treat of my choice. It seemed like a good plan except we still didn't know what to do with the candy. That's when I created a great plan to get rid of all my candy. I remembered the feeling I got when the firemen came and gave me the teddy bear. I wanted to give them something in return. I asked my mom if she would take me to the firehouse. We took my bag of candy to the Norwood Fire department. The firemen started choosing their favorite candy from the bag. It was fun to watch the men enjoying my candy. It made me feel different inside. I liked this feeling of different.

I learned so much from this first experience of giving. It felt really good. I enjoyed making other people happy. The next Halloween I decided I wanted to do something more. Then I thought of something incredible that I could do to help people in need. I decided I wanted to collect enough candy to make 50 bags of candy for the poor. I knew I was going to need help so I went to the one person who I knew would have all the answers, my mom. My mom was willing to help out any way she could with my idea. She asked all the First Grade students at her school to bring in a small bag of their

Halloween candy for the poor. The response was more than I ever expected. After I sorted and bagged all the candy, I had 100 bags of candy to hand out for the holidays. My mom and I delivered the candy to Father Ray at Holy Trinity Church. The candy was taken to Tender Mercies and handed out to the people who came to eat Christmas dinner. The volunteers said the people were very excited because this was the only gift some of them had received. This time I knew I had touched many lives, and it felt good. No, it felt fantastic.

I have continued to collect, bag and distribute candy for the past 5 years. This year was a really tough year. It appeared everyone was struggling. Several organizations contacted my mom and asked her if I could make some bags for their charities. Tender Mercies had already asked me to make 100 bags. I didn't know how I would be able to make 200 bags of candy, but I was determined. I decided to ask my principal and my school for help. My principal, Mr. Meyers, wrote a note in his weekly letter asking for candy donations. A couple weeks passed. My school donated several boxes and bags of candy. Of course, my mom asked her students to help again, and this year I was able to make 263 bags of candy which was distributed to several shelters, food pantries and Tender Mercies.

I am reminded everyday that I am different. But I've learned something about being different. Because I am different, I was able to learn how wonderful it feels to give to others. The act of giving and not expecting anything in return, makes me feel different. It makes me feel good inside. So I guess, there are advantages to being different, and I am proud to say that I like feeling different.