

First Injection

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Heather grabbed the vial of sterile saline, tipped it upside down, and held it steady. She jammed the insulin needle into the rubber stopper, pulled back the plunger until it reached five units. She studied the end of the syringe near the needle, looking for bubbles, flicking the syringe with her middle finger. Her legs dangled from the edge of the kitchen chair as she leaned forward to snatch the ripe soggy orange infiltrated with sterile saline. Her fingers wrapped around the syringe like she was holding a dart. With eyebrows scrunched in concentration, she aimed and plunged the needle into the orange's skin.

At six years old, she was determined to be a self-sufficient person with diabetes.

"Teach me how to give my own injection, Mom," my daughter requested over and over again.

So there we were in the kitchen inhaling the odd mix of citrus from the orange, roast chicken, and alcohol from the numerous opened preps bought from the pharmacy. On the kitchen table an open bag of insulin syringes spilled out next to tomatoes ripening in a basket and notes from Heather's kindergarten teacher and Pt. Defiance School. "I'm getting good at this, Mom," Heather stated as a fact. She set down her syringe and glided off her chair. Standing on tiptoe by the sink, she reached for the faucet to fill her glass with water.

I watched the back of her hair, parted in the middle and held apart in two bouncing wheat-colored pigtails, tied up with blue and white ribbon. Her thin legs failed to keep up her knee-highs, which drooped midway between her knees and ankles. With a step and a smooth glide she descended back to her chair, facing me with an expression of expectation. "Mom, I'm good at giving the orange a shot. Can I practice on you now like you said?"

“Ok, I said that I would. I guess you’d better find a new needle and draw up some of the normal saline. It’s close to dinner time so maybe after you practice on me you can give your insulin to yourself,” I suggested.

With a toothy smile, Heather scrunched up her nose and clapped her hands together. “I know that after I give you a shot, I can give my own,” she asserted.

I unbuttoned a few buttons from the lower part of my skirt to expose a thigh still suntanned from the waning summer. “Here you can’t miss this target,” I encouraged her. “Remember to go in at an angle and draw back to check for blood return in the syringe.”

“I know, I know, Mom,” she said. Carefully, studying the drawn up syringe, she checked for bubbles and took a breath. After a brief hesitation, she looked at me for encouragement and then pinched up a piece of my flesh between her skinny fingers. With quick precision she delivered the contents of the syringe.

I looked at her and dropped my head atop the table, closed my eyes and exhaled with relief. Heather grabbed my arm, yelling into my ear, “Mom, Mom, are you all right?” she pleaded.

“Just kidding,” I laughed. I felt 50 pounds of Heather land on my lap, as small hands tickled my ribs.

“You are so bad, Mom.”

I held her close and told her that I didn’t even feel it. “You are a great shot-giver Heather.” With that she hopped off my lap and landed near the refrigerator to retrieve her insulin. I could then breathe in the roasting chicken, and close my eyes while the early autumn wind slipped through the open patio door to cool off my burning face.