

Life without Pockets

CHRIS TOAVS

A collection of poems that attempt to describe the virtually indescribable emotions of living with diabetes. The name comes from the first few years after my diagnosis when I used an insulin pump. As a woman, my pant pockets were either too shallow or nonexistent to house my pump. Instead, I used a clip that fashioned my pump like pager on my waist displaying my diabetes to the world.

“Life without Pockets” is twofold: it captures my struggles managing my diabetes as well as my battle with health care systems as both a person living with a non-communicable disease and a woman. Both categories I fall into are often ignored and not given credence. My relationship with diabetes is unique and confusing—a tension many people may share. I write from a perspective of living with type 1 diabetes from a young age but that is not restrictive in the collection’s audience. I hope these poems offer connection, validation, anger, sadness, peace, and a myriad of emotions that exemplify the multitudes contained within any person living with diabetes.

I have no pockets
So I hold everything with my feeble frail hands
Fingers laden with tiny holes, scabs that take far too long to heal, and scars from failing in this balancing act
Pens and needles sprinting for the gaps between
I just want pockets to carry these things

Perhaps I'll learn to sow
So to relieve my tired aching hands
And construct a place for me in this world that offers me space and respite; Wouldn't that be wonderful?
Things in pockets, hands free—
I could let go and be

I hate sweets at midnight
And cookie crumbs in my sheets

I hate turning on a screen
And counting the hours I have left to sleep

I hate the alarm that sounds death
So piercingly neat

Sometimes I pretend to welcome the end
Because I'm tired of eating chocolate in bed

I often feel my body betrayed me
And left me to fend
Off demons and hell
Is this some sick test
That I must endure
Without rest or else
Succumb to glucose folly?
Where is the understanding
Where is the cause
Where is my cure
My cure
Is still 5 years out
Ah please someone help

PLEASE
TOAVS

Well I forgot to give myself a shot
And the numbers are rising
Along with it my anxiety and anger
"Work fast" I repeat
As I increase the dial
I can't bear going over high numbers
I don't want to sit there
Contemplating my health
Because I just wanted to be normal
To see food instead of math
To not think of units and carbs, sliding scales and ratios
But that is not the life I live
I must attend to each fluctuation
Every second that ticks on the clock

But I will be kind
And not let numbers count against me
Or define my ability to care for myself
I'm on this clock infinitely and without pause
So I will be kind if I forget a shot

The last vial
Sits on the shelf
A life sentence

That's resets the clock
For limited time

And what cruel torture it is

To count seconds in insulin units

My doctor should listen
When I raise concerns
My doctor should care
When I speak my needs

My blood sugar should listen
When I calculate meticulously
My blood sugar should care
To the effort I make

And sometimes they do.

I'M SPEAKING
TOAVS

The optometrist asked me,
“When were you diagnosed?”
I responded with day, month, and year.
“Oh, I like you!” she said
Impressed with my precision.

I should accept such praise—
But it stung for some reason.
Like the first bite of food
That burns your mouth from its heat.

Of course I remember my diagnosis date
Of course I can tell you without pause
Of course—
It’s the very day that altered my life,
That replaced sugar with glucose,
Food with carbs,
Sleep with alarms,
Peace with chaos.

What bliss it would be to live
without recalling that day.
Without anxiety of high blood sugar,
Low blood sugar,
Ketones,
DKA,
Diabetic retinopathy,
Nerve damage,
Organ failure,
Foot infections,
Stroke,
More infections,
Heart disease—
The list is long
And oh so near.

Yet still, I must persevere.
So I will repeat the date with heed and rigor
Because that is what’s demanded of me.

I know I am different
But wow am I strong
To see life in this pain and toil
And smile at you all the same

A WEIRD SUBLIME
TOAVS