

Prevailing in the midst of



A patient of mine died the other day. To protect him, I will call him “Mike”.

Mike came to me a few years ago for help with his Type 1 Diabetes. He was a young man, my own age actually. He was the son of a preacher and grew up in the small-town chain church circuit. Being from a small town myself, I immediately felt a link with him.

The year we were juniors in high school, he was diagnosed with Type 1 Diabetes. At the beginning of our senior year in high school, he had a motorcycle accident, that left him in a wheelchair. In addition to paralyzing him, this accident also took his memory, he had no memories of his childhood.

Because of this, there was a time where we mutually thought that he had at some point in his frequent moves, been a resident of my own town, which brought me even closer to him. Once we determined that that had not happened, I still teased him about imagined shared memories.

To be clear, I never knew him before his accident, never saw him outside of the clinic, however, we had so many commonalities, it was easy and fun to pretend that we did.

Over the course of a couple of years, I saw him multiple times in the pursuit of stabilizing his diabetes, with his other injuries, it was a monumental task. Mike was such a source of humor and strength. He drove himself to all of his own doctor's appointments and held a full time job. He never missed an appointment. I never once saw him angry or self-pitying despite the circumstances.

He was always ready to see me with some sort of funny anecdote. He had had diabetes for longer than I had been a professional in the realm of diabetes, yet he always took my advice and recommendations openly. He was a whiz at his insulin pump and enjoyed learning new things.

In his state, I imagine it would have been quite easy to “depend” on the system, to wallow in self pity, and to not try to beat this disease. He certainly would have qualified, but he didn't. He never gave up. I believe he was shooting for 100 years of age. He demanded that his blood sugars be very well controlled so that he could prevent complications. He was in it for the long haul.

A good majority of people with chronic diseases like diabetes, high blood pressure and high cholesterol, are not in it for the long haul. Maybe they take their time on this Earth for granted, maybe they feel sorry for themselves, rarely are they so grateful to have what they have that they fight tooth and nail to keep it. Mike did.

I saw Mike unknowingly, for the last time in 2009. As usual, we troubleshoot his issues and he tried to persuade me to learn how to use my iPod. I, as usual resisted, and he went on his way. He didn't come back. Now, usually when this occurs, in a patient like Mike, it means, that they are doing so well that I am not needed. Or maybe as in this case, it means you have Cancer. I didn't know he had cancer at that last visit, and I doubt he did either. I wonder now how it would have changed out exchange. I am sorry I didn't get to say goodbye to him and to thank him for being such an inspiration to me. He taught me more than I ever taught him, of this I am certain.

His time with cancer was very brief. But knowing Mike as I knew him, I am convinced that he fought it and fought it hard. I am sure he would have it no other way. He knew that this life is a gift to us and how we behave with this gift is a testament to our relationship with the Giver.

Mike will continue to be the gold standard to taking this life seriously and always prevailing in the midst of failures.