

KID'S-EYE VIEW OF DIABETES IN HIS BOOK, ADAIR GREGORY AIMS TO HELP OTHER CHILDREN UNDERSTAND HIS DISEASE

The Boston Globe

Author(s): Patti Doten, Globe Staff **Date:** April 27, 1998 **Page:** C7 **Section:** Living

WINCHESTER -- "My name is Adair. Adair means 'courageous and strong' in Irish. Two years ago, I got diabetes. This is the story of how I got sick and how I got better."

So begins 12-year-old Adair Gregory's "Sugar Was My Best Food," a book written with his therapist mother, Kyle Carney Gregory, and her best friend, psychologist Carol Antoinette Peacock, and published by Albert Whitman & Co. Adair became ill three years ago, at age 9, while flying with his family to visit his uncle's ranch in Wyoming. Everyone thought he had a stomach bug. But he continued to feel weak and dizzy, and ended up in the emergency ward.

It was there that doctors told Adair he had diabetes.

"I was really scared," says Adair, sitting in the dining room of his family's home on a hill overlooking Upper Mystic Lake. "There were all these shots. Plus I'd never heard of diabetes. I thought I might die because it sounded like DIE-a-bee-tees. I was so overwhelmed, I didn't know what to do."

He was relieved when doctors assured him he wasn't going to die, but the relief was short-lived. He was then told he couldn't eat candy, had to test his blood and get insulin shots several times a day, must keep to strict meal and snack times, and couldn't sleep late on weekends because he had to test his blood, get a shot, and eat breakfast. He thought his life was over. He thought he'd never play sports again.

"The first year was really, really rough," says Adair. "I was really angry. I think it took about two years to really feel like a normal kid again and not be mad all the time. I kept asking, 'Why me? I don't want this.'"

And he couldn't find any books that described all his feelings. The books on diabetes he found at the Joslin Diabetes Center in Boston had kid characters, he says, but they were very technical. Others were much too upbeat -- you have diabetes, but everything is going to be just fine.

"Well, it's not like that," says Adair. "Everything isn't just fine. Your life changes completely. I wanted to write about what it's really like. I'm hoping my book will be in public libraries, too, so kids who don't know anything about diabetes will be able to understand what it's all about."

Snacks all around

Before returning to the Atrium School in Watertown, several weeks after being diagnosed, Adair and his mother met with his teacher. They decided that when Adair had his snacks, the other children would also be allowed snacks. On the first day of school, when the children told about their summer activities, Adair talked about getting diabetes. He explained that his pancreas couldn't make enough insulin and that he needs insulin to live. He talked about having to prick his finger to check his blood-sugar levels several times a day to see how much insulin he needed.

The children made a game out of his blood tests. They'd stand around while he pricked his finger, then try to guess whether his blood sugar was high (over 180) or low (under 70).

"The school was wonderful," says his mother. "But it was exhausting. The school would call several times a day about his blood levels. So my husband, Chris, a political consultant, started wearing a beeper."

She said Adair was a very angry and miserable boy. Not only did he have to contend with constant shots and blood tests but also with weight loss, low energy, nausea, and blurred vision, which made it very difficult to concentrate in school.

"We tried to let him feel his real feelings," says Kyle Gregory. "That he had a miserable disease. An illness that affects

the whole family."

And one that is driven by the clock -- times for blood tests, snacks, breakfast, lunch, and dinner. Dinner had to be on the table at 5:30, so there were no more special pasta dishes made by his father and served up at 7 or 7:30.

As Adair's mood swings continued, his older brother, Stephen, 14, thought he'd lost his fun-loving brother to a new Adair who was always angry and had temper tantrums.

As Adair says in his book, it was a house filled with worry.

"There was so much worry in our house," writes Adair, "I figured even Slugger [the family's Kerry terrier] and Paprika [the canary] were worried."

According to statistics from Joslin, there are 15.7 million people in the United States diagnosed with diabetes. Under age 20, there are 123,000 people with the disease.

Fun times again

There were several things that helped Adair climb slowly out of his misery.

First, was the birth of Quinn, the Gregorys' fourth son. He was born the spring after Adair got diabetes. Adair loved to play with the baby and take him for walks in his stroller. It was during these moments that Adair was able to forget about his blood-sugar level. Second, his father began to train for the Boston Marathon and Adair ran with him around Fresh Pond. After several weeks, he began to feel stronger and lost the dark circles under his eyes. He also signed up for town track and won his first race.

But perhaps the most significant experience was going to the Eliot P. Joslin diabetes camp in Charlton, where he met other kids and staff members who had the disease, "even the cook."

"When I first went to camp, they encouraged me to give myself the insulin shots [his father, a former medic during the Vietnam War, had been giving them to him]," says Adair. "I had been testing my blood with no problems, but I just couldn't see hurting myself with a needle. But they kept pressuring me, and I think I finally gave in because I knew if I could give myself shots, I could go on overnights at my friends' houses."

He says it freaked him out the first few times he stuck himself with a needle, but he's learned to think about other things during the injection. He takes three shots a day -- morning, dinner, and bedtime. He always carries a snack with him if he feels dizzy, especially during strenuous exercise. Now in the sixth grade at the McCall Middle School here, he plays all sports -- baseball, lacrosse, soccer, track -- and skateboards constantly on the hill in front of his house. His favorite sport is baseball and he dreams of being a second baseman for the Houston Astros. There really isn't anything, he says, that he can't do these days.

Yet the worry in the house remains.

"There's always a level of anxiety that never lets up," says Kyle Gregory. "You worry when he's late coming home from a soccer game. You worry when he goes on overnights. You worry about the teen years and drinking. Although he's seen people at Joslin who are blind and have lost limbs, the consequences of the disease are difficult to comprehend at his age."

But Adair feels he's being very responsible.

"Taking care of my diabetes is like breathing now," he says. "It's like, oh, it's lunchtime, I've got to go to the nurse's office and take a blood test."

[Perform a new search](#)