

50 SECRETS

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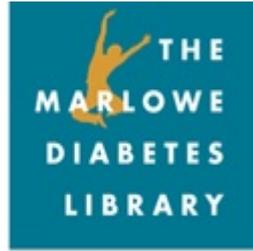
LONGEST LIVING PEOPLE



WITH **DIABETES**

SHERI R. COLBERG, PhD, and
STEVEN V. EDELMAN, MD

50 SECRETS



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LONGEST LIVING PEOPLE

WITH DIABETES

Praise for *50 Secrets of the Longest Living People with Diabetes*

“Inspirational—and practical. A must read that can make a difference in your life.”

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“*50 Secrets of the Longest Living People with Diabetes* has our hearty recommendation for the inspiration it brings to everyone who desires a long and healthy life.”

—John Walsh, P.A., C.D.E., and Ruth Roberts, M.A.,
authors of *Pumping Insulin* (4th edition), other diabetes books,
and www.diabetesnet.com

“The advice that Sheri Colberg and Steven Edelman offer is excellent and will help everyone living with diabetes to live a better, healthier, and longer life . . . Much of their guidance would be well heeded by everyone, not just people with diabetes.”

—Jeff Hitchcock, *Children with Diabetes*

“Information about the inspiring individuals with diabetes was woven in with the fifty great secrets in a very entertaining and educational way. I endorse *50 Secrets of the Longest Living People with Diabetes* to teach, train, and coach those of us with diabetes. ”

—Paula Harper, R.N., C.D.E., founder and president,
Diabetes Exercise & Sports Association

“Most books tell you what the authors think you *should* be doing about your diabetes. *50 Secrets of the World’s Longest Living People with Diabetes* tells you what long-lived people with diabetes actually *are* doing about their diabetes . . . Their stories are inspiring as well as instructive.”

—Gretchen Becker, author,
The First Year®—*Type 2 Diabetes and Prediabetes*

“While at the University of Michigan we developed the notion of ‘patient empowerment’ and ‘taking control,’ which Sheri Colberg and Steven Edelman have captured in a most elegant manner with case histories of people who have thrived for many years despite having diabetes. There is no greater eloquence than that expressed by patients themselves. ”

—Aaron Vinik, M.D., Ph.D., director,
Strelitz Diabetes Research Center

“Camaraderie is truly what soothes the diabetic breast. As I’m reading read through this book, my neck is getting tired from the constant nodding and saying ‘Yes! Yes! This is what it’s all about!’ Who knows more about living successfully with diabetes than the people who have done it for so many years. After I’ve soaked up every word, I might be willing to share it with my patients.”

—Gary Scheiner, C.D.E., author, *Think Like a Pancreas* and *The Ultimate Guide to Accurate Carb Counting*

“*50 Secrets of the Longest Living People with Diabetes* is full of inspiring examples. Sheri Colberg’s early belief that she would suffer ‘inevitable’ consequences of her diabetes struck a particularly strong chord with me . . . Indeed, diabetes is treatable and is more and more treatable all the time, while many other chronic diseases are not. This is another of the excellent and positive points that these two authors make throughout this important book.”

—David Mendosa, coauthor, *The New Glucose Revolution What Makes My Blood Glucose Go Up . . . and Down?*, and author, *Losing Weight with Your Diabetes Medication*

“Encouraging, informative, and easy to read . . . this is my kind of diabetes book! If nothing else, you’ll be delighted to discover how many of the secrets you’ve already mastered.”

—Amy Tenderich, journalist/blogger, www.diabetesmine.com, and coauthor, *Know Your Numbers, Outlive Your Diabetes*

“*50 Secrets of the Longest Living People with Diabetes* is the Can-Do-est diabetes book you’ll ever read.

Whatever your age, whatever your current physical and mental health, these vivid experiences of others who’ve successfully climbed the Diabetes Mountain will inspire you to get on top of the world yourself.”

—June Biermann and Barbara Toohey, authors, *The Diabetic’s Total Health and Happiness Book*

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

SHERI R. COLBERG, PHD, is an exercise physiologist and associate professor of exercise science at Old Dominion University in Norfolk, Virginia. Having earned a doctorate from the University of California, Berkeley, she specializes in research in diabetes and exercise. She continues to conduct extensive clinical research on diabetes and exercise, with funding from the American Diabetes Association and others. She has also authored myriad articles on exercise and diabetes, as well as three books: *The Diabetic Athlete*, *Diabetes-Free Kids*, and *The 7 Step Diabetes Fitness Plan*.

Dr. Colberg has almost 40 years of personal experience with type 1 diabetes. Diagnosed with diabetes at the age of 4 in 1968 in what she refers to as the “dark ages” of diabetes care (pre-home blood glucose monitoring), she has spent her life in pursuit of knowledge to allow her to live a healthy life with her disease. She resides in Virginia Beach with her husband and their three boys. An avid recreational exerciser, she enjoys swimming, biking, walking, tennis, weight training, hiking, and yard work, as well as playing with her three sons.

STEVEN V. EDELMAN, MD, an endocrinologist specializing in diabetes care, is a professor at the University of California, San Diego (UCSD) School of Medicine. He directs several programs there and at the VA Medical Center in San Diego. He earned his medical degree at the University of California, Davis School of Medicine, where he was valedictorian of his class, and he completed his internship and residency at UCLA, as well as some additional training during a fellowship at the Joslin Clinic in Boston, among other places.

Diagnosed with diabetes himself at the age of 15, Dr. Edelman has become a local and national leader in diabetes treatment, research, and education. He is founder and director of Taking Control of Your Diabetes (TCOYD), a national not-for-profit organization, as well as the primary author of two books, *Taking Control of Your Diabetes* (3rd edition) and *Diagnosis and Management of Type 2 Diabetes* (6th edition), and the coauthor of at least three more diabetes-related books. When not on the road lecturing and putting on more than ten TCOYD conferences annually, he resides in San Diego with his wife, Ingrid Kruse, a podiatrist who specializes in treatment of diabetic foot problems, and their two teenage daughters.

ALSO BY SHERI R. COLBERG, PHD

The Diabetic Athlete
The 7 Step Diabetes Fitness Plan
Diabetes-Free Kids
(with Mary Friesz)
The Science of Staying Young
(with John E. Morley)

ALSO BY STEVEN V. EDELMAN, MD

Taking Control of Your Diabetes (3rd Edition)
(with Irl B. Hirsch)
Diagnosis and Management of Type 2 Diabetes (7th Edition)
(with Robert R. Henry)
The Secrets of Living and Loving with Diabetes
(with Janis Roszler and William H. Polonsky)

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Designed by Maria E. Torres
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For all of the people with diabetes who need a helping hand,
but most of all for Ray Ochs,
my loving husband and supportive partner
in my own diabetes care
—SC

To my loving wife, Ingrid, and my two great kids,
Talia and Carina,
for their never-ending support of my efforts
to help people with diabetes
—SE

INTRODUCTION

FACING THE GHOSTS OF DIABETES PAST, PRESENT, AND FUTURE

Thank goodness that some things are in the past. For instance, one of us (Dr. Sheri Colberg) clearly remembers believing as a preteen that she was doomed to suffer a premature death from diabetic complications before finishing her high school years, at which point she would have already had type 1 diabetes for well over a decade (since the young age of 4). Now, over three decades later and a quarter century past her high school years, she is living well with diabetes, has given birth to three perfectly healthy sons, and has suffered only minor, treatable diabetes complications to date, despite living almost all of her life with the disease.

We consider ourselves the diabetic version of the ghosts of Christmas past, present, and future in Charles Dickens’s classic tale, *A Christmas Carol*. As was done for Ebenezer Scrooge, we and many other long-time diabetes survivors are going to help you understand your past, present, and possible future with diabetes—*before* it’s too late to change your personal story and choose a different, healthier ending.

PERSONAL GHOSTS OF DIABETES PAST

Luckily for Dr. Sheri, her early beliefs were no more than a Dickens-spawned ghost of diabetes past. Her false assumption of a predestined early demise had arisen from reading on her own about all of the “inevitable” consequences of diabetes, which were admittedly a more common reality before the availability of modern-day management tools, better medications, and a greater understanding of the actual causes of diabetes-related health problems. By finding her way to optimal diabetes control using whatever management tools were available to her at any given point in time, she prevented this possible bad ending from becoming her diabetes present or even a likely future.

“For me, the worst part of getting diabetes when I was 4 was being forced to give up eating Froot Loops!” Dr. Sheri recalls. “Back in 1968 when I was diagnosed with type 1 diabetes (just a month after I had the mumps), the standard diabetes diet required cutting out all sugar. I loved that cereal, and to this day—almost 40 years later—I still remember the cabinet in the kitchen where we used to store the box even though we moved the next year. Getting shots didn’t bother me nearly as much as losing my favorite cereal.

“Now, with modern-day insulin analogs and a blood glucose meter, I could eat Froot Loops if I really wanted to and still manage my blood sugars, but to tell you the

truth, I tried them once a few years ago and thought they tasted horrible! I don't let my kids eat them either, even though they don't have diabetes, because I know that they make anyone's blood sugar spike rapidly, and no one needs that."

Dr. Steve Edelman's past is a little different from Dr. Sheri's. He didn't develop diabetes until he was already 15 years old. "In junior high school, I would run to the restroom to urinate between classes, relieve my distended bladder, and then slurp up as much water as possible at the drinking fountain," he recalls. "I could not quench my thirst, and all of the kids in line behind me yelled at me because I took so long. Then, halfway through my next class, I would have to urinate again and almost desperately seek out the nearest drinking fountain." He had the classic symptoms of type 1 diabetes. When he finally realized something was really wrong with him, he asked his mother to take him to the doctor, where he was immediately diagnosed.

The ghosts of diabetes past have been more real for Dr. Steve because of his lack of good control in his early years of diabetes. "Every three months I would see my doctor, who would look at my urine and blood glucose results and say the same thing every time. 'Steve, you are doing fine. I will see you next time.' He said the same thing even after I'd had five doughnuts (two glazed, two chocolate cake, and one maple bar) one time before going in for my appointment when I knew my blood sugar was sky-high. In addition, I never went to a camp for diabetic kids or spent any time in support groups or classes for young people with diabetes. I was never educated on how to take an active role in my own diabetes care, and as a result, my control started to slip." Since that time, though, he has sought out the best diabetes care and the knowledge he needs to both control the problems he has (some eye, kidney, and nerve problems) and prevent others from happening, and he regularly shares everything he knows with others.

In retrospect, even Dr. Sheri would agree that giving up eating her favorite sugary cereal, no matter how much it traumatized her at a young age, was well worth the better health she is likely experiencing now by going without eating it. By making other alterations in your diet and lifestyle that are just as simple to implement, you also have the power to change the course of your life and your experience with diabetes. You *can* control your blood glucose levels to prevent diabetes-related health complications from happening to you (or better control any you already have), and in the rest of this book, you'll learn exactly how other long-time diabetes survivors have successfully done it and how you can, too.

IS THE GHOST OF DIABETES PAST IN THE PAST FOR EVERYONE?

Unfortunately, the diabetes past is still all too frequently a part of the present for many people. Poorly controlled diabetes can have a tremendously negative impact on your health. Almost everyone agrees that experiencing good health is truly the most important aspect of living well—with or without diabetes. In fact, without good health, a longer life is not really worth living. If you're unsure, just ask someone with

shooting neuropathy pains (due to nerve damage in the feet from diabetes) what he or she would wish for: a longer life or a pain-free one. While it's perfectly understandable to wish for both a long *and* a healthy life (most of us desire both), if forced to make a choice between living long and living well, almost all of us would choose having good health for the rest of our lives, with living longer as our secondary goal.

When diabetes enters the picture, though, you could lose out on both counts. Diabetes has the potential to rob you, on average, of more than twelve years of your life. What's more, it can also dramatically reduce your quality of life for more than twenty of those years by negatively impacting your health while you are still alive. Your quality of life can be reduced by many physical ailments, but diabetes often causes disability through partial limb amputations, chronic pain, loss of mobility, blindness, chronic dialysis, and/or heart disease. In fact, experts recently estimated that for the 38.5 percent of average females born in the year 2000 or later predicted to develop diabetes, the disease will shorten their lives by over 14 years (if diagnosed by the age of 40) and make their lives a lot less worth living during the last 22. As diabetes survivors ourselves, we can't think of anything *less* desirable than living a shorter, disease-limited life.

Just by having diabetes, you already have twice the risk of dying young as someone who is diabetes-free. If you're a younger type 2 diabetic person (between 25 and 44 years old), your risk is almost four times as high. Diabetes is the sixth leading cause of death, but it should actually have a higher ranking. For instance, if you die from a heart attack or stroke, your death certificate may not even mention diabetes as a cause or contributing factor, even though we now know that poor blood sugar control accelerates the blockage of arteries around your body. The World Health Organization recently estimated that diabetes kills more people worldwide than previously thought, causing well more than 3.2 million deaths per year, or at least six deaths from diabetes every minute of each and every day.

THE RAPIDLY GROWING DIABETES PRESENT

We're not dwelling on the darker side of diabetes to upset you. Rather, our goal is to give you hope for a brighter future by increasing your awareness of what's possible and how to prevent problems. Without better education and a concerted effort, all the diabetes management tools in the world aren't going to make a difference or keep the diabetes past out of our collective present and future lives. The world is currently experiencing the fastest rise in cases of diabetes ever, resulting in an epidemic all around the globe. In fact, American children born in the new millennium have a one in three chance of developing diabetes in their lifetime, and for many minorities like Hispanics and African-Americans, the risk is closer to one in two. Likely more than 21 million people in the United States already have diabetes (7 percent of the entire population), although a third of them still have no idea that they do, and every twenty-one seconds someone is diagnosed with it. A recent conservative prediction of the number of diabetic Americans in the year 2030 is that there will be over 30 million, but with the way things are currently going, it's likely to be much higher.

More than 90 percent of people are developing type 2 diabetes, which is largely due to an interaction of genetics and lifestyle habits that result in insulin resistance. In their bodies, the glucose-lowering hormone insulin is unable to effectively manage blood sugars, and they usually end up losing too many pancreatic beta cells to make enough insulin, so they will often have to take insulin injections to make up the difference. Another 5 to 10 percent have type 1 diabetes, which results from an abnormal immune system response (and possibly altered sensory nerves) that wipes out their bodies' own beta cells, leaving them dependent on external insulin for the rest of their lives. Like type 2s, though, people with type 1 diabetes can also develop an insulin-resistant state as a result of lifestyle choices, which only makes their diabetes harder to control. So, when it comes right down to it, no matter what type of diabetes you have, the secrets to controlling it, living well, and preventing diabetes-related health complications are remarkably similar, as you are soon going to find out.

A SWIFTLY CHANGING GHOST OF DIABETES FUTURE?

Despite current remaining obstacles to diabetes prevention and control, the future of diabetes is still looking brighter and brighter all the time. The message we want to convey to you is that you can take control of your diabetes, even if you already have complications. It is never too late to feel in control, both mentally and physically. Reaching this future starts with learning from the lessons offered by survivors of past years with diabetes. Many long-time diabetic survivors have been officially identified and awarded by the Joslin Diabetes Center, Lilly Pharmaceuticals, and others. The Joslin facility was started as a private practice in 1898 by Elliott P. Joslin, MD, who believed that the key to managing diabetes is patient involvement, education, and empowerment. This philosophy closely parallels the one that Dr. Steve has adopted for his educational, not-for-profit organization, Taking Control of Your Diabetes (TCOYD), which puts on conferences and health fairs around the country as part of his mission (www.tcoyd.org).

Some time ago, researchers began to track long-living people with diabetes to find out their secrets of longevity. For example, in 1970, the Joslin Diabetes Center established the 50-Year Medal, an award given to anyone using insulin to treat diabetes for a half century (to correspond with 50 years of insulin availability starting in 1921), and they are also studying these individuals to find out their longevity secrets. As of 2005, more than 2,200 people worldwide had received this medal. On the seventy-fifth anniversary of the discovery of insulin in 1996, they also awarded the first medal for living 75 years with diabetes, and as of 2005, over sixteen people had been recognized for achieving this remarkable feat. Lilly Pharmaceuticals, the original manufacturer of insulin for diabetic use (but now just one of several companies that make it), also established 25-, 50, and 75-year awards (for insulin users) as part of its LillyforLife program in 1974, and since the program's inception, this company has presented more than 1,500 of its own 50-Year Insulin Awards. While the majority of

the recognized individuals have type 1 diabetes, anyone with type 2 diabetes who has been using insulin for at least a quarter of a century also qualifies for these awards.

What makes these long-living individuals' accomplishments so remarkable is that blood glucose meters have only been widely available since the early 1980s, so these survivors have lived a large part of their diabetic lives without the benefit of knowing their exact blood glucose readings (or being able to fully control them). Furthermore, the average life span for most individuals, with diabetes or without, is only around 74 years for men and 78 years for women in the United States, so living for 75 years with the disease means that they have outlived many people living without it.

Through his contact with thousands of conference attendees yearly throughout the United States, Dr. Steve has also met many other motivated individuals who have lived long and well despite having diabetes. Most of them have type 1 diabetes, formerly known as juvenile diabetes because its onset is most common in children and adolescents. However, many of them are also long-living people with type 2 diabetes. The lessons learned from both are similar and apply to everyone, their key secret being that strict control of your blood sugars can help prevent diabetic complications, regardless of the type of diabetes you have.

"I wish my doctor during my teenage years had given me better advice on the benefits of controlling my blood sugars. I have my diabetes under control now, but all of those early years of being in less than good control have taken a toll on my body," Dr. Steve remarks. "If I had only known then what I know now, I probably wouldn't be having any problems with my health after almost 38 years with diabetes." He currently takes medications to protect his kidney function, and so far he's doing well despite having been diagnosed with kidney disease almost 20 years ago. "I know that my better blood sugars are also a key factor in keeping my body in good shape now and for the next 40 years . . . or more."

The really good news is that although having any type of diabetes requires you to follow a rigorous set of daily tasks and choices to control it effectively, doing so has become vastly easier in the last quarter century due to the wide availability of new management tools and cutting-edge diabetic medications and technologies, including rapid-acting insulin analogs, new medications for the treatment of both type 1 and type 2 diabetes, a plethora of blood glucose monitors, and even continuous glucose-monitoring devices as of 2006. As a result, millions of people now have access to everything they need to manage their diabetes successfully and to live long and complication-free lives. The best suggestion is to follow the advice of Rabbi Hirsch Meisels of Spring Valley, New York, who says, "Focus on the present and the future, and don't dwell on the past." It's good to realize how far we've come, but it's more important to take charge of your diabetes now, with the hope of even better treatments and tools or a cure in the not-too-distant future.

A SHORT TALE ABOUT TWO LONG DIABETIC LIVES

Few people so far have managed as well or as long as the Cleveland brothers of Syracuse, New York, who have over 157 years of living with diabetes between them. Robert “Bob” Cleveland, reaching his 87th birthday in March of 2007, has lived longer with diabetes than almost anyone else so far—82 years—since the age of 5, just a few years after the discovery of insulin in 1921. Even more remarkable, though, is the fact that he is not the sole member of his family who has survived a remarkably long time with diabetes. His older brother, Gerald, who turned 91 years old in January, has also had type 1 diabetes since childhood—only slightly less long at 75 years, since the age of 16. Experts say that they know of no other person who has lived to be as old as Gerald after having had type 1 diabetes most of his life.

While inheriting a good set of family genes undoubtedly has something to do with the extended longevity of these brothers, there is far more to it than just that. Scientists tracking the brothers and other long-living diabetes survivors say that while these remarkable individuals almost certainly have some genetic advantages, what has helped them just as much are their underlying behaviors in controlling their disease: vigilance, hard work, self-sacrifice, and determination. Both brothers have meticulously kept track of their blood glucose readings, insulin doses, diet, and exercise on a daily basis for most of their diabetic years. In their early lives with diabetes, times were quite different, and all they could really do at that time was to be vigilant and hope for the best. The Clevelands have actually lived most of their lives in what we often refer to as the “dark ages” of diabetes care (including decades of even “darker” years than both of us have lived through). Before the early 1980s, almost no one had access to the modern tools of diabetes care, like home blood glucose monitors and synthetic human insulins, to help optimize control of blood sugars. The expected outcomes of diabetes back then included amputations, blindness, kidney failure, and heart disease, not to mention a severely shortened life span.

The Cleveland brothers were lucky to develop diabetes just late enough to have insulin commercially available and be able to survive those early years and many, many more. At the time that they were born (1916 and 1920), type 1 diabetes was still a death sentence within weeks or months in most cases (even on a “starvation” diet with limited carbohydrate and food intake) because insulin was not discovered until 1921, and it was not widely available commercially until 1922 to 1923, mostly in the larger suburban areas. Likewise, although type 2 diabetes could often be controlled with diet and exercise, it also usually led to years of debilitating illness and a shortened life expectancy. Just a few years after the brothers’ arrival into the world, however, scientists at the University of Toronto isolated insulin in a form that was effective and safe enough for human use (although far from optimal), and then Eli Lilly & Company began to mass-produce it for the first time by 1922. Although insulin’s discovery kept the 5-year-old Gerald from dying soon after his diagnosis in 1925, it didn’t change the fact that he had a difficult road with diabetes ahead of him. Admittedly, controlling diabetes was hard and painful work back in the early decades of insulin therapy, and the good control of today was simply not possible to achieve like it is nowadays.

In the early years, insulin was made from pancreases of pigs and cows and was so impure that the doses needed were many times larger than typical ones today. What’s more, the insulin’s strength was often inconsistent. Even when the product became

purier and more predictable, some people suffered serious adverse reactions to it. The insulins were also only short-acting ones that had to be given frequently to cover both meals and basal insulin needs. Moreover, people using these insulins did not have any way to measure their actual blood glucose levels, and as a result, they often suffered from a roller-coaster ride of damaging blood sugar highs and dangerous lows. Until the development in 1936 of a longer-acting insulin (PZI) that stabilized insulin levels throughout the day and night, doctors advised patients to interrupt their sleep to inject themselves rather than let their sugar levels climb through the night from lack of insulin. Human synthetic insulins were not available until Lilly got FDA approval for the first one (Humulin) in 1982.

Even up until about twenty-five years ago (almost six decades into Bob Cleveland's time with diabetes), the only tool people had to use at home to get some feedback on their blood sugar levels was an antiquated method of testing urine for glucose, which was notoriously inaccurate. For decades, the Clevelands and millions of other people with diabetes (including both Dr. Sheri and Dr. Steve) caught their urine in cups and then added a chemical reactant to a certain amount of urine diluted with water that turned it various colors depending on the amount of sugar in it, running the gamut from dark blue (indicating sugar-free urine) to bright orange for the highest concentration of sugar that could be measured.

Of course, this method was still a more accurate technique for determining blood sugar levels than was available in even earlier times. In the second century AD, during Greek times, the name "diabetes," meaning "siphon," was adopted to describe patients with great thirst and excessive urination, and in the seventeenth century, the term "mellitus" (meaning "like honey") was added to describe the sweet smell of their sugar-filled urine. Reportedly, physicians back in those days tasted urine for sugar content to diagnose the disease, but we're sure that it wasn't an accurate way to measure the actual quantity present!

Being aggressive about controlling diabetes back in the Cleveland brothers' early years meant running a serious risk of taking too much insulin, which could easily have resulted in a hypoglycemic coma and early death. The alternative, though, was to let their blood glucose levels stay higher than normal, which over many years could lead to damage and the potential for many diabetic complications. We're happy to report, however, that against these immense odds, both of the Cleveland brothers have had successful careers, long marriages, children, grandchildren, and great-grandchildren—with truly a minimum of diabetes-related health problems. In fact, 91-year-old Gerald believes that he has lived as long as he has so he can help inspire others with the disease. "My main reason to stay alive is to prove to young people there's a way to live with diabetes, to live well," he says.

Now, as diabetes poses a rapidly rising threat to the health of so many Americans and others worldwide, the remarkable lives of these brothers offer the ultimate diabetic success story, giving all of us hope that living a long and healthy life with diabetes is a real possibility for everyone. Thankfully, long gone are the days when diabetic complications and a shortened life span were a foregone conclusion, a sentence that was handed down along with the diagnosis. The Clevelands have lived long and generally healthy lives in part through extraordinary discipline in diet, exercise, and monitoring of their diabetes, along with a very positive outlook on life.

The discipline involved in living well for so long has not always been easy. As Bob admits, “I never had any sweets as a child—never.” Even to this day, his older brother Gerald keeps meticulous logs of his insulin doses and blood sugar readings, tests his sugars seven or more times a day, avoids desserts and rapidly absorbed starches, exercises, and stays thin. Gerald is still a compulsive reader of food ingredient labels, so he knows exactly what is going into his body and how much insulin it’s going to take. Both brothers still recognize the importance of their diet and daily exercise in living well. At 87, Bob is still an avid cyclist, often biking twenty or more miles outdoors, while Gerald regularly attends exercise classes and does daily exercises with five-pound weights. Largely due to their extraordinary diligence, the brothers’ lives have been even longer than the average life span for most people and remarkably free of any serious diabetic complications.

Both of the Clevelands have developed some of the circulatory and nerve problems in the feet that are so common to people with diabetes, but just in recent years (after a very long time with diabetes and no access to blood glucose meters during most of their lives). Gerald has also undergone several operations for “trigger finger,” a condition most prevalent in people with diabetes that causes curved fingers that can’t be unbent without surgery. Nevertheless, these complications are relatively minor, and both continue to make a point of meeting with younger people with diabetes, giving them hope and encouragement. “It hasn’t been easy,” Gerald says, “but I’ve had a terrific life.”

WHAT THE FUTURE HOLDS FOR YOU

Likely, no one reading this book will have lived as long with diabetes as Bob and Gerald Cleveland (with the exception of Gladys Dull—more on her to come in the first profile), but it’s a goal that we can all aspire to reach. Initially, the idea for this book came about when the story of the Cleveland brothers’ long lives with diabetes was picked up by the media early in 2006 (specifically the *New York Times*), which brought a greater public awareness to the fact that people really can live a long time and in good health despite having diabetes. At some point in our lives since our diagnoses, we have all invariably turned to others with more diabetes experience like the Clevelands for advice and support. Maybe you have done the same not just for yourself, but on behalf of your diabetic child, significant other, or aging parent. Regardless of the circumstances under which diabetes has entered into your life, you can learn from other people living with diabetes, even if they have had it for a shorter time. The people interviewed for this book really have a handle on what works and what doesn’t. What’s more, they’re beyond willing to share what they know to help you also live a long and healthy life with diabetes.

With the intent of taking advantage of this wealth of experience, we conducted well over fifty interviews with people living with both type 1 and type 2 diabetes. They range in age from 34 to 93 years “young” and have experienced from 19 to more than 83 years of living with and managing the disease using any and all tools available at the time. Close to 40 percent have lived with diabetes for 50 or more years, and