



## AMAZING ACTS OF KINDNESS

How Having Diabetes  
Opens the Door

“*Having diabetes has opened the door for people to be kind to me, and for me to accept their kindness and be amazed by it.*”

There's no doubt diabetes changed the way many people react toward me. Although I was surprised when so many people started telling me what to do and what not to do, there was another reaction that shocked me even more: genuine, from-the-heart kindness.

### THE DOCTOR AT TOIYABE

The amazing acts of kindness started with my doctor, Steven Levesque. I've mentioned it before. His words and actions were so critical. He treated me like a loving parent treats an innocent, scared child. He closed the exam room

door. He gave me hope. He gave me words to cling to at the beginning of my new life with diabetes, words that I hear to this day: “Your diabetes does not have to be like your mother’s or anyone else’s. You can make something good out of having diabetes.”

The Creator was looking out for me by giving me Dr. Levesque as the person to set the stage for my life with diabetes. I always knew Dr. Levesque was competent. But until that day, I didn’t know of his huge capacity for kindness and empathy. He said the perfect words. He closed the door. He saw me and was there in the room with me.

*He closed the door and let  
me cry. He gave me his time.  
What a wonderful gift.*

Dr. Levesque was loved by many, and I can see why. He died early in life, in a rock climbing accident. At his memorial there was a picture of him with his beloved mountains in the background: not a big man, slender, dark-haired and handsome. He had just turned around to look over his shoulder to face the camera. He was smiling big.

Many people attended the memorial. It was held at a huge church. People of all ages, Native people, rock climbers and health staff were there. His beautiful family was there; he left behind his wife and young children.

Bob played the flute. Many people spoke about Dr. Levesque’s kindness. I told of how he let me speak, let me

voice my fears about diabetes. “He closed the door and let me cry. He gave me his time.” What a wonderful gift.

He was known simply as, “The Doctor at Toiyabe.” I believe he was put here on earth to spread enlightenment, to show us the way. He showed us how to rise above job descriptions. He was never just doing his job. He was touching hearts with his kindness.


#### **MY HUSBAND BOB**

The second person to show me amazing kindness was my husband, Bob. When he drove me home from the clinic, we didn’t talk. Bob broke the silence by saying, “Whatever you have to do, I’ll do, too.” When we got home, he calmly went through the kitchen cupboards and threw away the junk food.




Bob's acts of kindness go on and on. During the first two difficult years, Bob walked with me. On his days off of work, he went to diabetes support group meetings with me. I brought back stacks of diabetes care booklets about foot care, eye care, kidney care. I was too scared to read them. Bob read every page. Because he was brave enough to read them, I then read them. Together, we saw how serious it is to have diabetes.

And during the first two years when my blood sugar was going up and down, and I was moody, depressed and tired, he took on extra chores. He hung the laundry. He didn't do it according to my high laundry standards. I hang the clothes inside-out, so tight a coin will bounce off a strung undershirt. But I kept my mouth shut, and I was grateful.



*He started doing more grocery shopping. He read labels to check fat, sugar and sodium content.*



For many months, I felt nauseated and lost my appetite. Bob tried to get me to eat more. He took over the cooking. He made scrambled eggs. To get me to eat them, he would top them with a spoonful of salsa and put a parsley sprig artfully next to the eggs. The red and green really complimented the yellow of the eggs! Even if I had only a forkful of the eggs, I felt like I got a full serving of love.

He started doing more grocery shopping. He read labels, to check fat, sugar and sodium content. When he came home and unpacked the bags, he held up cans and said, "This one has no added sugar." I read between the label lines. Bob wanted me to be healthy and live long. Bob really cared about me.

**HE DID WHAT HE PROMISED**

He kept his promise. He did what I had to do. He was a carved-in-stone meat-and-potatoes guy. So much so that, before I had diabetes, he didn't know broccoli could be eaten raw! A few months after I was diagnosed, Bob was joining me at meals that included raw vegetable sticks and yogurt! He still can't eat tofu, though.

Because Bob took on many of my chores, it freed me up to do things I needed to do to take care of my diabetes. First I started attending diabetes workshops. Then I started traveling to diabetes wellness conferences. I even took time to study Pilates. I traveled to San Francisco and was certified as a Pilates instructor.

During one of these trips, a Native woman asked me, "Who is going to take care of Bob? Who is going to feed Bob?" My mind went straight to Bob. I knew he was at home, maybe scooping up a spoonful of yogurt, looking out the window at the laundry that was flapping in the wind, right-side out. Bob was okay. I didn't feel any guilt by taking time for myself. I felt his constant love and support, carried by the wind, to wherever I needed to go.

THE KINDNESS OF GINA'S ACTIONS

Animals can sense a kind heart, at times better than humans. Maybe that's why you don't often see my younger sister, Gina, without an animal by her side. A typical sight on TuSu Lane is Gina walking around her home, leading her horse, Gabelon, her cat, Mike Jones, tagging along at her heels.

Gina's true kindness was able to emerge after she went through rehab. She has always been tough as nails. She can mend a fence and stack hay bales. She drives like a trucker and splits wood like a logger. Gina doesn't worry about having manicured nails. Her hands are usually covered up by work gloves.

After going through rehab, Gina's true kindness, the kindness hidden in her heart by alcohol, was able to shine. She is not very vocal. She has never said, "I will support you with your diabetes in any way that you need." But that is exactly what she does. She never judges me or tries to control what



I do. She never tells me I should not eat something. At the same time, I think she is watching me because she cares.

At birthday parties, I usually accept a small piece of cake and fiddle with it for awhile. I break it up on my plate. I scrape off the frosting. I might have one or two bites. I have noticed Gina watching me. She never says, "Don't eat that!" Sometimes I wonder what she would do if I put a huge forkful of frosting in my mouth. I might do it someday to see her reaction! But I think she's keeping an eye on me because she cares. And I also think she is watching me because she, too, is eating less sugar.

*She has never said, "I will support you with your diabetes in any way that you need." But that is exactly what she does.*

Gina and I are both on paths of wellness. She knows diabetes is not just my concern. It is something that her entire family needs to know about. Maybe that's why she isn't judgmental. Maybe that's why she has changed her family's eating habits. When Gina says, "We're having chicken salad for dinner tonight," it's just a simple statement. But it shows me that she supports what I'm doing and is doing it, too.

Gina's kindness is all about simple statements coupled with action. She shows up at my wellness activities, no matter how busy she is. She might stay only a minute, to drop off some food or help me clean up. She is there when I need an extra hand or just a friendly face. She doesn't have to say

a word. She looks me in the eye, and I know we are in this together.

#### THE KINDNESS OF NURSE JEANNIE

I have also been amazed by the kindness of health staff. I know they are doing their jobs and that they are just people. They can have bad days. But so many of them are kind and smiling, day after day!

Jeannie is a nurse who is always smiling. Her kindness to me extends beyond her natural smile. Most recently her kindness was shown in a simple sentence: “Barbara, we’re starting a Frisbee team, and we need you on it!”

Now for someone who does not have diabetes, this invitation might not seem so special. But for me, it spoke volumes. It said that I was a normal person. It said that when Jeannie looks at me, she does not see a big, flashing sign that says, “Caution! This person has diabetes!”

She has never told me this, but I believe Jeannie sees diabetes as a bump in the road. Every person has some bumps in the roads of their lives. We have to get over them and continue on. We have to not look at them as Great Walls of China. So when Jeannie or any of the other health staff say, “Barbara, join the Frisbee team!” what they are really saying is that I have no limitations. I am not defined by having diabetes. I am normal and able.

By the way, I am thinking of joining the Frisbee team!


#### COCO AND FRANCINE’S HUGE ACT OF KINDNESS

Sometimes the act of kindness is so great, it’s a blessing you can replay in your mind over and over to bring you peace.


Once I needed an operation that required general anesthesia. If you have diabetes, any health problem seems to get magnified. Sometimes your blood sugar can go way up or way down. So I didn’t have only the surgery to worry about. I was worried about my blood sugar. And more than that, I was terrified by the anesthesia. Pain medication makes me go nuts. I become terribly paranoid. My entire body starts itching. The walls start closing in on me.

As I was being prepared for surgery, I told my non-Indian nurses, Coco and Francine, of my fears.

What happened after the surgery is like a dream. As I was waking up in my hospital room, I smelled sage. I heard Paiute singing and felt a gentle wave of sage waft over my head, shoulders, stomach, legs. I felt someone stroking my hair, singing a Paiute song in a gentle whisper. Intermingled with the song were the words, “You’re going to be okay. You’re going to be okay.”



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The pain medication usually takes me out of my body into a wild world of fear. But the sage and the song kept me in my body. They re-awakened cells in me that knew of the time when I was a little girl and almost died. The cells recalled the

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medicine man burning sage and praying over me. I was okay then, and I would be okay now.

Coco and Francine's sage and song brought me back to my core. It was the first time I didn't react badly to pain medication. Because of their amazing act of kindness, their honoring of who I am as a Native person, I slept peacefully.

### **KINDNESS OPENS THE DOOR TO MORE KINDNESS**

Having diabetes has opened the door for people to be kind to me, for me to accept their kindness and be amazed by it. I am forever deeply connected to Dr. Levesque, Bob, Gina, Jeannie, Coco and Francine. I am forever thankful for their gifts of kindness.

Because of their generous acts, another door is open: a door for me to become a kinder, more generous person.



## *7: Amazing Acts of Kindness*

Acts of kindness are examples of how to treat people, those you are related to, those you work with, those you might just pass in a hallway.

The door is open for me to be more compassionate, stronger, more patient, more nurturing. The door is open for me to follow these examples of kindness.

### **THERE WILL ALWAYS BE CHANCES TO GIVE KINDNESS**

Like Bob stepping up to the plate when I needed him most, I recently have been given the opportunity to show some kindness and compassion.

Bob twisted his knee and couldn't walk without crutches. Suddenly there was a dramatic shift in who cares for whom, in who does what for whom. Suddenly along with a hundred other things, Bob needed me to do something I had never done before: start a car.

It's a long story, but I have never learned to drive. So when Bob was on crutches, the act of hobbling outside to start the car to warm it up was a huge effort for him. I woke up early to make him coffee and breakfast and faced the real test, the real payback time: I had to walk out to our driveway and start his car.

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How exactly is that done? Do I push the key in? Do I turn it clockwise or counterclockwise? Once it starts, do I hold it there for a second? I didn't want to do it. I was scared and nervous. But of course, I thought of all the things Bob had done for me to help me with diabetes. I thought of his flapping laundry. I thought of the parsley sprigs. I walked to the car, bravely flung the door open, put the key in and turned it. It started. I was overjoyed. I had helped Bob. I had started a car.

Receiving kindness goes hand-in-hand with giving kindness. It opens all sorts of doors to human connection. It provides endless opportunities for the giver to be more compassionate, stronger, braver, more patient. It provides opportunities for the receiver to be more graceful, more humble, less picky, less controlling. There will always be chances to be the givers and the receivers. We are always switching roles.

### THE AMAZING BEAUTY OF KINDNESS

A while ago, Bob showed me another kindness. He started giving me gifts of lip gloss and nail polish. He used to give me gifts of food. Some weren't the best for controlling my blood sugar. Now he says, "I have something in my pocket for you." He pulls out a cherry flavored lip gloss or a bottle of hot pink nail polish.

That's what kindness is all about. Kindness does not have to be large or ribbon-wrapped. It is often small, the size of a lip gloss.

## *7: Amazing Acts of Kindness*

My having diabetes has allowed me to accumulate all sorts of kindnesses from countless numbers of people. When I'm feeling down or defeated, I gather up bunches of these thoughtful acts and gaze with wonder at them. These shining examples of human kindness are unexplainable and endless. I touch them to my heart and release them. They float skyward, illuminating the darkness with a million bursts of pure light.



## Wit & Wisdom

I asked myself:

What small or large kindnesses have I received? Did I receive them gracefully?

Is receiving kindness helping me? Am I becoming less picky? Am I becoming less controlling?

Is receiving kindness now preparing me for the future? Will I have a chance to repay kindness? How might I repay kindness?

