

## THE DIABETES EPIDEMIC: A LIFETIME OF SURVIVAL

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 Author: SHARON GINN  
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### Document Text

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Maureen Murray was just 12 when doctors finally figured out why she had spent most of the summer sick in bed: She had diabetes.

To the child, that felt like a death sentence.

She was told she would probably die young. She probably never would get pregnant, and if she did, she wouldn't carry a baby to term. She was terrified, and - since she knew no one else who had the disease - she felt terribly alone.

That was 53 years ago. Murray, a Brandon resident, has two grown children and a career.

Her Type I diabetes, formerly referred to as juvenile diabetes, is in check, though keeping it that way remains a huge inconvenience.

Remarkably, Murray is complication-free, which is rare for anyone who has been insulin dependent for so long. Indeed, living this long is a major accomplishment, according to researchers at the Joslin Diabetes Center in Boston. Murray is participating in center's study of more than 300 50-year Type I survivors, to figure out what factors have contributed to their longevity.

Murray credits her dedication to following the recommended medical, diet and exercise routines with keeping her otherwise healthy.

"I just always felt like I had to do the right thing," Murray explains.

Barbara Singer, one of the founders of the Diabetes Research Institute in Miami and a friend of Murray's, believes her "extraordinary positive attitude" has helped Murray immeasurably.

Murray wasn't always so positive. She says her family life was difficult: Her mother was an alcoholic, and Murray married young and delayed getting a job because she and her husband started a family right away.

Life changed when she was 43 and walked in to the Diabetes Research Institute. The institute gave Murray, then a Boca Raton resident, an insulin pump, a device programmed to deliver through a small tube beneath the skin doses of insulin at different times of the day. That relieves the patient of monitoring the clock or meals to administer the insulin shots.

But just as importantly for Murray, the institute staff also provided the first significant counseling and support.

"I went from total insecurity," Murray recalled in a recent interview, "to going on the pump, to having a part-time job."

Soon she was training others to use the pump, a job that she did for six years. She has worked continuously in the health care field. When she and her husband moved to Brandon nine years ago to be with their daughter and her family, Murray joined the H. Lee Moffitt Cancer Center, where she works in the case management department.

Counseling and advising others with diabetes remains one of Murray's favorite things to do. And the patients - and their

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"She's very upbeat," Singer said. "You can't help but be affected by that. Equally important, when you meet somebody that's had diabetes as long as she has and who doesn't have any complications, she really serves as an example - and sort of a beacon of hope."

Meanwhile, Murray is enthusiastic about trying the latest technology. In December, she started using a device called a continuous glucose monitor, which allows her to keep an eye on how well her insulin pump is regulating her blood sugar.

That has changed her life. But she still has to prick her finger up to seven times a day, to make sure the monitor is accurate.

She says she still has to carry too many electronic components and thinks medical science should be able to put everything into one device. But that isn't what she really wants.

"I'm waiting," she said firmly, "for the cure."

Sharon Ginn can be contacted at sharonlgin@yahoo.com or (813) 226-3394.

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**Abstract** (Document Summary)

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