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I'm with Fred

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I'm with **FRED**

Welcome to the first issue of The PLAID Journal, a journal for and by people living with and inspired by diabetes!

The seed for this journal was planted on May 15, 1981. That was the day I was diagnosed with type 1 diabetes and began what has become a lifetime of trying to learn from and figure out this disease. I was two years old.

When you're diagnosed with something like type 1 diabetes at such a young age, you haven't yet learned to carry the weight of the world on your shoulders and pretend that it is effortless. You've only recently learned to carry yourself around on your own two feet. However, as far back as I can remember, diabetes has been a part of who I am. What to many could seem a malfunction, a weakness, a threat, and a crutch to lean on has simply been a part of who I am.

I try to imagine diabetes as a person. We'll call him Fred. Fred is someone who does not discriminate against any demographic or personal characteristic. Fred perceives every single one of us as equals. For some of us Fred simply waves as we walk by, with maybe a gentle smile, as if to say, "I'll see you down the road, dear friend." Others, Fred never seems to notice at all as they go about the adventures that this world has to offer. Then, there are those of us who Fred becomes quite fond of. Fred sees our strength, our passion, and our zest for life. He sees all of the

burdens that we are carrying, and all of the burdens that we will carry in the future. And he chooses us. Fred attaches himself to our side, sometimes long before we even notice, and, because he is with us, forces us to grow in ways that we could never have imagined.

I don't view Fred, or diabetes, as a villain. I can't. I am more valuable to this world with diabetes than I could ever be without it, and for that I am grateful.

Diabetes has made me who I am, and it has made all of the people in the following pages who they are. Within this journal, you will meet a variety of people touched by diabetes, regardless of what type of diabetes they have been gifted with in their lives. You will meet people with diabetes, just like me. You will meet friends and loved ones of people with diabetes, who support us, love us, and admire us for far more than just our courage to live every day with a chronic disease. You will meet healthcare professionals who work to improve how we live with and understand diabetes, including endocrinologists, primary care physicians, certified diabetes educators, and more. You will also hear from researchers, and through their academic expertise and curiosity, gain from their perspectives about the disease.

Everyone featured in The PLAID Journal wants to help make life with diabetes better. It takes time and years of practice and research. Despite all we know, there is still so much misunderstanding in this world about diabetes. Misinformation relating to diabetes can be found everywhere: From the internet, to supermarket tabloids, to urban legends, and even in the belief structures that help define who we are as human beings. None of us wants to admit to ourselves or anyone else that there might be something wrong with us. From the time we are children, we are told to sit up straight, don't cry, walk it off, and put a smile on our face. We pride ourselves on a strong, confident appearance, showcasing ourselves to the world that we have no weaknesses, no faults, and nothing holding us back from greatness.

With diabetes, we are forced to examine the grains of sand in the hour glass and consider the value of each and every one of them. We are given the opportunity to accept a lifestyle that is at times completely unfair, and the opportunity to make positive decisions amidst that unfairness. Where diabetes was considered a death sentence just over a century ago, today it is a disease that we can live with and still find success and longevity rivaling that of people without diabetes. But it is never easy, and we are stronger because of it.

The famous futurist, computer scientist, and inventor Ray Kurzweil once said, "Death gives meaning to our lives. It gives importance to time. Time would become meaningless if there were too much of it."

We all have a limited amount of time on this swirling mass of water and dirt we call home. It's what we do with that time that defines us, not diabetes. We are defined by how we talk to each other, share our stories, and leave our legacies and dreams behind for others to follow. We are defined by the choices that we make to inspire the change in the world that we want to see. We are defined by all of the incredible things that we, as people with diabetes, can accomplish beyond the finger pricks and needle sticks.

Every person in this world can make a difference in the lives of someone else. We are all people with di-

abetes, because we are all touched by someone who has dealt with the disease. Almost every person on this planet either has diabetes or knows someone who does. As people with diabetes, we have learned to carry ourselves and each other through the good times and bad. We are never, in any way, limited by diabetes, unless we choose to be. Together, we can change how we view diabetes, and the message that we send when we communicate about it. We can choose to focus on the successes rather than the failures. We can choose to embrace the highs and overcome the lows. Together, we can make a difference.

--MARTIN

