



Disneyland Paris Visit with Old Catton Senior Section

Lying in my hospital bed unable to move more than a few inches because of the drip in my arm and the beeping heart machine which attaches me to the wall behind me, I wonder how I managed to get myself into such a predicament. Am I a bad person? Have I done something wrong? There is one thing I'm convinced of – it's all my fault. If only I had controlled things differently, kept a closer eye on things, I would not be here now. But what had gone wrong?

I was diagnosed with diabetes just before my 7th birthday and had always taken it very much in my stride. I am on insulin pump therapy and my readings have generally been very good. I have never let my diabetes stop me from doing anything; I control it, not the other way around. This trip to Disneyland Paris with the Girl Guides was no exception. I was not at all fazed by having to cope with my diabetes without my parents and being totally responsible for my control; in fact I was quite looking forward to the independence. This was going to be a new experience; it was my first time abroad without my family (although my younger sister was also on the holiday) and, despite being only 13, I felt confident about looking after myself. I would certainly be facing new experiences, just not the ones I was expecting.

The coach journey to France through the Channel Tunnel went smoothly and we arrived at Disney's Cheyenne hotel without any hiccups. Soon we were sorted into rooms of three; I was sharing with my sister and another friend from my Guides Patrol. After a quick exploration of the hotel and bite to eat we all settled down for a night's rest in anticipation of our day in the park tomorrow.

The first day of independence could not have run any better. As half of my group of 6 had never been to Disney before (and being the oldest in my party) I decided it was my responsibility to give them the full Magic Kingdom experience. We jumped between the shortest queues, watched the parade, met the characters and ate popcorn and lollipops. That night we all slept on a high, with a smile on all our faces.

But I did not feel totally up to speck the next morning and could not eat much at breakfast. Determined to have another great day, we ventured on into the Walt Disney Studios and I even managed a ride on the Rock 'N' Rollercoaster, before I vomited. Feeling immediately better, I persevered into one of the shows, only to be sick again. I was taken back to my room by one of my leaders, and went back to bed, whilst continuing to be ill into a bowl. I could keep nothing down, even water made a short reappearance and before long I was left coughing and retching. On testing my blood sugar I found myself to be over 30.0, but no amount of insulin seemed to change that. I later discovered that this was due to a hole in the line which connected

my cannula to my pump leading to Diabetic Ketoacidosis (and therefore could have been easily corrected had I been rational). Unsure what else to do, the leaders decided to call out a local doctor to check me over; this somehow turned up as a fireman, a doctor and 2 paramedics, who packed me off to the nearby hospital in a taxi.

Much of what happened after this point has become hazy to me as I was in a state of semi-consciousness and little aware of my surroundings. I know that I was taken to a small side room, where I was changed into a plain hospital nightgown from my dirty pyjamas and had a cannula inserted into my hand. I also had a number of sticky pads added to my back and chest to monitor my heart. When asked to go to the toilet, I was told I could not move from the wall and given a bed pan. Finally, a drip was inserted into my arm and I was given a large amount of insulin and something to stop me vomiting. Exhausted and shaking I eventually got a few hours rest before being moved to a children's ward.

But the problem was not solved that simply. The rest of the guides unit had finished their 3 nights away and were ready to leave, however the hospital were not releasing me for at least one more night. A decision was made that the other guides would return home and 2 of the leaders would stay with me in France. The next day was pretty difficult for us all; especially as I found that my French speaking skills did not stretch to being able to explain my condition or my treatment. The problem was also complicated by the French hospital not understanding pump therapy and believing that my insulin pump had failed completely and was utterly useless. Yet I did manage my first proper meal in 2 days that evening; my throat was like cardboard and the food was so painful I nearly gave up and went hungry. Through the day I had been visited by a number of people who spoke varying levels of English and treated me as though I was 3; I was even asked by the children's play specialist if I would like some colouring books to keep myself occupied. I politely declined.

That night was another rough experience. Doctors came and went throughout the night, checking my blood sugar, which had finally fallen to within range and also checking my pulse and taking blood samples. I shocked myself when a trip to the bathroom gave me the opportunity to see myself in the mirror. I looked pale and weak, stood in a short nightshirt and leaning on my drip post for support. As I had been forbidden to use my mobile phone (by the hospital) I took the chance to text my parents and I cried when I received a reply saying, 'hang in there, you'll be home soon. Love you xxx'.

The hospital was determined to keep me in for another few nights, but my guiders and I had other ideas. After a lot of admittedly stunted conversation, we persuaded them that I would see a medical professional the second I was back in England and that I was well enough to be released. My guide leaders were incredible, they took me back to the Disney resort, where a room had been kept for us for the day and I had a shower. We then went to find some food in the Disney Village and had a look around the shops. I had little strength left, but being away from the hospital had given me a new lease of life. At 7pm we boarded a Eurostar train (which had been arranged in England by my Mum) and headed back home. The journey seemed to take forever; all I wanted was to be away from France and to see my family again.

The reunion was emotional and on catching sight of my parents back in my homeland I burst into floods of tears. I was met by an equal amount of sobbing from my mother and shortly both of my guide leaders joined in; so great was the relief and joy ebbing through me. The whole ordeal had been stressful and painful and I was just glad that my leaders had been so supportive and caring throughout it, or I may not have made it through. It had also had a huge knock on my confidence, I was sure that the whole event had been entirely down to my own incompetence and I never wanted to go away from my parents again.

But I believe life experiences such as this are there to learn from and I regained my confidence within a few weeks, having realised that, although the situation could have been better handled, it was not entirely my fault. Since then, I have been abroad several times with the school and I have also attended a 1940's style guide camp in Norfolk for the past 3 years, all of which have been successful. I am not daunted by dealing with my own diabetes; in fact I quite enjoy the independence. I have just come to realise how important it is that the people around me understand my condition and know what to do in an emergency. I'm so grateful to my guiders, Pat and Sarah, for getting me out of the hospital and back home in one piece and for my doctors who kept in touch with the hospital in France to explain my condition. The holiday proved to hold new experiences that I did not expect and for that matter am in no rush to experience again.

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