

ORANGES & LEMONS

by Pravin Rajwani



Pravin with his younger sisters Nisha (left) and Neeta who was diagnosed with diabetes when she was three.

I fall under category of a young working single adult, hitting the big 3-0 this year. The only difference - and a huge one - is that I have been living with type 1 diabetes since I was seven. Well, I guess you can't really escape the condition when it runs so deep in the family - mum has type 2 diabetes, so do all my grandparents and a host of other relatives.

The fateful day we discovered I was diabetic was quite traumatic for mum. She had just returned from a trip to India. I greeted her at the door with a 'hi', and collapsed. I was rushed to the hospital where the specialist confirmed that I was diabetic.

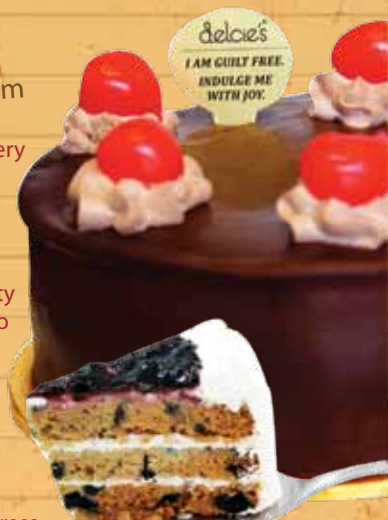
Then came the oranges. That was how the nurse educator taught us the fundamentals of injections. I would like to say I was a tough kid, but I cursed like a sailor every time they injected me. My dad, a medic during his NS days, took it upon himself to inject me and used to joke that it was like playing darts. Well, this dart board was not laughing. After a couple of days, I told him not to quit his day job and tried to master the skill myself.

I missed the majority of classes when I was in Primary 1 because I was in hospital. On my first day back in school, the form teacher explained my condition to the class. Some were nice. Some plain mean and ate ice cream in front of me. In retrospect, the teachers, principal and most students were very supportive. It helps to tell people what you are instead of trying to hide. Acceptance is the only way forward. When I was in secondary school and junior college, I was exempted from doing the NAFTA tests but I did them anyway. I don't like being told I can't do something. I even earned the gold award a couple of times.

When I was five, I wanted to be a fighter pilot. You can't even get a private pilot's license (PPL) if you are medically unfit, let alone a commercial pilot's license. But when life gives you lemons, you make lemonade. I decided to become an aerospace engineer instead. That is what I am today. My dream of flying is still very much alive though. Perhaps one day.

MUM'S THE WORD

by Delcie Lam



When I decided to start my cake business in September 2008, my mother who was a businesswoman herself objected. She said, "I put you through studies of your own interest (design and advertising), you had a great career as an art director in a good company that paid you well, why do you want to give that all up?"



I told her, "I want to be like you!" I remembered her look of disappointment. "Perhaps you should learn it the hard way", was her last word of advice to me before she passed away six months later.

In 2006, mum was diagnosed with stage three breast cancer and needed surgery. She suffered chemotherapy and radiation over the next six months, to be declared cancer free in 2007. After that, she went on an organic and hi-fibre diet influencing me to do likewise. I did not follow her strictly organic diet and still had my hawker indulgences when I was not with her.

I immersed myself in my cakery, 12 hours a day tending the shop and running around meeting people. Three months into my business, mum complained of stomach bloating; she looked as if she was four months pregnant. We rushed her to the doctor and she was immediately diagnosed with stomach and intestinal cancer.

Everyone was devastated. We thought she might beat the cancer again, but her condition worsened. I watched her scream

in agony for more morphine shots every day. On 31 September 2009, mum passed away, quietly, while everyone was outside the hospital ward.

Mum had a heart of gold, doing charity work and always giving to people who needed money. What did she do to deserve such sickness? I grieved for a whole year, searching for the reasons. Then one day my fiancé opened my eyes.

Yes, it was mum's food, lifestyle and stress that cumulatively caused her cancers! The organic diet after her breast cancer could not prevent another cancer because she had fallen back into the old unhealthy pattern of irregular meals and long working hours.

I had the answer right in front of me all along - vegetarianism. I then made a life choice for myself. No, I do not want to be like my mother. I want to live my life differently. Food can either be your medicine or your poison.

Because of this, I transformed my entire bakery's menu in 2010 and pioneered the technique in baking organic, egg free, dairy free, gluten free and diabetic friendly cakes in Singapore and in 2011 my bakery became the proud recipient of the Healthier Bakery Award by Health Promotion Board.

I am sure mum is smiling right now. Everything that I am now, I owe it all to her. She is and will always be my inspiration.

photos courtesy of www.delciesdesserts.com