

Monday, October 13, 1980



Shirlee Iden

Learning to live with diabetes

A late night phone call. And a mother catches her breath. "Hello" and again, "Hello?", this time more questioning.

"Mother..." and then a pause.
"Pat, I'll be right there," the mother responds. She tries hard to sound calm, but already she's shaking.

"Just one word — 'mother' but it's all I need to hear." In her head, she's saying. "No, not again," questioning her ability to get to her 23-year-old daughter to the hospital in time for the life saving care she requires.

For Pat, the episode begins as it had three times before with sweating and a heavy feeling when she breathed. She had been fighting a virus, running a temperature. And it was enough to bring on this diabetic emergency.

Pat does get to the hospital in time, is rushed into intensive care and given the sophisticated medications, tests and monitoring she needed.

"Her blood sugar goes crazy, and it's something to do with the gases in the blood," the mother said. "I don't understand it all, but I understand the urgency and the seriousness."

THAT WAS two weeks ago. Pat's fourth emergency came hours after her 23rd birthday. The diagnosis of juvenile diabetes had come when she was 17 years of age.

"I was eating a lot and yet lost 10 pounds in 14 days," she said. "Suddenly I'd have to get up at night to urinate and would get these fierce thirsts. I thought it was great I was losing the weight, but my mom got concerned."

Leveling the blood sugar of an adolescent is a complex, difficult enterprise for the doctor, the patient and the family.

Pat's family have been totally supportive, helping her adjust to treatment, medication, diet. During her recent hospital stay, her mother and dad visited once, even twice each day. No diabetic emergency is routine.

"Normal blood sugar counts run between 80 and 120," Pat said. "Mine was close to 10 times that much when we found out I was diabetic. I was pretty close to a diabetic emergency before that diagnosis."

An active, athletic young woman, Pat said when they first told her she had juvenile diabetes, she just about drew a blank.

"I didn't know anything about it, nothing. But I thought about it a lot. It's something that couldn't be avoided, so you just have to decide to make the best of it."

"And sometimes, I think diabetes is better off. We really have to watch our diets and take care of ourselves."

LIKE THOUSANDS of others, she counts every calorie, works out frequently to balance what she eats with what she burns off. Pat does it with racquetball and swimming in the colder months.

Even so, a touch of virus or some unknown factor can trigger the sudden rise or fall in blood sugar that's so dangerous.

"It's not all so great," she said. "You can't go drinking with your friends or have a birthday cake, but well, it's not so bad, either."

And injecting yourself with insulin each and every morning?

"To me, that's nothing," said Pat. "It's like brushing my teeth."

"Lots of people think they could never face it, but I had a roommate who said exactly that. A year later, she was found to be diabetic and she injects insulin every day now."

Juvenile diabetes is the most severe form of the disease. It can appear at any age, though most commonly from infancy to age 30. Its victims must take those daily injections of insulin to stay alive.

Diabetes is the third major chronic ailment of children. It's a disease that is on the increase in our society, and there is a strong hereditary tendency. One of Pat's grandfathers, an aunt and an uncle are diabetic.

THE JUVENILE Diabetes Foundation in Southfield is part of a wide network of resources to whom diabetics can turn. Mostly, they raise funds for research, and the research does pay off. Without scientific research, insulin would not have been discovered early in the century.

Nearly 100,000 persons in southeastern Michigan are diagnosed diabetics. They suffer a metabolic disorder that has adversely affected their bodies' capability to manufacture and/or utilize insulin, a chemical needed for the conversion of carbohydrates into energy.

National Diabetes Week ended on Oct. 11. For Pat and thousands like her, diabetes week is every week.



Despite the array of sophisticated equipment such as that in the control room at the Fermi II plant, nuclear accidents can happen. (Staff photo by Gary Caskey)

Tell us the truth about nuclear accidents

I wonder what the people of Utah and Nevada started thinking about after the lift-off of the Titan missile from its Arkansas nest. By 1980, there is supposed to be 200 MX missiles traveling around under their soil on rails.

A wrench socket recently caused a Titan to whoosh out of the ground, accompanied by a reddish-orange fireball. So it doesn't take much imagination to think of the accident possibilities involving subterranean railroad beds, switches and schedules.

Someone has already termed the MX system "an underground railroad to Armageddon."

Other accidents involving nuclear facilities have similarly been triggered by this kind of trivial occurrence, which can happen anywhere but without the nuclear possibilities. At Fermi I near Monroe, Mich., a small piece of metal broke loose and clogged critical coolant nozzles. A meltdown was avoided, but the event inspired the book, "We Almost Lost Detroit."

A disaster almost occurred at the Brown's Ferry, Ala. nuclear plant. It was caused by a fire accidentally started by workmen who used a candle to check for an air leak.

ACCIDENTS WILL happen. But what can we do about them? Precious little, evidently. But at least we ought to start demanding more information from the government and the nuclear industry.

The governors of Utah and Nevada, who are negotiating with the Pentagon on the MX missiles ought to fight for truth. We in Michigan ought to be asking for the same. We have three nuclear facilities in operation in our state and two under construction — one in Midland, the other (Fermi II) in Monroe.

The Fermi II plant is about an hour down the pike



Sherry Kahan

from metropolitan Detroit as the radiation flies. So we would be wise to worry. Two newspaper quotes will explain the problem.

An Associated Press report stated: "Hundreds of area residents, angered and frightened at a proposal to release radioactive gases from the Three Mile Island nuclear plant, screamed curses at federal officials who came to tell them any exposure would be minuscule."

The New York Times printed this paragraph: "The Air Force continued today to refuse even to confirm or deny the existence of a nine-megaton nuclear warhead on the Titan II missile that blew up into its silo yesterday, and some angry state officials and local residents insisted that the military should tell them whether it had recovered the warhead and what condition it was in."

WHEN A U.S. plane collided with a U.S. bomber over Palomares, Spain in 1966, nuclear bombs plunged to earth. One was later recovered from the ocean. One cracked open and radiated the soil of Spain with plutonium dust.

Instead of bragging about its quick response to the event, Air Force officials blocked the spread of facts. They denied any danger, even though they later carried off tons of soil for burial in South Carolina.

They were not hiding anything from the Russians because a local radio station was broadcasting during the incident. But they didn't level with us. Maybe they were embarrassed about the mishaps or

didn't want the world to understand the dangers of nuclear weapons.

Judging by the Arkansas event, the Air Force still isn't willing to inform the American people. The non-military part of the government is giving more information now, as is the nuclear industry. Anyone reading the accounts of the Three Mile Island near-disaster can tell that.

One of the problems may be that nuclear power is so new that scientists need on-the-job training in dealing with meltdowns. Not even they always know what is going on.

SOMETIMES there seems more leaks from nuclear plants than from Washington agencies. And on the subject of radiation leaks, a lot more information will be needed before the people living near a nuclear plant or military installation will be satisfied.

The official attitude is that the level of leakage will be of no harm to anyone. Yet some months after Three Mile Island, the feds admitted there would be an increase in cancer and birth defects in the neighborhood. But, of course, the amount would be small.

The issue of nuclear energy has been on the ballot in several states. It was supported in a recent election in Maine. If citizens are voting on the issue, that is just one more reason for widespread proliferation of nuclear and radiation facts. If there are studies on the effects of nuclear radiation on people or animals, we should know the results. We need to learn in advance if an evacuation plan has or hasn't been devised for populations near nuclear facilities.

When Fermi I was on its way to a possible meltdown, the sheriff of Monroe County got a call one afternoon informing him that something was wrong at the plant. According to "We Almost Lost Detroit," he went to bed that night without hearing another word.

We need facts now. There may be no time for discussion if an accident turns into a disaster.

Children, too, need help with stress

shop talk/ Sandra Armbruster

before leaving for my meeting. I would be home early, I promised.

I didn't make it in time.

The headache worsened, and Marge stretched out on the sofa to rest.

She never woke up.

Frantic when he heard a choking sound, my son phoned me at work. Not finding me in, he ran in his stocking feet to get my neighbor who is a nurse.

She wasn't home, but a teen-age daughter, Adrienne Bennett, and her friend were. The three of them ran back to the house.

Adrienne phoned 911 and one of Southfield's Life Support units was dispatched.

"They got here almost before I could get off the phone," she said. And they didn't leave until they were sure that the house was locked and that someone would care for my son.

NO ONE SLEPT much that night. Little things spoke of what had happened as I walked through the house:

A tilted lampshade.
A chair not quite where I had left it.
Empty magazine wrappings piled neatly on the kitchen table.

A spot on the sofa.

The crisis was over, but lingering on were the memories. And the guilt.

"Should I have gone home sooner?" I asked.
"Why didn't I call 911 instead of running next door?" my son wondered.

We had learned the importance of keeping phone numbers and our own address posted by the phone. People under stress forget things like that. We also learned the value of programs like Cub Scouts, which had taught my son how to react in an emergency.

But it took a lot of special people, including a couple of Southfield teachers, helped us cope with our experience.

I think of the teachers now as I learn of a pilot program operating in Wayne-Westland and Livonia school districts. If successful, it could be expanded elsewhere.

The program is paid for this year with a \$150,000 federal grant in cooperation with the University of Michigan-Dearborn. It is designed to help kids cope with stress.

"Elementary and secondary children are sometimes under stress just as much as older people, whether it's from divorce, death or something that temporarily upsets them," said Ray Rafford, assistant superintendent for student relations in Wayne-Westland.

"These things are temporary by their nature, but they affect students' learning."

"Hopefully, we'll gather data for these kids and develop short-term strategies for helping them on an informal basis."

Not all children suffer through the tragic stress my son did one night last spring, but I'm grateful for teachers and programs that try to help.