

Camp Reflections on New Technology

By: Kat Shreve

Just after Camp Kudzu's first three sessions of the summer, I washed several loads of laundry, ate dinner in near silence at my own kitchen table, intentionally didn't apply sunscreen, and packed my car in order to journey to my family reunion (for those readers who see where this is going, yes, a Family Reunion is just like another week of summer camp: there's t-shirts, singing, a photographer or two, meals served family style, and outdoor activities, rain or shine...oh, and a little bit of interpersonal relationship management).

The Shreve Family has gathered on the fourth Saturday in June for 120 consecutive years. I enjoy attending the gathering...seeing my father's family (I have 30 first cousins), hearing stories retold (the time the boat sank with all my uncles onboard...with them surviving, but not their wallets), sharing memories of years past (the instance in which my Uncle Joe failed to truly share the terror I would endure in attempting the waterslide into his lake), and hearing new stories for the first time, like the fact that my dear Aunt Natalie, fresh out of nursing school, was a counselor at a camp for kids living with type 1 nearly 50 plus years ago.

I never knew that. And in what may have appeared to be a match at Wimbledon, Aunt Natalie spoke of her camp experience and then served a question to me at the other end of the table...all those gathered round, tilted their head in my direction as I answered and then volleyed an inquiry to her.

Her tales of checking the campers' urine in the morning and at night to gauge blood glucose levels were matched by Camp Kudzu's 10-12 checks via finger pricks. Her camp activities included board games, creative writing, and arts and crafts, while I spoke of the Giant's Swing, paddle boarding, and archery. The camper's meals were carefully weighed and consumed, and, conversely, I gabbed on about carb counting, sun butter-dipped apple slices, and the showpiece of Taco Tuesday: churros for dessert.

The insulin back then and its administration is night and day from our methods employed today: we don't boil syringes and sharpen needles like the brand-new counselors had to do at her camp. Technology has (and will continue to) grow leaps and bounds from that time. Aunt Natalie continued her education in the medical field throughout her professional life and retired as a nurse anesthetist several years ago. She was in awe of my explanation of CGMs and the array of insulin pumps available.

While it is easy to see the differences since Aunt Natalie grabbed a clipboard, clipped her whistle to the front of her uniform, and put her nurses hat on (she had to fold, clean, and starch it herself even while at camp), there are so many similarities: campers at camp get to be themselves, try new activities, are under the watchful eye of talented medical professionals, and are surrounded by a community of others just like them.

At Camp Kudzu, we continue to stay abreast of the technology available. Our team is in continual contact with the endocrinology community to sharpen (pun intended) our approach,

protocols, and policies to the cutting-edge approaches to managing type I diabetes. Our medical volunteers spend a significant amount of time and brain energy in the months before camp (and, at times, during camp) to be the best resource for our campers and staff. The conversation endeared me to my favorite aunt even more.

In closing, my hope is that very soon, my own niece, Rachel, will have a captive audience of her cousins circled around a table and will recall tales of her crazy Aunt Kat who worked at a camp full of campers, passionate staff, and volunteers before there was a cure for type I diabetes. The technology will be there.