Alyssa Tousant

How I Made It Over: A Journey to Healing

Introduction (revised)

 In "How I Made It Over: A Journey to Healing," I share a personal and transformative journey from a life-altering diagnosis to a place of healing and hope. This book speaks to the challenges and triumphs that marked my path, beginning with the dreadful effect of uncontrolled diabetes on my body and soul. From the harsh truths met under the care of military doctors, who used scare tactics, to the emotional and physical torment of the illness and its treatment, these accounts offer an intense look at the struggles and resilience required to endure such a journey. The story begins with my early eating habits and the unexpected start of diabetes at the age of 12. The diagnosis brought out so many different feelings and emotions, from confusion to denial, and unfairness as I faced eating limitations that seemed unbearable. My efforts to trick doctors and the discovery of Hemoglobin A1C tests led me to a turning point, as shame and secrecy about my condition followed my middle and high school years.

As I moved on from my adolescent years and into my adulthood, the stakes grew higher. Transitioning from pediatric to adolescent care introduced new changing aspects in my dealings with doctors and turning 18 brought a foolish sense of independence that led to the dodging of medical care. The physical symptoms of my worsening condition—yeast infections, weight loss, and high blood sugar—were intensified by the emotional trauma of attempting to self-manage my health with limited success. This period of life began the experimentation with smoking, drinking, and promiscuity, moves across states, and the development of neuropathy and other complications.

A move to Houston signaled a new chapter, where finding a knowledgeable endocrinologist brought a correct diagnosis of Type 1 diabetes and the initiation of insulin treatment, leading to initial improvements. Yet, ongoing health issues persisted, including stomach problems and neuropathy. A return to Illinois brought further health decline, employment struggles, and the challenge of managing stomach paralysis with an insulin pump.

The journey took a critical turn with the diagnosis of kidney failure and the start of dialysis, a physically and emotionally taxing process. Seeking a transplant led to a significant moment: receiving the call for liver and kidney transplants in November 2019. The surgeries and following recovery were difficult, but they opened the door to a renewed life. A pancreas transplant followed, bringing more hospitalizations but also hope for a better future.

Throughout this journey, faith played a pivotal role. Encouragement from doctors and loved ones, the power of sharing my story, and a steadfast belief in God's faithfulness provided the strength needed to persevere. "How I Made It Over" is not just a recounting of struggles and medical battles; it is a testament to the resilience of the human spirit and the profound impact of faith and hope in the face of adversity. As I reflect on the lessons learned, I aim to inspire readers to trust in God's healing power and to find solace and strength in their own journeys.

Outline for "How I Made It Over: A Journey to Healing"

Introduction

* Brief overview of the journey from diagnosis to healing
* The impact of uncontrolled diabetes on the body
* Experiences with military doctors and their scare tactics
* The emotional toll of the illness and treatment

Chapter 1: "In the Beginning..."

* Early eating habits and the onset of diabetes
* Diagnosis at age 12 and initial reactions
* Struggles with dietary restrictions and feelings of unfair treatment.
* Attempts to deceive doctors and the discovery of Hemoglobin A1C tests.
* Shame and secrecy about diabetes during middle and high school

Chapter 2: Adolescence and Escalating Health Issues

* Transfer from pediatric to adolescent care.
* Changes in doctor-patient interactions and feelings of control
* Turning 18 and avoiding medical care
* Physical symptoms worsening (yeast infections, weight loss, high blood sugar)
* Attempts to self-manage the condition with little success.

Chapter 3: The Impact of Lifestyle Choices

* Experimenting with smoking, drinking, and promiscuity
* The move to California and back to Illinois
* Development of neuropathy and other diabetes-related complications
* Seeking medical care through Medicaid

Chapter 4: A New Start in Houston

* Moving to Houston for a fresh start
* Finding a new endocrinologist and receiving the correct diagnosis (Type 1 instead of Type 2)
* Starting insulin treatment and feeling initial improvements
* Ongoing health issues: stomach problems, orthostatic hypotension, neuropathy

Chapter 5: Return to Illinois and Further Health Decline

* Moving back to Illinois due to worsening health
* Employment struggles and temporary jobs
* Getting an insulin pump and managing stomach paralysis
* Continued challenges at work despite medical accommodations

Chapter 6: Facing Kidney Failure and Dialysis

* Diagnosis of kidney failure and beginning dialysis
* Emotional and physical toll of dialysis
* Seeking a transplant hospital and choosing Rush Hospital in Chicago

Chapter 7: The Transplant Journey

* Receiving the call for liver and kidney transplants in November 2019
* The surgery and difficult recovery process
* Adjusting to life post-surgery and the challenges that followed
* Receiving a pancreas transplant and ongoing hospitalizations

Chapter 8: Faith and Encouragement

* The role of faith in the healing journey
* Encouragement from doctors and others along the way
* The importance of sharing the story to inspire and uplift others.
* The message of hope and the power of God’s faithfulness

Conclusion

* Reflecting on the journey and the lessons learned
* Encouraging readers to have faith and trust in God's healing power.

Chapter 1: In the beginning…

 I remember my life experiences by what state I was living in, the house I was living in, where I went to school, or treatments I have taken. So, to start my story let me set the stage. I was living in California on a lot with five other houses, this lot was gated, and you had to be let in to enter, I felt safe there and I trust everyone there. Little did I know there was danger inside the place I felt safe in. I was molested by a family friend who lived in that gated lot, there were only two encounters that I remember but I lived in that place for a long time. When we first moved in, we lived in the brown house to the left, then ended up moving to the blue house to the right.

 I trusted this man so when he would invite me to his house, I felt like it was ok to be there plus he had a monkey and I thought that was so cool. Even at that age I knew what was going on was wrong, I felt dirty like I had been rolling in a mud pile, but I never said anything because I was afraid that I would get in trouble, so I never told anyone. These events unlocked a desire inside of me, I liked how I felt so I was curious about sex and wanted to know more. We moved again, this time we moved to another state, my dad was in the military so we would move back and forth from California to Illinois. We were in Illinois in military housing, and I met this girl, I thought she was so cool, and she was older than me, I thought I was cool because she wanted to hang out with me. She was so free and she loved her life, she made people pay attention to her, every playground we went to she stole the show. I looked up to her and wanted to be like her, she use to wear Mrs. Celie from the color purple plates in her hair, she wore jean knee length shorts and colorful tee shirts. She was cool and I followed her around were ever she went and did whatever she did. She was the one who introduced me to porn, her parents had HBO and she was the only child, and she was allowed to do whatever she wanted. I spent the night over her house, and I was introduced to porn, we watched it all night. I saw people doing things and I decided I wanted to try them, this is when I started to masturbate.

 I was still in grade school and now I had secrets that were weighting heavy on me, it felt as if an elephant was sitting on me, and I was still trying to move forward. I knew what I was doing was wrong, and I didn’t want to get in trouble, so I kept all this guilt, shame, and perversion hidden inside. This is when I began to eat my feelings and where the insomnia began. The only thing that would sooth me after engaging in these sexual acts was to eat, so I would get out of bed walk down the hall my feet pitter patting on a cold tile floor, sneak into the kitchen, take little Debbie oatmeal crème pies, and eat them until I felt satisfied. My mom began to notice that the pies were getting eaten too fast and thought it was my brother. One day she was cleaning my room, and she found all the wrappers behind my bed, I was embarrassed I never liked being exposed, this caused me to become sneakier so I wouldn’t get caught.

 While in this house my cousins and I would also engage in sexual acts, which led to more eating, more guilt, more shame, and less sleep. The only way I could sleep was if I masturbated but not until I ate my snack. I’ve had sexual encounters with many of my cousins and it was tearing me down, I started to isolate, even in school I was always alone even if there were people who wanted to be my friend. I felt that if anyone was close to me, they would see what I was doing and because I knew I was doing wrong and didn’t want to stop I hid from people and nursed that perversion, at this time we moved back to California.

I grew up Christian and I loved Jesus even at a young age and I gave my life to him. My church home in California was my family. I loved going to church, I loved singing, and really enjoyed the messages even in children’s church. I felt better at church, I didn’t want to do sexual things while I was in church, I felt free at church around the pastor and the other church members. I felt safe and secure there, I felt Holy Spirit there, I never wanted to leave this place. I thought church was the only place I could meet God, so I went with my mom and aunt anytime they were in the building. I’ll never forget my church home, my foundation was built there, I learned about Jesus and how much he loved me. I learned how he died so we could be saved, I learned that Jesus is a healer, our teachers told us all about how he would go all about doing good and healing people. I believe that Jesus is all these things, and he could do all these things and the memory verse that stuck with me my whole life was John 14:12 “Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that believeth on me, the works that I do shall he do also; and greater works than these shall he do; because I go unto my Father.” Once I left church it seem as though the desires came back like a might wave and would overtake me. I still believe that Jesus was all these things, but I started to believe he couldn’t save me because I had done so much wrong.

When I moved back to California this time I had gained a lot of weight, and I always wanted to eat, I don’t remember anyone ever telling me don’t eat that or I was eating to much. I grew up in a family of cooks, no matter what occasion we were eating, none of the food was considered healthy but it sure tasted good. My mom was the cook in California and my momma could throw down in the kitchen, it wasn’t anything she ever cooked that I didn’t like. Coming home from school and smelling the nutmeg, butter, sugar combination, I knew we were having sweet potatoes that night and you can’t have sweet potatoes without mac and cheese. My mom would barbecued ribs, chicken, steaks, brats, hotlinks, hotdogs, and hamburgers. The sides would be potato salad, spaghetti, baked beans, mac and cheese, and whatever else she could think of. There was always dessert, and I ate it right after eating my meal no matter how full I was. Overeating was easy for me because I couldn’t see it was happening, I would get a hot dog or hamburger because they were always done first. This was considered a snack, then I was tasting everything while the main meats were getting cooked. This goes on until everything is done and then I would sit down and eat a whole meal and dessert with a can of pop or two. I was eating the shame and guilt away, I wanted to feel better because I felt so depressed and low because if what I had become and that I was bring innocent people, my family members into this. I was mad at the man who molested me because he opened the door to perversion in my life and now, I was opening the same door to others. My desire for sex became stronger and stronger, I was involving my cousins and that really bothered me.

I remember one day I was so thirsty all day and I was drinking and drinking anything I saw but I remained thirsty. On top of that I was urinating a lot, I didn’t know what was going on, but I remember one night I went to the bathroom 24 times. I didn’t tell my parents because I thought it was because I had drank a lot. Then I got a boil, and it was painful, and the location was in a weird place so their was no relief. The pain became unbearable, and I went to my mom and told her. I told her then that night it burst, I thought everything was ok and life would go back to normal, but this would be the moment when my life would change forever. My mom took me to the hospital and military hospital were so old and they had a smell like something was rotten, walking in the building I already knew I didn’t want to be here. I remember sitting in a hallway all these people were passing by with their brown military getups on and I felt uneasy I was anxious and wanted to leave. A lady came out and she had me drink this drink; it was so sweet even to me I didn’t like it but she said to drink it. I don’t remember much after that but what I do remember was that I was admitted into the hospital that day. That was scary, especially when my mom had to leave, my baby sister was home, and she needed to go home to her. She said she would be back in the morning, and I said ok, I watched her walk until I couldn’t see her anymore and then I cried.

The next day was when someone explained to me why I was in the hospital, they told me I had diabetes, I didn’t know what that meant and the doctors tried to explain it to me, but I didn’t understand. All I knew was that they had me locked in a room, I couldn’t go home, and they were feeding me food that had no seasoning and tasted like cardboard. Hospitals always have chicken breasts that is hard and dry, I needed a whole gallon of water just to swallow it. One of my favorite doctors was Dr. Bailey, she came to my room with a smile and made me feel comfortable with her. She was very patient and kind with me and I trusted her.

I don’t remember how long I stayed in the hospital but when I finally left, I thought I’ll never be back in this place again, little did I know this would be the start of many hospitals stays. I couldn’t wait to get home, I had been starved and I was ready to eat, my mom was cooking that night, so I knew it was going to be something good. When I got my plate that night, I had baked chicken and salad with Italian dressing, I thought this is a joke right? I felt betrayed because my mom was feeding me like the hospital did except her chicken wasn’t dry and it had flavor, so I ate it. She gave me diet peach tea to drink, and I hated it, it had an after taste, I didn’t understand what was happening and I was mad because I wanted to eat like everyone else. While I was eating prison food everyone else got the fried chicken, spaghetti, sweet potatoes, mac and cheese, cakes, cookies, and candy.

My mom would always ask me had I taken my sugar, and I would sadly walk and get my machine, take my sugar, and my numbers were always high. To take my sugar, I had to use this pen looking tool that had a needle in it, it would stab my finger, blood would come out, then I would put it on a strip that was inserted into the machine, and ten seconds later my blood sugar would appear on the screen. I didn’t like taking my sugar because I didn’t want my numbers to be high and I didn’t want my mom to know I was sneaking food. My mom didn’t understand why my sugars were high, but she didn’t know that after she would feed me, and everyone went to sleep, I was up in the kitchen eating and drinking pop. The insomnia had gotten worst, the overeating had reached new heights, and incest and masturbation seemed like it consumed me.

I don’t remember my first doctor’s appointments, but I do remember that each appointment lasted two hours plus, I felt like I was being interrogated. They saw my numbers and they wanted to know what I was doing, how I was eating, and my mom told them she was changing my diet, and she didn’t know why my sugars were elevated either. I was hearing all this, and it made me sad because they were blaming my mom, and I was the one sneaking in the kitchen eating. They did blood work, but I wasn’t sure what the test was for. So, from that day one I lied about my numbers, I would also poke my finger but get water to dilute the blood so when I showed my mom the number it read lower than it was. I thought that this would allow me to eat more of the foods I wanted and get the doctors off my back.

At my next appointment I showed my logbook, and the doctors were asking me what changed to get my sugars regulated like this and my mom said she is still making my food healthier, and I was always outside playing. The doctors were pleased, my mom was happy, and I felt good as well, after the appointment I always went to get blood drawn. I still didn’t know the reason why they were drawing blood but one of the tests they did was for Hemoglobin A1C. This test allows the doctors to see what your average blood sugar has been over the last three months. So, once the results came back and my levels were higher than I said they wanted my parents to get my sugar under control and make sure I was giving then the right numbers. I was in middle school now, I lived in a new part of California, and I thought things were going to get better.

Middle school was fun and terrifying at the same time, I was becoming me, I was making friends, I felt happy for the first time in a while. I still needed to take my blood sugar at school for lunch, I got to leave class 5 mins early so that I could go to the nurse and check my levels. That was cool for me, everyone wanted to know why I got to leave, and it made me feel mysterious and people talked to me more because they wanted to be nosy. My mom and the nurse were like best friends, she made sure he saw me do everything and that my numbers were correct. I like the nurse; I could tell he cared by the way he treated me; he wasn’t harsh like the military doctors. I would leave his office, go to lunch, and eat everything I wasn’t supposed to eat. At school we had a student center where you could buy chips, candy, pop, juice, whatever you wanted, hot Cheetos were my thing back then and I got a bag every day with a Fruitopia. I believed there wasn’t any sugar in chips especially these because they were spicy. I thought it was ok for me to eat junk food because I walked so much. I walked to and from school each day and it had to be about two miles, I didn’t mind it because I was walking with my friends, so it didn’t seem that long. The doctors told me that diet and exercise helps lower your numbers, so I thought walking was the best thing to do.

I didn’t understand anything about cards and how they processed in the body, and hot Cheetos did have sugar in them, but I never looked at the nutritional values on the back nor did I think about serving sizes. My numbers were still high and my mom, the doctors, and the school nurse couldn’t figure out why. I had made a friend in the student center she was considered popular, we hung out at lunch, and I thought I was a cool kid now, one day she comes up to me and says your picture is hanging up in the student center and it says not to serve you. I was so embarrassed, and I lied and said I didn’t know why. Inside I felt like someone had come and gut punched me, I felt sick and nervous, I hated to tell people that I had diabetes. Well, I never told anyone my mom would make sure she let it be known, and once people knew they started acting weird. They randomly asked me if I took my medication and that would make me so mad because none of my friends knew and they would say “what medication?” I hated everything that came with diabetes, the food restrictions, people asking me did I take my medication, and the constant stares when I would eat or drink. I was a heavy kid so being heavy on top of having diabetes made me feel like I was an alien from another planet. I just wanted it to go away but it wouldn’t, so I started to become sneaky, I would ask other people to buy things for me. I wanted my hot Cheetos, and no one was going to stop me.

I was getting stressed out about my numbers, eating, and my friends knowing I had diabetes. So, I did what I always did when I was stressed, masturbation was a routine now I made room for it. I hated the fact that I had brought other people into this perverted world so I vowed that I would never invite anyone else into that world and I thought that I wasn’t hurting anyone by just doing it alone. My family decided to get a new cable service Time Warner, and we had all the channels, one day I was scrolling through all the channels, and I saw that there was a playboy channel. I thought “I know my parents didn’t get this channel” but I clicked on it anyway and I was shocked to find out that we had the channel. I spent hours in the room watching move after movie and seeing all this perversion and it was like I studied it. I knew it was wrong, but I couldn’t stop it was like I was drawn to it. This caused me to be depressed and eat more, and more, and more. I had all these secrets built up in me, I was overeating, I was masturbating, and I was lying to everyone about everything.

Imagine all this weight and condemnation on a middle schooler, I felt like I started to fade away and I would put on this mask, I wasn’t sure who I was anymore. I knew I loved God but if I loved God why was I watching these movies and doing things God said not to do. I knew I should be taking care of myself and eating right so that the complications of diabetes would destroy my life. I was so confused and the thing that I used for a stress reliever was also the thing that had a potential to kill me.

Things started to change when I met a girl, she came to my school in 8th grade, she was from Mississippi, and I loved to hear her talk. She just started talking to me one day and at this point I was super shy and didn’t talk much in school anymore, but I wanted to talk to her. I wanted to ask her the first day we met to be my best friend, but I knew that wasn’t something people are supposed to do. We hung out at lunch, we walked to and from school together, and after school we went to the park and hung out. This kept me away from watching the playboy channel and she made me feel like I was a normal person. She genuinely like me for me, she would always compliment my hair because I stayed rocking the braids or the deep swoop with the ponytail, and she would say kind things to me. After a while I became comfortable with her, and we would make each other laugh all day long. We has silent read class after lunch, and we would look at each other and just busting up laughing we use to get into so much trouble in that class.

She was always eating these orange sticks and one day I said “ girl what are you eating” and she said “Chick-o-stick” I laughed really hard because of the way she said it, then she started laughing and I asked her again what she was eating and she said “CHICK-O-STICK!” After we laughed so hard that our stomach hurt she finaly said “its candy”, I told her I had never heard of it, she gently informed me that everyone in Mississippi eat them and asked me to try it. I tried it and I was shocked, Chick-o-sticks are made of peanut butter, cane sugar, corn syrup, and tosted coconut, so I other words it was SWEET and I loved it. We would go to the NEX which was a store for the military and buy Chick-o-sticks, if she didn’t have one I had on and if I didn’t have one she had. She didn’t know I had diabeites thought, I didn’t want to tell her because we had becaome such good friends and I didn’t want her to think I was weird. Towards the middle of 8th grade a new girl came to the school with her brother and the we all became friends and we had a little crew. The new girl was loud and hilarious, she always kept us entertained, after school I would put my stuff down and go to the park. All the girls would go there because the boys all played basketball there, but I was going just to hang out with my crew. When I was with them I felt like I was in a perfect world with my perfect friends, next year we would be in high school and we would talk for hours about how high school would be. We walked everywhere all around military housing just talking and laughing, this was the best time of my life and I felt like these were my people.

My blood sugars kept getting higher and higher and I couldn’t even understand at this point what was happening, the doctors said if I exsercied and at right I would be fine. I felt that I walked a lot and that was good exsercie, but my number were increasing and one day I ended up in the hospital again.

American children and teens are being diagnosed at with diabetes at higher rates, there are over 205,000 with the disease and the number continue to increase. Diabetes ran in my bloodline and even when diagnosed with the disease there weren’t proper dietary changes, so the disease and bad eating habits kept getting passed down from generation to generation.