

In her stride

Theresa Hughes sees the funny side

What is Dracula's favourite icecream flavour?
VEINILLA!

Why was the ancient Egyptian boy confused?
Because his daddy was a mummy!

Why did the ghost go to the funfair?
He wanted to go on a rollerghoster!

Why was Cinderella dropped from the soccer team?
She kept running away from the ball!

Jim: Is this a second-hand shop?
Man in shop: Yes, sir!

Jim: Can I have one for my watch then, please!
What has a button at the top? Your legs!

Where do hamsters come from? Hamsterdom!
What kind of hair do oceans have? Wavy!

What happened to the damp skeleton that sat
beside the fire? He became bone-dry!

What is full of holes but still holds water?
A sponge!

What can you serve but not eat? A tennis ball!

- Theresa Hughes, age 9, Co Limerick

Type 1 diabetes has been part of Theresa Hughes's life for a long time, but that doesn't mean she lets it define her, writes

Max Ryan

Theresa Hughes from West Limerick was just three years old when her mum brought her to hospital with what she suspected was Type 1 diabetes. Theresa had no symptoms, and when the diagnosis was confirmed, the doctor told her mum that her pancreas was still producing the tiniest amounts of insulin.

"I wasn't thirsty; I wasn't going to the toilet more often than normal for a three-year-old child; I wasn't losing weight and I wasn't feeling sick or overly tired," Theresa, now 27, recalls.

It was a mother's intuition that convinced Theresa's mum to have her daughter tested for the condition.



Theresa Hughes

Theresa's dad also had Type 1 diabetes, which played a role in her parents' concern.

Theresa's mum tested her daughter's blood glucose at home, and when the results read slightly higher than normal, she decided it was time to take her to the hospital. Theresa's mum brought her to the local GP, who wrote a referral letter for University Hospital Kerry.

"The doctor told my mum to take me to hospital when she felt the time was right.

"My pancreas hadn't fully shut down, so it's quite an unconventional diagnosis story, really."

Theresa recalls her hospital stay being quite traumatic at first, but that ultimately

the nurses who looked after her were "lovely".

"Whenever I'd have to get the plaster changed for the drip connector, they'd also put one on my teddy to make me feel like he was involved as well," she laughs.

Formative experiences

Because Theresa was diagnosed before she started school, she says her condition didn't have a major impact on her life growing up.

"My mum took care of it in my younger years, and I was 10 or 11 before I started taking charge of managing my diabetes," she says.

"Before that my mum would have monitored my blood glucose and given me the right amounts of food depending on what the levels were."

In 2007, when Theresa was nine, her father tragically passed away at the age of 48 due to hypoglycaemia, which can occur when your blood glucose level is too low.

"He was living in Australia and was an electrician by trade. He was working in the mines in Darwin in the Northern Territories, so he lived alone in a worker's apartment near the mine."

Theresa says he failed to show for work one morning and when his supervisor called, there was no answer.

"They sent someone around to the apartment, and when they went in they found him unresponsive in the bathroom."

The toxicology report revealed that hypoglycaemia had caused him to lose consciousness, leading to his death.

Theresa says the nature of her father's passing had an impact on her own management of the condition.

"From that moment my mum and I were more cautious of low blood glucose. Because of how he died, the night-time blood glucose was what we used to be a bit more tight around.

"Even now I'm aware that there's a

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very real possibility of that happening, although I'm a lot less worried about it these days," she says.

One foot in front of the other

In January 2023, Theresa took up running and set herself the goal of completing a 5-10km race in all 32 counties, in aid of Diabetes Ireland.

She ran 28 races in just 26 weeks and at the time of writing was gearing up for the first of the remaining four races, the last of which was to take place in Dublin in December.

Theresa admits she was never the sportiest of children, however she has had no trouble adapting her diabetes management to her newfound passion.

"As a child I'd always bring my blood glucose monitor, my insulin, snacks and jelly sweets everywhere with me. Now I make sure I have them at the start and the finish line to make sure my blood glucose levels are fine heading into a race.

"That's still something I'm trying to perfect, because there's the added challenge of having to drive on the day of the race and trying to eat on the way," she says.

On the day of a run, Theresa takes a "top-up approach" to the management of her blood glucose level.

"I'll take a base amount of insulin when I have my food and then keep an eye on the levels coming up to the race. Then I'll top it up with one or two units if I see it's going a bit higher than I'd want."

Lifelong connection

Theresa says the experience of losing her dad to complications of Type 1 diabetes was in part what motivated her to raise funds for Diabetes Ireland.

As well as having a close personal connection to the cause, Theresa is a long-time reader of *Diabetes Ireland*, and even used to submit stories and jokes to the Sweetpea Kidz Club (see photos).

"I recently pulled out all the old issues I was featured in and had a right laugh. One of my short stories was featured



Clippings are from Theresa's submissions to the Sweetpea Kidz Club pages over the years (from 2003, 2006 and 2008)



in the second ever issue of the magazine, so Volume 1 Issue 2, when I was six. I was obsessed with jokes, so up to the age of 11 I was still sending jokes in to the magazine."

Although Theresa has completed her challenge, you can relive her

experience on Instagram @32in23 or visit gofundme.com/f/32-in-23-challenge where she raised just shy of €2,000 for Diabetes Ireland.

