

**M**y journey with type 1 diabetes started in January 1994 when I was still very young - I was diagnosed at the age of two and a half. I was the only person in my extended family with diabetes and everything was still unknown. I don't really remember this stage of my life, but I've heard my parents and older brother and sister's memories of me running away when they had to give me injections and always trying to sneak things to eat outside of my strict 'diet'.

*At this stage, my family started to take baby steps with my diabetes management.*

My whole family quickly learned how to cope with my multiple daily injections, finger pricks and that strict diet. Even though we fell down a few times with the seemingly unpredictable behaviour of my blood glucose control, we got up again and learned to walk with it.

As I started primary school, I was always very open about my diabetes. I never felt like it was something I should hide; I accepted that it was just a part of my life and that it didn't define me. As I grew up, I became more independent with many things, including my diabetes management. I started giving my own injections and I learned a bit more about how different things affected my readings, including food and sport. I never felt like diabetes was a limiting factor in my life.

*I enjoyed life to the full, participating in a variety of school activities and a variety of sports, including gymnastics, modern dancing and athletics. I was starting to run with my diabetes management.*

In high school, my teenage years, diabetes management became more of a rollercoaster ride. As I started to learn more about the complexity of diabetes and tried to balance that with my independence, I experienced lots of ups and downs. It was the period in my life that I had the opportunity to learn the most about diabetes, but



# The Journey

By Alet Janse van Rensburg

*Life's about the journey, not the destination*

I wasn't completely open to learning. I began to rebel against certain aspects of my diabetes management. In Grade 7, I stopped testing my blood glucose and I decided to stray from the limitations of my diet. Having a Bar-One and a Coke, and attempting to 'cover' that with enough insulin, became commonplace. I had lost faith in my diabetes management plan and I tried to go it alone.

*Around the middle of Grade 8, I met a dietician who also had type 1 diabetes. She opened my eyes to the possibilities of my diabetes management.*

She educated me about carbohydrate counting and she referred me to a doctor in the CDE provider network who later started me on insulin pump therapy. With a lot of hard work, this allowed me a bit more freedom with my eating while

maintaining fairly good control, even though I was still trying to push some boundaries.

In my matric year, I had a life-changing opportunity to attend a Youth With Diabetes (YWD) Leadership Training camp. I met other people in similar situations to mine and realised that I could help people learn from my own experience with diabetes.

*In the next chapter of my diabetes journey I started soaring, realising that even though it's a lot of hard work, diabetes is manageable and that it doesn't limit me in any way.*

I've always had an interest in food, I loved cooking and I also had an interest in understanding how food affects the body. After school, I decided to study B.Sc. Dietetics at North West University. While studying, I became more involved with Youth With Diabetes, a non profit organisation that aims to give back to the children and youth with diabetes. I started to help out at the YWD-hosted diabetes camps more frequently and it has become an important part of my support structure with my own diabetes management. It also gave me the opportunity to help support other young people with diabetes through my own experiences. I have since graduated from University and completed my community service year as a registered dietitian.

*I'm now starting an exciting new phase in my life as a young adult. I got engaged recently and my fiancé is very supportive with my diabetes management. I also recently started working as a diabetes educator, which I enjoy very much.*

Looking back on my life so far, I have learned that no matter how bad things may seem at the time, a light of hope always shines somewhere ahead. Knowing that, I feel confident to deal with most of the challenges I will still face. I can thus focus on, enjoy and be thankful for all the good things that will also come to pass. I can't wait for my journey ahead!



# Ons Saamstap

By Hester Davel  
Registered Nurse, Diabetes Educator, CDE  
Houghton, Johannesburg and Chairperson YWD

I met Alet as a shy young lady at our Youth Leader training in 2009... She was quiet, but I remember that she soon showed good listening skills. She wanted to help others living with diabetes to feel understood and not alone.

I was thus not surprised when she phoned us and asked when the next YWD Camp would be, because she wanted to come and help. Alet has attended every camp that she could since then. She would catch a bus from Potchefstroom to Johannesburg, and after a tiring camp and much hard work, she would catch a bus back to continue her studies.

The vision of Youth With Diabetes is to inspire young people living with diabetes - often those who cross our path continue their journey in the field of diabetes. I am so proud of Alet that she is doing just that. Her passion for the better understanding of diabetes and for living with this condition shines through with her creativity and her exceptional listening skills. Alet is always looking for a new idea, a different way to make diabetes education fun, visual and understandable.

I have no doubt that Alet will make a tangible difference in the lives of so many children living with diabetes. YWD is proud and honoured to have you on their team.