

Narrative: *The Antidote to Diabetes – Living Proud*

At forty-eight I was laid off from my job, undergoing diabetic frozen shoulder surgery and getting married – for the first time. There was another first. Not wanting to be a burden to my husband-to-be, I went to a diabetes educator for the first time in 32 years. All these events formed the perfect midlife crisis – and the beginning of my second career – diabetes author, lecturer and coach. But I see diabetes management different from the pack.

I believe pride can serve as the “antidote” to diabetes. It is motivating and enduring, and reaching toward it in diabetes management, can move people beyond where discipline, willpower and fear can. When pride is your touchstone living with diabetes, every day, as they say, you turn lemons into lemonade.

I am convinced that we need to inspire patients to better diabetes management not through emphasizing target numbers, but the rewards of accomplishing those targets—good health, energy, spending time with loved ones and living our dreams. Focusing on what gives life juice and what one loves is what motivates people to desire health. Further, and not surprisingly, those who use diabetes as a catalyst toward greater meaning and purpose in their lives, live fuller, happier lives.

Good diabetes management includes both medical proficiency and emotional resilience. And good management bestows more than “good” numbers – it remunerates one in strength, courage, confidence, capability, ease and purpose – pride. Pride creates a closed loop system: when you manage diabetes well you feel proud, feeling proud of managing diabetes well you aim to do your best. Focusing on what you love, seeing diabetes as a catalyst to creating a healthier and happier life, and pride, imbue people with greater energy, capacity and resolve to manage their care.

I moved from a miserable beginning with diabetes: it was 1972, I was 18 years old and diagnosed with type 1. I spent a dozen years in denial with no meter, the medical ignorance of the times and a physician, who in trying to “scare me straight,” scared me into denial. Through the years I learned more and shifted my goal from getting through the day to thriving through the years.

For me diabetes is a *blessing in disguise*; I am far healthier than I would be otherwise. I have used diabetes to lose 30 pounds and keep them off for 25 years; to walk three miles every day; to have a heart cardiologists praise, to manage my tasks with gumption and grace, even with diabetes’ inconsistencies. I have A1Cs in the 5s, praise reflected back to me in my husband’s eyes, a deeper appreciation for all that I have and I look for the beauty in every day. Diabetes gives me cause for appreciation, celebration, happiness, and yes, a great deal of pride.

Pride is an unquantifiable emotion; we cannot measure its power except in witnessing its results. Pride is the magical elixir that can transform the hopelessness, helplessness and notion of surviving diabetes into the strength, courage, character and determination to thrive with diabetes.

### **Riva Greenberg**

Riva Greenberg has interviewed more than 100 people with diabetes, loved ones and professionals in her research. Riva is a regularly featured columnist in *DiabetesHealth* magazine and presents educational/motivational diabetes presentations across the country. Her philosophy of not merely ‘surviving with diabetes’ but ‘thriving with diabetes’ and improving management by addressing the emotional impact of diabetes is reflected in her recently published book, *The ABCs Of Loving Yourself With Diabetes*, and is the basis of her work. Please visit her website: [www.diabetesstories.com](http://www.diabetesstories.com).