

By Riva Greenberg

JUDITH

This 63-year-old is a poster child for fitness.

Since her three-week hospital stay when first diagnosed with type 1 diabetes, Judith hasn't stopped moving. She takes aerobic dance and Tai Chi, bicycles and walks 16 miles on Sundays. Never thinking she was athletic, Judith's can-do attitude is inspiring to all.

Q: How did your life change after you were diagnosed?

Judith: At first I was in total denial, eating hot fudge sundaes but in my twenties I moved to Italy with my husband. The doctor insisted I take a walk every day and in our little village I had to climb 300 steps to get to the town square. I was exercising naturally and eating fresh foods, vegetables, fish, nuts, olives. I ate well and I felt really good.

Q: Some people think exercise is just too hard. What would you tell them?

Judith: After Italy, I lived on an organic farm in Canada for two years. I was chopping wood, snowshoeing into town to buy milk, grinding flour and growing vegetables. I weighed 140 pounds and never thought of myself as athletic. I was just active. Then I heard Bill King speak at a diabetes conference a few years ago. He's a marathon runner and he said, "There's an athlete in everyone – you just have to find the athlete within yourself." It might mean you ride a bicycle or jump rope or run a marathon, but you have to find something within yourself that you love to do. I thought that was so simple and so brilliant. This is what I tell people to try to motivate them to exercise.

Q: After 45 years with diabetes what keeps you going?

Judith: When I turned 40, I was so surprised just to be alive and healthy it was its own celebration. That's what keeps me going. I think we're given things in our lives that shape our lives like diabetes has shaped mine. In Canada, I realized diabetes was going to go with me wherever I went, so I may as well become friends with it. Life is so short and I've learned to enjoy living with both moderation and gusto!

Q: What gives you your confidence and how do you bring it to your diabetes?

Judith: A friend of mine who was a cook for World Yachts one day begged me to help her. I thought I could cook but as a job, I couldn't do that! But she was so desperate I went. From that we started our own catering company and our first job was 1,000 people at Radio City Music Hall! We catered for the next 20 years. First I'm scared, then I close my eyes – and just do it. I've been in film, catering, I've written two columns, waitressed, traveled through China and Tibet... and managed my diabetes. You learn, you watch, you do.

Q: What inspires you that might inspire others?

Judith: Everyday when I wake up I look up down and around and say to myself I have another 24 hours of possibilities. What I've gained has been more positive than negative. I'm 63 and I feel better now than I ever have. I hope that inspires others.

Judith belongs to the Diabetes Exercise & Sports Association (DESA) a national organization committed to exercise and physical fitness for people with diabetes. Check them out at: diabetes-exercise.org.



DARLENE

A wife gets her husband to take his diabetes seriously.

Darlene is bold and brassy, a vocalist by profession and a true diva for getting her husband to take care of his diabetes. Diagnosed with type 2 at the age of 44, he spent the first five years ignoring his condition until Darlene insisted he get back to the doctor. When the doctor said, "I already see some eye damage," Darlene's husband got scared straight. We take our boas off to the woman behind the man.

Q: How did your husband find out he had diabetes?

Darlene: Five years ago I wasn't feeling well and since diabetes runs in my family I had blood work done. I brought my husband and we both got blood tests. When we got the results it wasn't me but him who had diabetes.

Q: Was your husband given medication?

Darlene: We went to our family doctor and he put James on pills. When he ran out of the pills he never had them refilled. He was supposed to see the doctor every three months and check his blood sugar daily, but when the medicine ran out he said, "That's it, I'm done."

Q: Did that create stress between you two?

Darlene: When I'd bring up his diabetes he was short-tempered and irritable. We've been together a long time and he's such a sweet guy I just wanted him to be well. I didn't want to push, but we needed to know how he's doing and what he needed to do.

Q: How did you get him to finally go back to the doctor?

Darlene: I went to a diabetes support group to learn more and then to stress the importance to my husband of taking care of himself. I learned a lot at that group and then made the doctor's appointment and just said, "James, we're going!"

Q: After seeing the doctor do you think James will take this seriously?

Darlene: Yes. I asked the doctor to explain the severity of diabetes and that it's not going away but that James can live normally if he takes care of himself. Just because right now he feels fine doesn't mean tomorrow he can't have a diabetic stroke or lapse into a coma. That's what the doctor told him. Next week we're seeing a cardiologist so I know he's taking it more seriously. Then we'll take it from there.

Q: What gives you the strength and confidence to help your husband like this?

Darlene: I love this man and I'm not going through our latter years with him blind, having lost a foot, had a stroke or having man trouble. You solve nothing going through life with your eyes closed.

Q: What advice would you give other spouses?

Darlene: Get a good doctor and ask questions. Make sure your spouse checks and maintains good blood sugar levels and eats properly. Just be there for your mate and do things as a team. I'm going to get my blood tested next week to make it easier for James.

Medic alert bracelets can be fun and fashionable and save your life. Inexpensive, they're available on many web sites or ask your health care provider.

