

# STORIES OF HOPE

## FIGHTING TO LIVE HIS DREAM

As the legendary front man of the rock band Poison, Bret Michaels has a new generation of fans because of his continued recordings of new music, his No. 1-rated reality show on VH1 for three seasons, Rock of Love, and his boardroom chats with billionaire host Donald Trump on NBC's Celebrity Apprentice.

Michaels, 48, who was diagnosed with type 1 diabetes when he was 6 years old, competed on Celebrity Apprentice to raise awareness of diabetes and money for the American Diabetes Association. He spoke often during Celebrity Apprentice of his desire to help children with diabetes. He's a big supporter of the Association's Diabetes Camps and has long spoken out about his experience managing the disease while living the rock star lifestyle.

Trump "hired" Michaels during the reality show's May 2010 live finale, raising his winnings for the Association to \$390,000 – all after Michaels was hospitalized three times in five weeks.

*"I've got this second chance, and I'm going to make the most of still being here."*

"There is no doubt that a huge part of who and what I am is that I'm a diabetic," Michaels says. "I am extremely thankful that I am living my dream. It takes an extreme amount of work, but the harder I work, the luckier I get. I've accepted that's just the way I'm built – to be given challenges and try to overcome them – and it's also what keeps me fighting."

In April 2010, Michaels was sidelined by an emergency appendectomy. Eleven days later, he landed in the hospital again, this time for an excruciating and life-threatening hemorrhage in the fluid-filled spaces around the base of the brain.

"There was an explosion in the back of my head that sounded like a loud bang. They call it the 'thunderclap,'" Michaels recalls. "It was the worst pain I've ever felt—like an elephant kicking the inside of your skull out."

He spent 10 days in intensive care for the bleeding and the resulting neurological effects – slurred speech, inability to move one hand, impaired control of his legs – and four days in occupational therapy.

"My doctor said to me, 'I've never seen anyone as driven as you to get back on your feet,'" Michaels says.

He returned home again to recuperate with his family. Twenty-four days after the brain hemorrhage and seven days before the Apprentice finale, Michaels suffered a mild "warning stroke."

"My mouth, left hand and arm, and left leg went numb. I felt like I was shot with Novocain," he recalls.

A third trip to the emergency room led to the discovery of a hole in his heart, a relatively common condition related to a small flap-like opening that didn't close the way it should after birth. Michaels went on aspirin and a blood thinner.

"Physically, I knew I was exhausted," Michaels says, noting that he worried about his ability to recover while living up to a demanding schedule. "I took a walk and got straight with God and with myself. I went back in and started setting goals because it takes as much energy to go positive as it does to go negative, and I would much rather drive myself positive."

Michaels staged an astonishing comeback, starting with an emotional win on the live Apprentice finale, just days after his mini-stroke.

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Bret Michaels, rock star and tireless advocate for people with diabetes.



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In November 2010, Michaels became the Association's "Face of Diabetes" for American Diabetes Month and was featured in a public service announcement campaign that he helped produce. A passionate advocate for people with diabetes, Michaels holds auctions of memorabilia and meet-and-greets after each of his concerts, with the proceeds going directly to help send kids to Diabetes Camps. He also works with Association volunteers and staff across the country while on tour.

His new VH1 reality show, [Bret Michaels: Life as I Know It](#), documents both the professional and the personal, on the road and at home in Arizona with his girlfriend, Kristi Gibson, and their daughters, Raine, 10, and Jorja, 6.

Following successful surgery in January to correct the hole in his heart, Michaels toured with his solo band and launched a 25th-anniversary tour with Poison. He also has a line of guitars with Dean and a cruise this fall with Carnival Destiny. Through it all, Michaels works hard to manage his diabetes.

"It's mind, muscle, music and motivation over matter. You can have all the doctors, but unless you can self-motivate, no one can make you exercise or take your shot at the right time or use your pump right," Michaels says, adding that he has ample motivation. "Like making sure I'm around to watch my daughters grow up." ▲

