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## Diabetes: The Birth of a Reader

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## **“Diabetes: The Birth of a Reader” by Meredith Oxley**

### **Instructor’s Notes**

Personal narratives are generally told from the first person point of view, which is exactly what Meredith Oxley does in her literacy narrative. But what would happen if Meredith told her story from another character’s point of view? What if she wrote from her mom’s perspective? Would the story still be true? If one of the reasons we write is to learn, what learning might occur if Meredith rewrote this story from her mom’s point of view? What if the story was written from the point of view of an inanimate object, perhaps from that of Meredith’s insulin syringe? Is that even a possibility?

### **Writer’s Biography**

Meredith Oxley is a junior Nursing major from Ohio. After her undergraduate studies she hopes to pursue a career as a diabetes educator because of her personal experience with type 1 diabetes. She is also fascinated by the liberal arts and enjoys reading classics in her spare time. Her hobbies include cooking, playing sports with friends, reading, and spending time with her family.

### **Diabetes: The Birth of a Reader**

On June 23, 2011, I went in for a checkup at the doctor’s office. I had been experiencing some odd physical signs: excessive tiredness, constant dehydration, and unnatural weight loss. Nothing greatly worried me; nevertheless, my mother wanted to make sure everything was alright. Instead of going home after my appointment like I, a healthy teenager, had expected, I was rushed to the emergency room. That day I was diagnosed with type 1 diabetes.

During the second half of the previous school year, I had experienced a lot of emotional stress, positive and negative; mostly negative. My grandfather passed away two days before my sixteenth birthday in January, I took a two week long trip to Europe in March,

I had been dealing with the breakup of a friendship at church, and I had to manage my devilishly heavy schoolwork load. Apparently, in addition to all these events, I was obviously experiencing symptoms of my diabetes the last few months of the school year. All that together within six months wore me out emotionally and physically.

On the day of my diagnosis, my mom and I sat in a little yellow room at my doctor's office, exotic animal photos ornamenting the walls and children's books filling the shelves beside our chairs. We waited for my pediatrician, Dr. Bockhorn, to come and hopefully give us an explanation for my unusual, unexplained symptoms. The tall, slender, smiling doctor came in and proceeded with her usual checkup procedure. As she was looking over my vital signs that the nurse had taken and examining my ears, nose, and throat, we chatted some. In our conversation, we touched on how emotionally depressed I had been that year with all the commotion and stress. By the end of our discussion, Dr. Bockhorn suggested that I seek counseling to help me become "stable" again. I firmly rejected this proposal in my mind and was overwhelmed by the thought of meeting with a counselor. I tried to deny this need, but all I could do was cry again as I had done so many times that year. Resorting to tears had become second nature to me in the past six months. After this conversation concluded, she gave me a cup and sent me off to the bathroom. I came back with the specimen to be tested. My mom and I were once again left alone in the room. It was quiet except for the almost whispered dialogue between the two of us. With tears in my eyes and a stuffy nose, I said, "Mom, I don't want to do anything this summer." It wasn't long until Dr. Bockhorn returned. She came in, looked me in the eye, and directly said, "I've found glucose in your urine, and I suggest that you go to the emergency room immediately." I had no idea what this meant at the time because I was so flustered. I turned to Mom, and silently asked, "What?" She responded with a shocked expression on her face, but still calmly said, "It means you might have diabetes."

I cried the whole ride to the hospital. My eyes burned at this point. Looking out the window, I could see the sun shining in the bright blue sky and people walking down the streets. It was a lovely day, and I had originally planned to enjoy it like a normal teenager would have. I even considered getting a group of friends together

to go to the neighborhood pool and play some pickup basketball at the park nearby. Instead, I was on my way to the emergency room because my blood sugar was over 700 milliliters per deciliter. In the car I told Mom again, this time with sobs in between words, “I don’t want to do anything this summer. No camps, no activities. Nothing.” She looked at me and reassuringly said that it was okay. I was free to do absolutely nothing.

We arrived at the hospital, and I received the first of my many insulin injections. I don’t remember much about those first three or four hours in the emergency room. All I do recall is lying on this extremely flat bed with few covers. My mom sat on my left in a chair, speaking to me softly as I cried the hardest I have ever cried. Many different nurses and doctors came to me during that time, informing us on the latest updates and blood sugar levels. During those long hours in the ER, my pastor came to visit. This big, tall man, wearing his Texas Longhorn shirt, sat down and prayed over me.

Finally, I was admitted to the hospital, and we all got settled into our room. The situation was not an ideal one. I had to spend the night in this cramped hospital room wearing that awful thin gown with people coming in periodically to prick my finger and stab me with a needle. To add to my pleasures, I was put in the only room on that floor that had double occupancy. A dark blue curtain divided the two sides of the room. Even though my family did not interact with the other family and we did not see each other, it was just another annoyance to the whole event. Not only did the poor group on the other side have to put up with my family, but my family and I had to listen to their choices in TV shows. At one point we could overhear the loud shouting of people on that obnoxious *Maury* show. It was a nightmare. It felt to me like everything was spinning and spinning, and all I wanted was stillness and quiet.

During my time at the hospital, many friends came to visit me. It was heartening to see how many people cared and wanted to encourage me during this troubling time. A number of them even brought me gifts or items of theirs to entertain me. Kevin and Victoria, my youth pastor and his wife, also came to visit. They brought a great variety of things to keep me occupied while sitting in this overcrowded, plain little hospital room for hours on end. Victoria specifically brought me her own collection of Jane Austen’s novels. This item will always stand out in my memory because it sparked a

wonderful and powerful new passion within me that summer.

I never had the time to read any of the books while at the hospital because thankfully I was released after one day. In that one day, I was bombarded with a multitude of information about this new diagnosis of type 1 diabetes. Then I was sent home having to put all this information into practice immediately. I had to learn and live a completely new lifestyle. Despite this overwhelming experience, I knew my summer was now free for me to do anything I wanted. I did not sign up for any camps; I was not going to do summer reading homework. I was going to simply sit down on my couch at home and read this borrowed book: *Pride and Prejudice*.

It was about the time when my family and I returned home from the hospital that my eyesight started deteriorating. For about two weeks or more, my whole vision was fuzzy. The doctors said it probably resulted from my dramatic blood sugar change. My glucose levels were so high for so long that my body had adjusted to the new level. Now that the levels were back down to normal, my body had to readapt which caused this strange blurriness of vision. I could still see people, but it was like I was wearing glasses with horribly unclear lenses. Basically, I couldn't read anything. So, my plan to read for relaxation did not work out as I had intended. However, I was firmly determined to get through this book. I ended up buying a set of Jane Austen's novels on CD. Every time my mom and I were in the car together, we would listen to the CD, hearing the different characters being played out through different voices. I was finally able to "read" like I wanted.

After about two weeks, my eyesight came back to me—clear once again. I began to actually read the pages of this Jane Austen book, soaking in the words of the story. By the end of the book, I was in love. I realized how enjoyable reading could be. Back in elementary school, I read a lot, but I lost this passion for reading by my middle school years. Up until my diagnosis, I had not really thought much about reading for fun. But, there was something about all the craziness that was going on that called me back to it. All I had wanted to do for weeks now was read. And so that is what I did. Next, I picked up *Sense and Sensibility*. It wasn't long until I finished that one and picked up another one. This progression went on all summer long. My daily position consisted of me sitting on my soft, light brown couch in the reclined position, a red fleece blanket

covering my legs, the dogs barking in the backyard, and the sun shining in through the window. By the end of that summer, I had read all six of Austen's novels, and I still craved more.

Looking back on that summer, I remember all those raw emotions from my diagnosis: stress, shock, fear, anger, confusion. By far, it was the hardest event that I have experienced, but it has also been one of the most beneficial. Because of my diabetes, I have acquired many new passions, and I have been molded into the person I am today. I appreciate the work of authors far more than I would have without that stressful year in 2011. Because of these books I read, I finally received the rest I needed. Because of the literature, I dealt with my life changes in a peaceful manner. Even though that summer was a transition time, learning to manage my blood sugar every moment of each day, I had my fictional companions and their worlds in which they lived. I could simply drift away into these imaginary realms when needed, and I did.

Because of that doctor's appointment, I discovered my diabetes. Because of my diabetes, I discovered my beloved books. For me, the classic Jane Austen became my companion and comforter that hectic summer. Since my encounter with her, I've come to know and love many others, finding pleasure in their works, seeking their company when I am feeling down. Reflecting back on that summer, I am thankful for that trial of being diagnosed, because without it, I may never have come to love and appreciate books as I do now.