

Dealing with Diabetes

Texans Sheena Grote and James Hallman share a disease and a belief that it won't limit their life.

by Lori Maude



Sheena Grote introduces her heifer to kids at a diabetic day camp in Fort Worth.

They don't act different than other kids or look different either. They share an interest in Angus cattle and both are Texas Junior Angus Association members.

Sheena Grote and James Hallman have something else in common—both are diabetic.

The Diagnosis

Sheena Grote found out she had diabetes when she was eight years old. Her mom noticed some of the symptoms over Christmas vacation from school, but never really thought about it being diabetes. Sheena continued to be tired and showed other symptoms into February. Her mom knew something wasn't right, so she took Sheena to the doctor.

"I went to the doctor and missed a whole day of school," says Sheena. "The worst part was catching up on all the school work."

The results showed Sheena had juvenile diabetes, which meant her pancreas wasn't producing any insulin. Insulin is a hormone produced to maintain the sugar level in the blood.

Usually diabetics under the age of 40 have the juvenile type. People older than

40 before they get diabetes have the adult onset type. The adult onset type can be controlled with diet and medicine versus the juvenile type that requires the diabetic to take insulin shots.

If the blood sugar level isn't closely watched it can get too high and dehydration or worse yet, a coma, may occur.

Life with Diabetes

Having diabetes hasn't slowed Sheena's busy lifestyle. Sheena's favorite pastime is showing her cattle. In her spare time she plays basketball and enjoys swimming with her friends.

"During the summer I'm so active that I have to eat all the time," says Sheena. She felt like she ate a "whole bunch" during the National Junior Show to keep up with her constant activity and socializing.

When things get busy in the Grote house, it's a bit tougher to monitor Sheena's blood sugar level all of the time, but they manage to do it at least once a day. Sheena says it was really hard to keep up with testing her blood sugar level during the national show.

"We did it (blood sugar monitoring) a couple of times and we just now started

doing it every day since we got home," says Sheena.

Her mom, Cathy, says once a day is all that is necessary, unless they are changing her insulin dosage and then they monitor the blood sugar level more closely. During an insulin change they may test Sheena's level four times a day.

Sheena, who will be an 8th grader this fall, says she sometimes likes her blood sugar level lower, so she can eat more when she feels like it. With all of her activities she says she doesn't have much trouble with high blood sugar.

Sheena laughs about traveling to shows with one of her cousins. He doesn't like to stop and take breaks, but when Sheena is with him he has to stop for snack breaks.

"Most people like to travel with me because they know they'll get to stop," says Sheena.

Sheena describes herself as an outgoing person who likes to meet new people. She doesn't let her diabetes slow her down.

Pat Grote, Texas Junior Angus Association advisor, says Sheena is "smart as a whip and talented." Pat attributes much of Sheena's attitude to her parents, Kelcey and Cathy, who don't

treat Sheena any different than any other kid her age.

Knowing You're Not The Only One

Unlike Sheena, who was younger when diagnosed, James Hallman didn't find out he had diabetes until May 1991. James was 13 years old. He had collapsed and was rushed to the hospital. It was during his hospital stay that doctors diagnosed him with juvenile diabetes.

When James first found out he was diabetic, he really didn't know much about the disease. But during his two day hospital stay he learned about his disease and how to handle it.

"I really didn't know what it meant or anything. They just put me in the hospital for a couple of days and taught me how to give the shots. It really didn't bother me at all," says James.

His parents were worried at first, until they found out it (the diabetes) really wasn't "that big a deal." It was easier to deal with once he met other kids with diabetes and talked to them, says James. He talked to Sheena about being diabetic after he found out she was also and it helped him cope with his own diabetes.

His mom, Kathy, says James has done extremely well adjusting to the diabetes. "He doesn't complain and he tries to find something good in every situation," says Kathy.

Being diabetic doesn't interfere with this NJAA member's activities. He just has to remember to eat a snack when he is doing a lot of work.

When asked to describe himself James humbly responds, "These are the kind of things that I let my mother fill out. She knows this kind of stuff."

James describes himself as outgoing and liking outdoor activities. His mother on the other hand went into greater depth when describing her son.

"James is a well-rounded person. He is creative and has a great imagination.



Diabetics Sheena Grote and James Hallman added a unique touch to the day's activities.

He's independent, but yet he's sensitive and he's very good with his little sister Laura Beth. James has a temper, but most of the time he's pretty easy going," says his mom.

Pat Grote describes James as "very grown up."

"I think that maturity helped him handle the diabetes as well as he did," she adds.

James enjoys hunting, fishing, playing in the school band and reading, as well as showing his cattle.

Future plans include showing cattle and to keep improving his grooming and showing skills. He has gone to Oklahoma for the "Be a Champ" fitting and showing seminar for two years. He wants to get more involved in other contests at the national level, especially the speech contest.

"The diabetes really hasn't changed things much," says James.

Sharing a Part of Themselves

Both Sheena and James had a chance in June to share their active lifestyles and their show heifers with other diabetic youngsters. They attended a diabetic day camp in Fort Worth for children ages three to seven. Many of the kids at the camp had never seen a heifer or any livestock up close.

It all started when Sheena's doctor asked if she would be willing to go to the camp and show one of her heifers to the

group. The Grotes knew James also had diabetes and thought he might be interested in going to the camp with Sheena.

After coordinating details with the camp supervisors, James and Sheena each took one of their heifers and spent a day at the camp answering questions from the camp participants.

The questions amused both James and Sheena.

"They asked what they eat, if it was a boy or a girl, what its name was and stuff like that," says James. "The questions

sounded kind of dumb to me, because I've always known that kind of stuff, but if I didn't know anything about cattle, like those kids from the city, those are the same kind of questions I would have asked."

Sheena laughed when one little girl asked if she milked her heifer and Sheena thought to herself, "There's nothing there to milk!"

Both Sheena and James found the camp interesting and fun. They got a chance to share an important part of their lifestyle with the camp participants and show those kids that diabetes hasn't limited their activities.

Diabetes is a controllable disease, but it doesn't have to control a person's life. Sheena Grote and James Hallman deal with the same problems, but both have learned to roll with the punches each day throws. They have also gone the extra mile to share their experience with other youth and show that diabetes hasn't limited their activities.

Kathy Hallman says their specialist told James there are only three things diabetics can't be — they can't be in the armed forces, they can't be a pilot and they can't be an air traffic controller.

That leaves a whole world of opportunities for James, Sheena and others who have diabetes.

