

Diabetes Health

Diabetes Heroes Come In All Ages

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Last summer, I led the third annual swim-run biathlon for the Barton Center for [Diabetes Education](#), which hosts two Massachusetts [camps](#) for children with [type 1](#)-Camp Joslin for boys and Camp Clara Barton for girls. It was at Camp Joslin that I met a memorable eight-year-old boy who exemplifies what being a diabetes hero is all about. I'll call him "Adam."

I spent a lot of time at both camps, speaking, interacting with the kids, and generally acting like a camper. The evening before the biathlon, I spoke at Camp Joslin just after [dinner](#). It was a family-style meal of veggies, meats, and bread, but the [carbohydrates](#) in every serving had been carefully measured so that the campers could dose the right amount of [insulin](#). When a hundred rowdy boys are involved, the systematic process of serving a meal and cleaning up is itself impressive. Insulin was flowing, [blood sugars](#) were being checked, and the boys were clearing and stacking the dirty dishes and wiping down the tables. Their moms would have been astounded.

As I talked about racing the Ironman triathlon with [type 1 diabetes](#), I noticed the attentive eyes of one young boy-Adam. Later on, I asked him, "Are you doing the biathlon tomorrow?" He said that he didn't know, and he asked me how long the swim was. I could tell that he was nervous about the idea. "You can do it," I said. "I'll be out there with you." He took a deep breath, looking unconvinced, so we talked a little about sports, diabetes, and [insulin pumps](#). Why does our blood sugar sometimes go high and we can't explain why? How can it go low without our knowing? As we talked, Adam slowly grew more comfortable.

The next morning, over a hundred boys and girls were lined up on the dock, awaiting their turn to jump into the lake for the quarter-mile swim. As I walked toward the lake, I saw Adam in the line, nervous and full of pre-race anxiety. "You can do it," I said quietly as I passed. I swam

several hundred yards out on the course, treading water and swimming back and forth, watching dozens of kids approach and pass. It was a challenge for them all. Finally, I spotted Adam. He was working hard, determined to get around the last buoy and head back to the dock. "Great job!" I yelled to him. I think it surprised him to see me out there, bobbing in the water right next to him, but he seemed to gain a bit of confidence.

I stayed in the lake until most of the campers had finished the swim, then sped to the transition area for the run course. Dripping campers were coming out of the lake, checking their blood sugar, and putting on shoes to run the course, excitement and adrenaline in them all. I ran the course with dozens of them, watching them cross the finish line with excited smiles, confident that they had conquered diabetes that day.

Then, around the far turn, I saw Adam. I caught up to him as we headed for the finish line. "I knew you could do it," I said as we both ran toward the crowd. He was exhausted, grimacing and with sweat pouring from his brow, but he sprinted as hard as he could. Music was playing, and the campers were cheering each other. I stopped and watched him run the final meters down the finishing chute. And then, from across the finish line, with his cabin mates around him, he looked out at me in the distance and waved, smiling.

"I did it," he mouthed.

Yes, you did, Adam. I knew you could. You're my hero.