

STORIES OF HOPE

HOW A FAMILY BEATS DIABETES

May 20, 2009, was Araine Cash's birthday and the day her 4-year-old daughter, Whitley, was diagnosed with type 1 diabetes. Welcome to the bittersweet flavor of life with diabetes.

Araine (pronounced Erin) and Duston Cash, Oklahoma City, thought their little girl's weeklong tummy ache, her growing thirst and frequent urination were symptoms of a urinary infection. They were stunned by the diagnosis.

"It was a very scary moment for us," Araine says. "I knew nothing about diabetes," other than the death of her grandmother, who had type 1 diabetes, when Araine was 5 and Julia Roberts' heart-wrenching final scene in *Steel Magnolias*.

Araine and Duston have had their ups and downs, and they survived the toughest times by leaning on each other. The inexplicable variation in Whitley's blood glucose – from dangerous lows to sickening highs – is hard to take for parents trying to guard their child's health.

"I still get very mad about not having it down to an exact science," Araine says. "We're trying to be realistic about it. We're not in 100 percent control here, but God wouldn't have given this to Whitley if he didn't trust us to take good care of her."



Araine, Whitley, Jaycie and Duston Cash

"Other parents are like the extended family you never knew you had and, once you meet, it's instant friendship."

Whitley, now 6, is determined to "beat diabetes," so she has learned to give herself insulin shots and adjusted to pricking her finger six or seven times a day to test her blood glucose. And she doesn't let diabetes interfere with her interests, like softball, basketball and Justin Bieber.

Jaycie, 9, may not get the extra snacks and attention that come with diabetes, but she takes the role of big sister very seriously. She taught pre-kindergarten Whitley about fractions "because she has to know this" and

maintains a protective watch over her little sister.

At an American Diabetes Association family event, the Cashes discovered they were not alone. Whitley played with other kids who checked their blood glucose, while Araine and Duston met and shared stories with other parents of children with diabetes.

"I was amazed to see how Whitley felt like a normal girl that day," Araine says. "Other parents are like the extended family you never knew you had and, once you meet, it's instant friendship."

Last year, Araine contacted the Association's Oklahoma City office to volunteer for the Tour de Cure bike ride. The Association countered with a job offer. She left a job in real estate to help find a cure and support families affected by diabetes.

With Araine as 2011 Tour de Cure coordinator, Duston as rest-stop volunteer coordinator, their two girls in the 2-mile kids' ride, and the extended family involved, the Wheelin' for Whitley team raised \$2,700 for the Association.

Araine also oversees Family Link, which connects families of children with diabetes. Now she can pass along the wisdom and encouragement that the Cash family received following a bittersweet day in May 2009.

"This gives me the opportunity to reach out to other parents and siblings," Araine says. "I try to give them hope that it does get better." ▲

Whitley's motto:

"I wear my heart on my sleeve and carry my pancreas in my pocket."

