

The mission of the Department of Cultural Enrichment at Vanderbilt University Medical Center is to present the healing arts in a context that makes the medical center a more compassionate and comfortable environment for patients, their families, and staff. The department offers therapeutic programs and maintains the aesthetic standard of the medical center through art acquisition, management of the extensive art collection, and selection and placement of art.

For more information call the office of Cultural Enrichment at Vanderbilt University Medical Center, 615-936-1234, www.vanderbiltculturalenrichment.com

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National Association for Poetry Therapy may be consulted at: <http://www.poetrytherapy.org/index.html>

Note on the Editor

Kate Daniels is a former poet-in-residence of both Vanderbilt University and Duke University Medical Centers. She is the author of three volumes of poetry, and is currently an associate professor of English and Director of Creative Writing at Vanderbilt University, College of Arts and Science. She is a member of the Curriculum Committee for Vanderbilt's Center for Medicine, Health, and Society.

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The Eskind Diabetes Clinic at Vanderbilt University Medical Center

The Vanderbilt Eskind Diabetes Clinic is an internationally-acclaimed facility that offers comprehensive care to both adults and children with diabetes. The Vanderbilt Eskind Diabetes Clinic provides complete care for children in conjunction with the Monroe Carell Jr. Children's Hospital at Vanderbilt that includes diabetes specialists, diabetes educators, and nutritionists.

The Children's Diabetes Program offers holistic, comprehensive care and education for children and teens living with diabetes and their families. Our clinic cares for children and teens with both type 1 and type 2 diabetes. Our care team includes physicians, nurse practitioners, nurse educators, dietitians, social workers, psychologists, and child life specialists. Services provided in our clinic include diabetes care education, nutritional education, diabetes self-management training. For teenagers with diabetes, we provide a seamless transition from pediatric to adult care. We also conduct vital research in the field of diabetes and train health care providers. Our education program has achieved and maintained recognition status by the American Diabetes Association.

For more information, or to schedule an appointment, please consult our website:
<http://www.vanderbilthealth.com/diabetes/>

Other Helpful Websites

Juvenile Diabetes Research Foundation International
<http://www.jdrf.org/>

American Diabetes Association
<http://www.diabetes.org/home.jsp>

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The Power of Words

"Poetry breaks through the skin of suffering in which children are often imprisoned: silent, confused, scared. A child's poetry is an intimate, trusting gift to her parent, or to anyone who wishes to 'read' her heart."

Alice Walker, poet, novelist, Pulitzer Prize winner

As we all know from experience, illness is absorbing. When we are ill – even with something as minor as a headache – it is difficult to concentrate. Our energy is diminished, and our attention is distracted. The pain in our temples puts us on edge. Maybe we snap irritably at our loved ones or coworkers. Maybe we speak harshly to the dog. Still, in the backs of our minds, we know that the headache is temporary. A couple of aspirin or a nap in a dark room and a tall glass of water will take it away. Before long, we will return to our normal, more pleasant and pain-free selves.

Imagine, then, being diagnosed with a chronic condition like Type I Diabetes at the age of five, or ten, or fifteen. Perhaps that diagnosis has come only after a medical crisis that frightened you with its bizarre and incapacitating bodily symptoms, and terrified your parents as they drove you to the hospital's emergency room, or telephoned for an ambulance. Because you are still a child, the immediate experience was probably overwhelming. It will likely take a long while for any child who has been diagnosed with a chronic condition like diabetes to understand fully how his or her life has been affected, and how dramatically daily activities will need to change. Many feelings will accompany that realization, and some of those feelings will probably be difficult to express. As adults, we know from experience that the expression of painful or upsetting emotions is often the first step toward accepting the reality of a bad situation and reestablishing our peace of mind. For children, this is not so clear. One of the ways to assist young people in sorting out their feelings and understanding what has happened to them is to have them write about their situation. Over the past three decades, more and more hospitals have begun incorporating

various kinds of bibliotherapy into the supportive services offered to pediatric patients. It was within this context that this little anthology of poems written by children with diabetes came to be.

In April 2008, Donna Glassford, the director of the Cultural Enrichment Program at Vanderbilt University Medical Center, invited me to conduct a series of poetry writing workshops at the Monroe Carell Jr. Children's Hospital at Vanderbilt under the auspices of the Child Life Program. After meeting with Janet Cross, Child Life director, we settled on the Children's Diabetes Program at the Vanderbilt Eskin Diabetes Clinic as the most likely site for a productive, short-term workshop. This anthology is the result of six weekly poetry-writing sessions with recently diagnosed children and some of their siblings. Child Life Specialist Leslie Grissim, had the idea to offer the writing workshop as a component of the first session of the extensive outpatient education and evaluation program that patients and their families attend.

At Vanderbilt University Medical Center, the resources for children with diabetes are excellent and all-encompassing. The Eskin Diabetes Clinic has adopted an integrative approach to treatment, by locating the juvenile and adult clinics in contiguous spaces, and providing rich programs of support for both medical and social aspects of the condition. Thus, newly diagnosed children are exposed to a continuum model of living with and successfully treating diabetes from the time of their very first visit. Support is offered in both individual and group settings. Patients and their families are gently encouraged to think about the ways in which a diagnosis of diabetes affects not only the patient, but his or her entire support system, as well –

Diabetes, Hey!

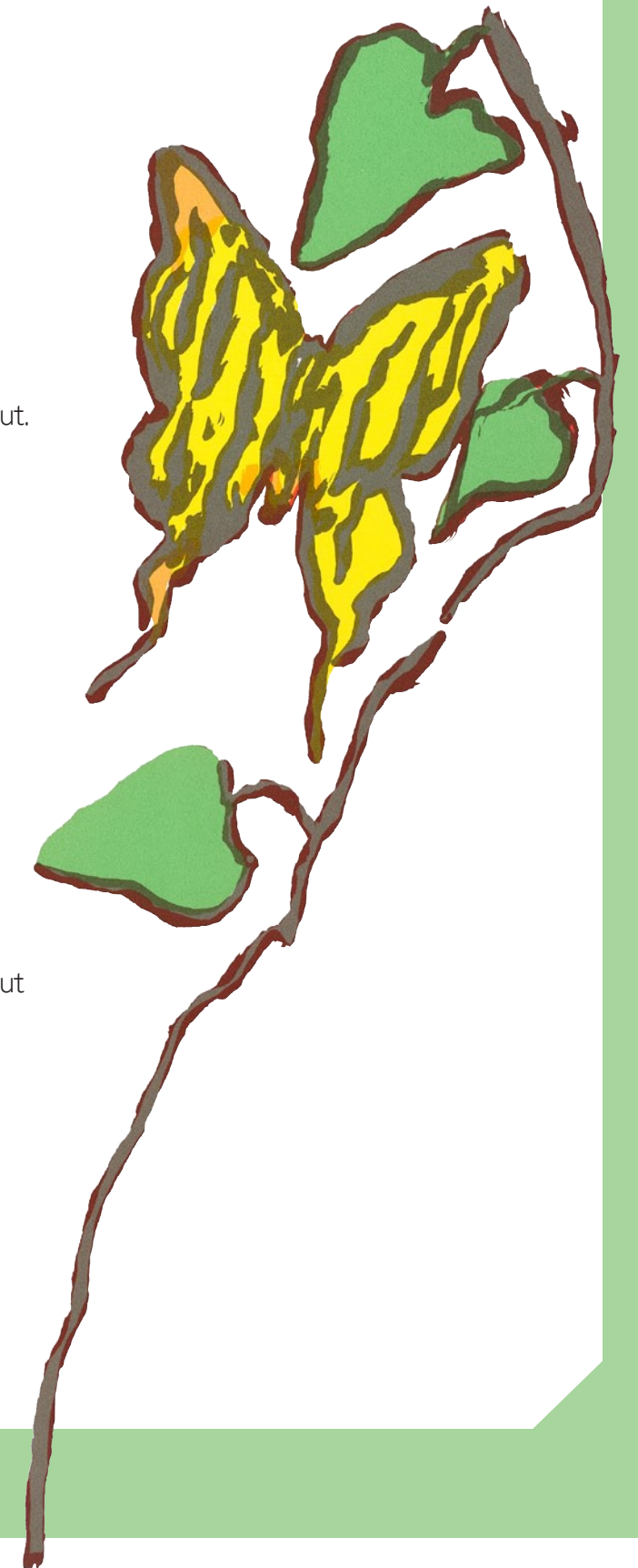
(Lyrics to Compact Disc written by participants at Family Day, 2007 and sung by Amy Chappel)

I can feel it coming on, those highs and lows
Shaking from my head down to my toes
So I check my sugar, then I take a shot.
But it's ok cause I'm gonna be alright.

Diabetes, Hey!
Listen to me now
There's no way
You're getting me down
Cause I am strong
I've got Mom, Dad, and all my doctors to help me out.

I get so frustrated when my pump breaks
Kind of like when I can't play my wii
Sometimes I feel sad
Sometimes I'm mad
Sometimes you just gotta get glad

Diabetes, Hey!
Listen to me now
There's no way
You're getting me down
Cause I am strong
I've got Mom, Dad, and all my doctors to help me out



Shots and Insulin

I like
The shots.

And I like
The insulin.

It goes in
My body
And makes me
Feel well.

Sean, 5



When I Got Diabetes

When I knew
What I had –
Diabetes –
I was sad.

I keep my diabetes stuff
In the nurse's office.
I have to check my sugar
Before I eat, and when
It goes up or down.

The shot's point is thin and short.

After I eat, I have to take
My insulin.
At night,
I have to take my latins.

You can't eat that much sugar.
And when you shoot your finger
With the needle, it hurts
When you put it in the same spot.

Zachary, 14

immediate and extended family; daycare providers; school; friends; coaches and team members; church communities; employers. To this end, the Eskin Child's Diabetes Clinic includes not only medical personnel (physicians, nurse practitioners and nurse educators), but also social workers, psychologists, nutritionists, child life specialists, and, most recently, a poet.

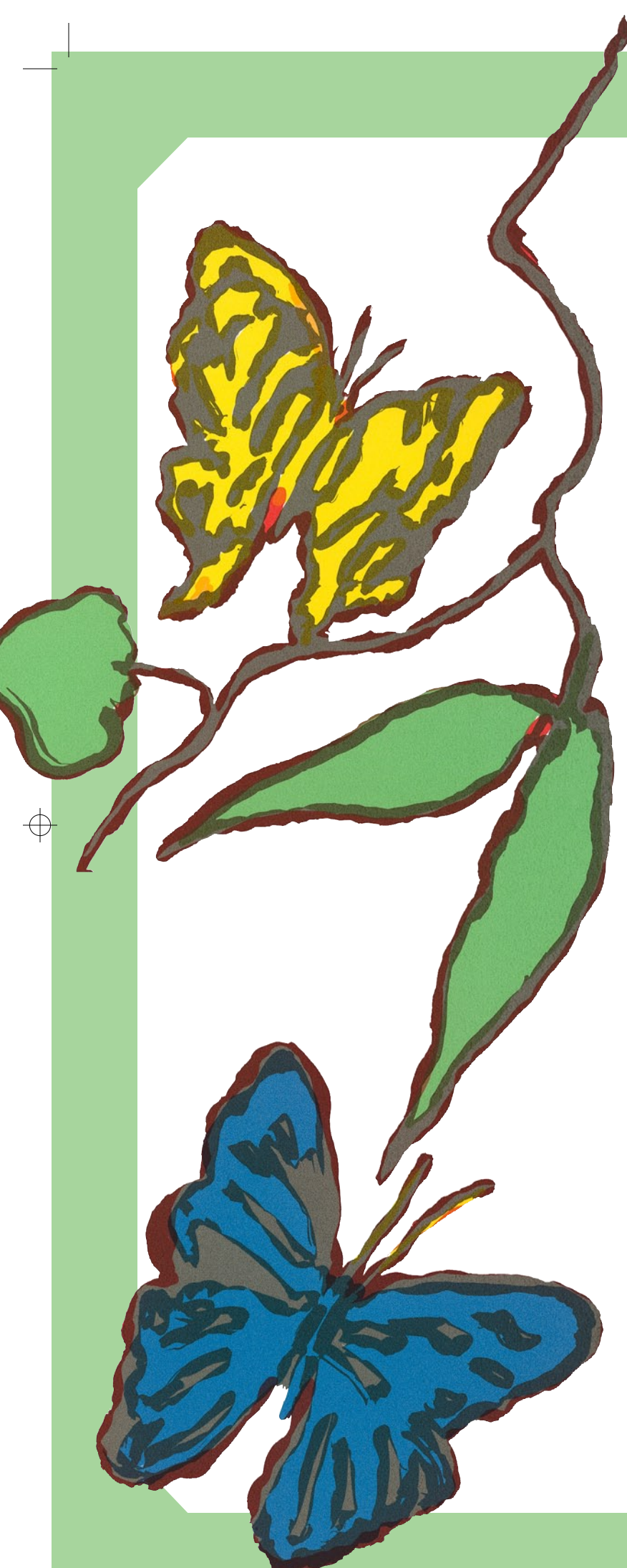
In the normal course of human development, we move slowly from the innocence of childhood into the experience of adulthood. Chronic illness like diabetes, however, truncates childhood. Children with diabetes must adopt numerous "grown-up" behaviors long before would have been necessary in the normal course of time. Good diabetes care requires that even very young children become acutely aware of how they are physically feeling; learn how to communicate that to adults; keep in mind the hours of the day and how much time has passed since last eating or checking blood levels; pay attention to personal organization by keeping their diabetes kit with them at all times; and learn how to administer self-care. It can be stressful and confusing for even the most mature and unflappable child.

I asked the recently-diagnosed children in the workshops to write something about how they "felt about having diabetes." I gave them a few models, reassured them that this was not school work and that there were no rules to follow or break. On the board I had written a list of diabetes vocabulary (blood, insulin, pancreas, stick, carbs, etc.), and some tips on how to begin. Without exception, regardless of age or inclination, each child wrote a poem. Their concerns are immediately obvious from the poems: the sticks and pricks of checking blood levels and the regulation of food intake recur throughout almost all of them, as does the stress of acquiring the new time-management skills that effective diabetes care requires. The siblings in the class wrote about their support for their affected brothers and sisters, and often expressed

admiration for the sibling's bravery in facing so many needles and visits to the doctor. The discerning reader will also see in some of the poems the child's anger or sadness that has come along with diagnosis and the growing realization of how profound is the impact that diabetes will have on his or her entire life.

Many of the parents wept as I read their child's poem to the group at large after the workshop. Anyone who works with pediatric patients knows how hard parents struggle to maintain a cheerful attitude on behalf of their sick children. I interpreted the tears of these parents as a painful acknowledgement that their child was beginning to take on not just the burden of diabetes, but the individual responsibility for taking care of it. To these parents, I would like to reassure you. However sad it is to read the poems, the expression and exploration of these very normal emotions is an important step towards psychological health for your child. Many studies have demonstrated the efficacious results of offering psychosocial support to young patients through creative writing and other types of arts therapy. I have included a brief bibliography at the back of this volume for further reading on this topic. I hope it will reassure you.

I would like to thank all of the children who participated in these writing workshops. For most people, it is not easy to write a poem. And it is certainly not easy to express private feelings to a total stranger. These children – both patients and their siblings – were all struggling with a new development in their lives. It is my hope that the writing of these poems was helpful to them in sorting out some of the strong feelings that must surround their relationship with diabetes. I hope each of these young writers will turn again to the written word as they work their way through the long days and nights of diabetes, and indeed through all the events still to come in their lives, both sad and celebratory. - Kate Daniels



I'm with You

I'm right here beside you
Whether you're happy or feelin' blue.
If you ever feel down or sad,
I'm here to make you feel glad.
Sometimes you might not think I care,
And you may want me out of your hair!
I'm your brother and your friend.
I'll always be with you through thick and thin.
And I'm not goin' to lie.
When I found out about you, I began to cry
'Cause even though you make me mad,
You're the best friend I've ever had.
When Mom and Dad are away at their jobs,
I'll help you with all your diabetic probs.
So I hope you know how I feel about you
And this situation you're going through.
I'm with you now
And I'll never leave your side.
No way, no how!

Alex, 15, sibling

What Diabetes Means to Me

All the kids who have it must be brave. They get shots every day. Their blood sugar gets high and low. I help my brother a lot. I know he doesn't like shots or pricks, but he is so brave. I know how he feels because he tells us every night! I tell him I will play doctor with him to make him feel better. I think he enjoys aggravating us because he has to take shots. I think that makes him feel better, too, so my other brother and I go along with it!

Rebecca, 11, sibling

Living With Diabetes

Diabetes since eight
Man this isn't great
I'm just a kid, I love
to eat, eat something
that's sweet, Something
sweet is what I like to eat.
Diabetes is serious,
It is hard to live with,
It's hard to believe
That now I'm 15 and
diabetes doesn't control
Me anymore, I've
pretty well kicked it
out the door. I control
it. It don't control me.

Now I can eat something
sweet. I've come a long
way. A long way I've come
with my diabetes.
My body feels better.
I have a glow. The life
of my teenage years is
a mist in the wind once
again. My diabetes doesn't
control me anymore!

Sarah, 15



Everything Will Be All Right

Sitting in the doctor's office, thinking
Nothing was wrong.
"Just a virus," my father said.
But then the doctor came in
And said I had diabetes.
I thought the world had come
To a crashing halt.

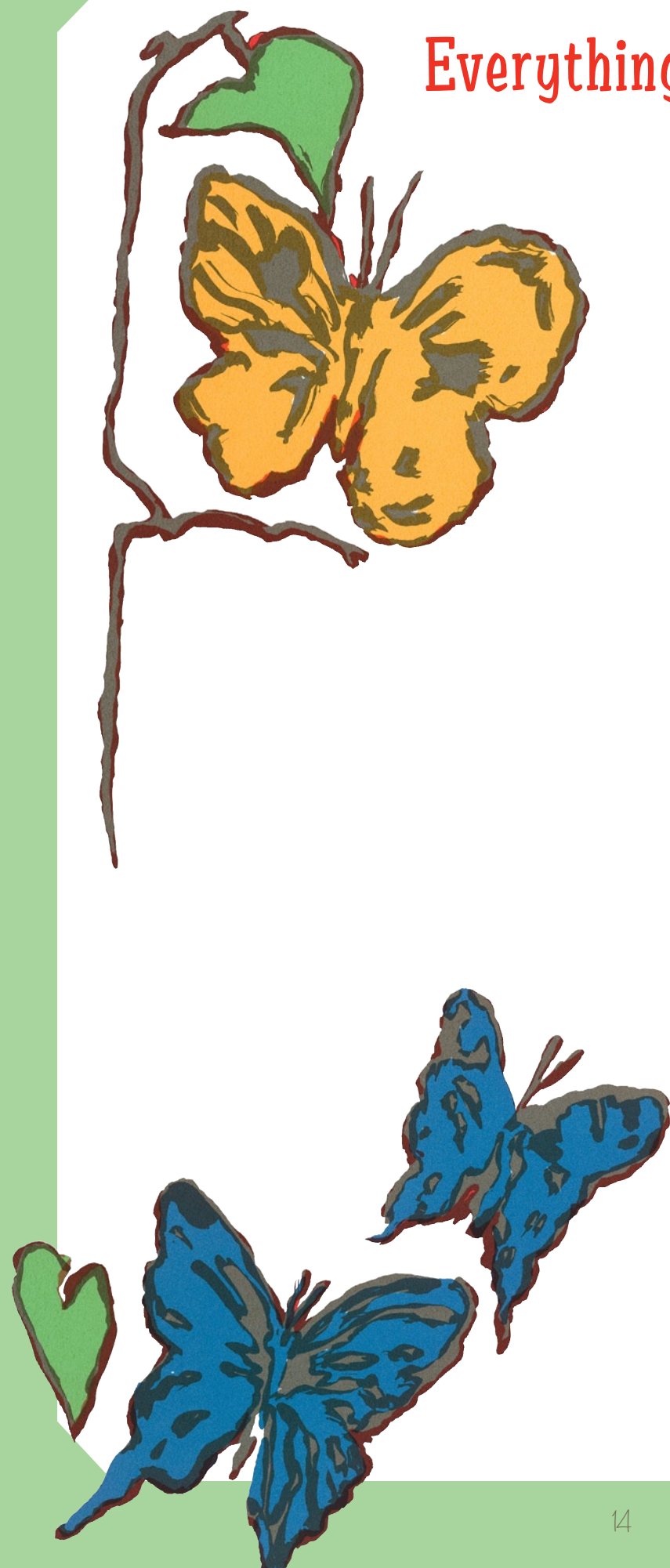
They took me to Vanderbilt
And told me everything
Would be all right.
My mom took my hand,
And I knew it would be.

They showed me everything:
Shots, pricking, injections, blood sugars.
Like majoring in diabetes
In just three days.
They were so kind to me.
I couldn't have asked for more.

Out of the hospital now
And on my own, back in school
With even more to learn than before.
Pricks and shots at lunch. People stare.
My friends ask everything: how, why, what?

Diabetes has changed me
So much and yet so little.
I'm thankful for everything now.
For my doctors and my friends,
For Mom and Dad and Daniel.
Now I know everything will be all right.

Paige, 16



My Diabetes Bag

I keep everything
In the nurse's office.

It's in a little box:
Syringes, pin needles,
Meter and strips.

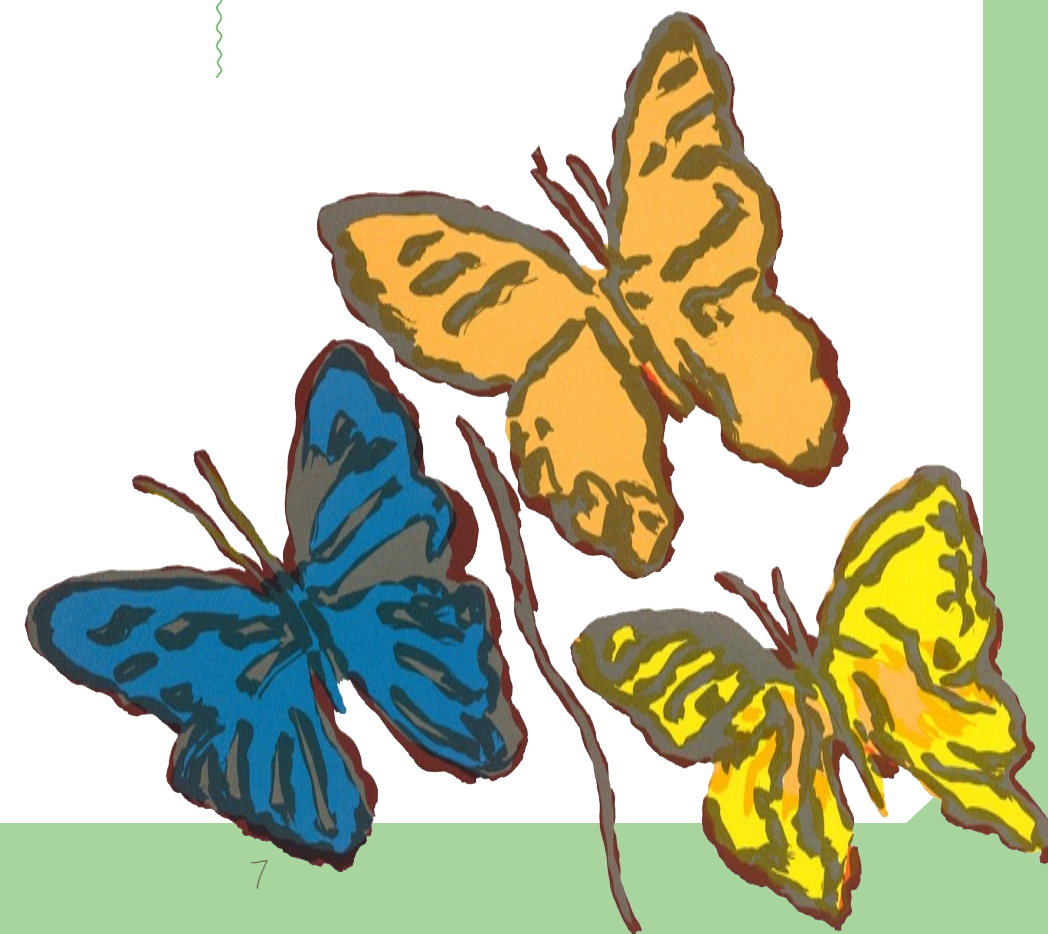
I miss classes.
And when I first found out,
I felt like broken glass.

My blood goes up and down,
And I bring a bag all around town.

There are holes in my fingers
From when I prick.

Before I took insulin,
I felt very sick.

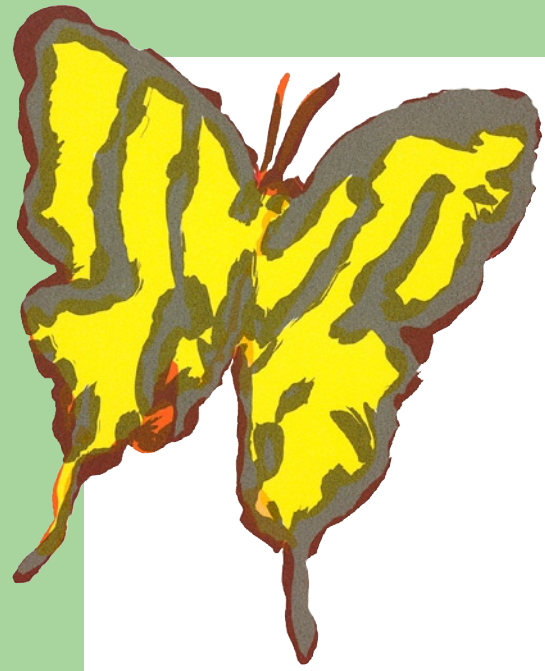
Alice, 12



My Little Brother

My little brother has diabetes.
I feel sorry for him.
He takes shots every day.
Also, he has to prick his finger.
If I could, I would trade places with him.
He may have this for the rest of his life,
But I believe my little brother
Is going to be a very successful person.

Austin, 13, sibling



Finger Pricks

When I prick my finger, it hurts.
I cry sometimes.

Since I have to prick my fingers
So much, I don't have any blood
Left in them.

When I first got diabetes,
My mom had to help me.
She went to my room
And got my Build-a-Bear.
She showed me how to prick
My finger by pricking it on its paw.

I get mad sometimes
Because I don't like finger pricks.
But I get over it, and I have a good time.
Now, I'm good with it.

Bayleigh, 10

My World with Diabetes

From the day I found out
Up until now, I wonder
How I'll carry this on:
The needles, the pricks.
I wanna end this quick.

It's hard to be like
Everyone else
When you have to watch
Every little step:
Your carbs, your sugar,
And the way you'll respond.
But I know if I control it,
I'll continue to move on.

The nights feel long.
The days are short and sweet.
I'll feel fine if I just continue to eat.

Some days feel normal.
Some feel stressed.
But living with diabetes
Could be both the worst and the best.

Calia, 17

Scary Shots

I really hated shots
And thought they were scary
Until I had to give them to myself.
I never thought I could.
It always felt like the needle
Was as big as my finger!
When I saw that they were only
About as big around as a thread
I was happy.

Shots aren't as scary anymore
Now that I have to take them everyday.

Larissa, 15

Promises

I promise to:
Keep my body healthy,
And keep my carbs counted,
And watch my blood sugar.

And the last thing I promise
Is to help find a cure.

Find a cure!

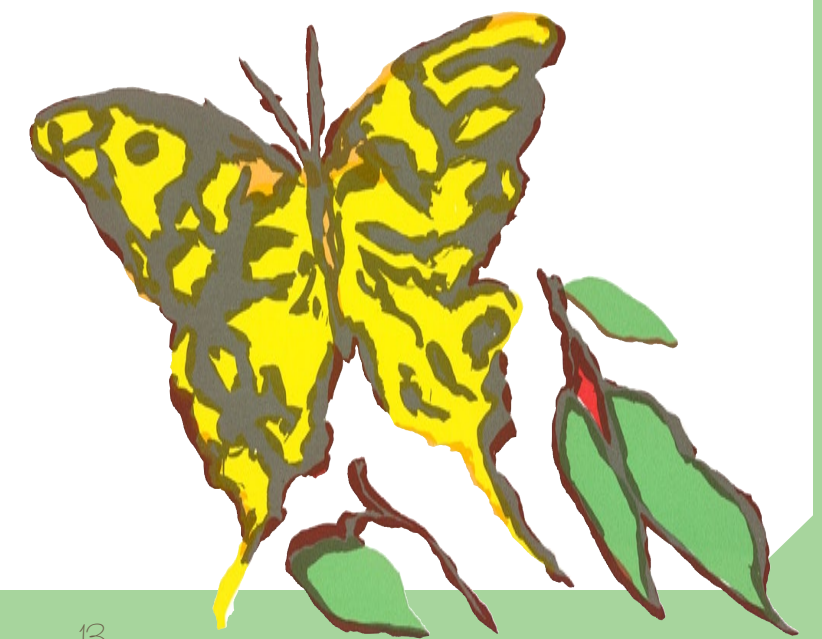
Madison

My Brother Having Diabetes & Me Helping

If I could help my brother
I would feed him
And sleep with him
When he gets scared.
Even when the power goes off
I would go in the room with him
So he wouldn't be scared.

I would take care of my brother's diabetes
By doing what he says.
I would help keep his blood sugar healthy.
I would help him not get stressed out.

Morgan, 7, sibling





Feelings on Diabetes

Mad. Sad. Glad.
It all started with Dad.
He took me to the doctor.
She was sort of like a proctor.
She looked over at me.
It was easy to see
I had diabetes.

She told us to take a bag.
That made me sag.
I was going to the hospital.
It wasn't like playing ball.
I was scared and frightened.
I wasn't enlightened.
The sound of keytone
Was not like an ice cream cone.
I was in my own little zone.

Jordan, 10

Sad Poem

I poke my fingers
To check my sugar.

I have to take shots
Before I eat.

I'm tired of all this.
I wish it was easier.

I can't go to my friends' houses.
They don't know what to do.

I wake up every night at 3:00 a.m.
To check my sugar.

I wish it would all end.

Josh

It Will Be All Right

I worry about my sister when her sugar is low.
She has a meter and a shot
To save her from feeling bad.
And when she takes the shot,
It will be all right.

I imagine sometimes: what if I
Had to take a shot?
I think it would hurt.
But she is brave.
I'm glad she's not scared
Of the shot, and that she has
Mom, me, and Dad and Cameron
And Vanderbilt
To help.

Carina, 14, sibling

I'm Feeling Whoosy

Colton: "Mom! I'm feeling whoosy!"

Mom: "OK, come in then."

Colton: "I'm feeling shaky and I'm losing feeling in my legs!"

Mom: "Hurry!"

Dad: "What happened?"

Mom: "Is that Daddy?"

Colton: "Yep."

Mom: "Just come in."

Colton, 8



Do I Have It?

Roses are red,
Violets are blue.
Diabetes affects a few.

I don't feel like I have it.
But fingerpricks and shots
Are what I get!

David, 8



The Way I Feel About Diabetes?

The way I feel?
The way I feel about diabetes?
The way I feel is like it ain't even real!
I never thought I would get diabetes.
I'm a fifteen year old girl
Trapped in and out
Of the hospital world.
I wish it was fake
So I could take all the hate
Out of my mind.
I joke about it,
Trying not to cry about it.
Emotions run through my mind.
I wish I could lay around for a long period of
time.
To be a teen girl like me with diabetes –
It's hard. I just wanna go and escape my life.
Being young with diabetes, it's kinda hard.
You can't enjoy sweets, and half the time
You feel so, so weak.
I wish I could run and hide
And escape all the feelings I have built inside.

Jakiya, 15

In My Binder

I keep my blood sugar numbers
In my binder.

I keep how much insulin
I take in my binder.

I have to put the time when I take it
In the blanks in my binder.

I have my own little log in my binder
To write down my carbs, blood sugar, & insulin.

I have to check my blood sugar
Six times a day
And write it in my binder.

I have to take insulin
Four times a day
And write it in my binder.

It's hard to have diabetes
Because it's hard to remember
To check my blood sugar
Six times a day
(& write it in my binder),
And take my insulin four times a day
(& write it in my binder),
And to count up my carbs
(& write it in my binder).

Sometimes I forget to check my blood sugar
before meals.
And sometimes I forget to take my insulin
after meals.
So – there are a lot of blanks in my binder!

Janie, 12

Pricks

I don't like pricks
Because they hurt my finger.
Pricks are icky.
Pricks are messy.
And I give them to myself!

Jared, 8

