



Early Alert Canines

How a Diabetes Alert Dog Helped a Young Girl Grow Up with Independence



Mabel and her mom, Syda, when Mabel was 6.

Imagine you're just two years old and are diagnosed with diabetes. Imagine struggling through childhood to manage your blood sugar. Imagine entering adolescence and trying to develop independence when your health, and even your life, often depends on your mother's care. Then imagine the freedom a trained diabetes alert dog could bring into your life.

That's exactly what happened after Mabel Moonrising, now 15, was diagnosed with diabetes when she a toddler.

"I don't really know life outside of diabetes," she said. "And when I was growing up, my mom would handle everything to do with my diabetes."

As Mabel got older, she found she had to start taking more control of her condition. "It was really hard," she said. "I went through something called 'diabetes burnout,' where I would just stop trying to control my diabetes. I struggled a lot."

Mabel was in grade school when she first learned about dogs who could alert diabetics to blood sugar highs and lows. "A woman with a diabetes alert dog came into my classroom to talk to us about diabetes," she said. "I went home and told my mom. Then as soon as I was 12, we put in an application to Early Alert Canines."

More than a year later and after going through training with EAC, Mabel went home with Tokyo. The pair bonded immediately, and that's how quickly Mabel's management of her diabetes improved, too.

"It happened as soon as I got her," Mabel said. "Even just being around her and seeing her alert to my blood sugar changes makes me think about it more. It used to be a struggle, but having her changed my whole life for the better."



Mabel celebrating her 10th "Diaversary," at age 12.

One of the most profound changes in Mabel's life has been one of the simplest. "She wakes me up at night when my blood sugar is low or high, which means that my mom doesn't have to come in anymore," she said. "The first time [Tokyo] did it, just a few days after I got her, my mom had come in because my continuous glucose monitor (GCM) had alerted her.

"I told her, 'I'm already up. I already did it. My dog caught it before my CGM,' and we were both just both so amazed by that. Another time, she woke me up when I was at 45, and I got up and almost fell over because I was so low. My alarms weren't alerting me. So she saves my life every day, basically."

An even more dramatic incident happened when Mabel and Tokyo were at a summer camp for children with diabetes. "We were going on a hike up a mountain, and she would not continue walking. I thought, 'okay, I'd better stop.' And I checked my sugar and I was at 55; two minutes later I was at 48. I wouldn't have known without her alerting me, and might not have known until I had a seizure or was in the hospital."

Tokyo goes to school with Mabel every day. "It can be a struggle because people assume a lot of things without asking," she said. "I've had people ask if she's an emotional support animal because I'm depressed. Or they don't listen when I say no, you can't pet my dog.

"When I first took her to my previous school, I was yelled at and called an attention whore for having a dog at school. That was not fun. But she saves my life, and so I just blocked that all out, and thought, 'This is my dog. I love her. I don't care what you say. She is my savior.'"

The changes Tokyo has made in Mabel's life were profound, and she wants to see other children and adults with diabetes experience the same lifesaving benefits. "Diabetes is difficult, and these dogs support you in more ways than alerting to blood sugar highs and lows. They are a companion you can always count on. That is just the best thing ever."



Mabel and Tokyo, 2019



Mabel and Tokyo, 2018

She added, "They save lives every single day. And if it weren't for the donors who support EAC, that's not something people who aren't well off could experience. We only had to pay an application fee, so it eased the stress on my parents. It makes everything better for the people who need a dog like Tokyo."