

ONE PAGE DALIA ROSENFELD

Everything That Rises Must Come Down

SOMETIMES IT'S BETTER TO LEAVE THE things we buy in the boxes they come in. Such was the case with the Hammacher Schlemmer recumbent exercise bicycle (*assembly required*) that I bought for my teenage son after he was diagnosed with Type 1 diabetes and needed to stay on the move to bring his blood sugar under control. For the first few weeks after his release from the hospital, Natan tried to return to a normal life – going to school, getting together with friends, teaching himself to code well enough to make me wonder why, after three years of Spanish, he could not persuade our new Mexican neighbor to get his car out of our driveway.

But Natan's numbers were terrible, every finger prick a reminder that in America, to be on the move is more a state of mind than a lifting of limbs. And that dessert is never negotiable.

"Hey, I know!" I exclaimed one evening after the screen on Natan's glucose meter spat out a 300, when we had been rooting for a 95. "Let's go for a walk through the neighborhood!"

So, we went on a walk, picking up speed as we passed the ABC store, then a bit more speed as the cupcake café came into view, followed by Benny Deluca Pizza, the World of Beer, Wild Wings on the roof of the Amtrak station, and the smell of something Chinese that was strong enough for my youngest son to seek confirmation that if he dug a very deep hole in the backyard, he would eventually reach the restaurant.

When we got home, we all raided the refrigerator.

The recumbent bicycle was black and sleek and full of promise. It was a pity the only available space we could find for it was the bathroom.

"You must be kidding," Natan said. "Try it out after dessert tonight," I suggested, my heart pounding at the thought of the purchase I had just made. "I bought donuts."

Every evening after dinner, my son cloistered himself in the bathroom with his computer and the entire first season of "Breaking Bad," whatever that was. I didn't care what went on behind closed doors as long as it brought his blood sugar within normal range. And down the numbers came, a graceful, gradual descent, like a trek down a moun-

tain, only instead of a majestic snowy peak to stretch your neck toward, a frontal view of a toilet and a diagram illustrating how to pedal with correct spinal posture.

After three months, I took Natan in for his first A1C test to see what percentage of his hemoglobin was

coated with sugar, and how many cartons of ice cream that translated into.

"Six point one!" his endocrinologist proudly declared. "Unbelievable! What's your secret?"

So I told him.

"In the bathroom?" he repeated.

I shrugged. "It was renovated in 1978."

"Would you consider joining a gym?"

"No," Natan said, trying to help out.

And then an opportunity came for travel.

It is always good to get a change of scenery, and Tel Aviv – where we are spending the year – offers a pretty good view of the Mediterranean. But it is not the sea that allows my son to lead a normal life: It is the walking to and from it, the sharing of sidewalks with people all going to the same

place even if their destinations are different, that lets him take control of his illness and declare, "No, I will not build a meth lab in the tub today." For there are only so many episodes of "Breaking Bad" you can let your teenage son watch in the bathroom while riding a stationary bicycle before the weirdness sets in.

Disassembly sometimes required.

Last week Natan and I went in for his first A1C test in Israel, taking a bus an hour north to Ra'anana, because why keep things simple and have a clinic in Tel Aviv? The nurse practitioner greeted us, then excused herself to make an urgent call on her cell phone, the first words of which were "mazal tov!" When she joined us again, her face was more serious than celebratory.

"You're here for an A1C test?"

"Yes."

"Too bad. The machines we had been using were wonderful, but someone donated a batch of new machines, and the readings from my last five patients were totally inaccurate. You want to do it anyway?"

Whichever Hadassah chapter had come up with that bright idea for a contribution, well, I would have to write them a letter.

Natan extended his finger, and a minute later the three of us stood around the machine, cursing it and the diabetes that is daunting to live with in any land. It would have been easy to run out of the room then and catch the next bus to Tel Aviv, feeling defeated and forgoing the shawarma I had promised Natan after the appointment, freshly shaved and dripping with fat, insulin's most formidable foe. But in Israel, people only run if they have a reason, and there were no missiles raining down on Ra'anana at that moment. So we walked to the nearest restaurant, and when Natan's brothers called to ask when we were coming home, I told them to start eating dessert without us.



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Dalia Rosenfeld is a graduate of the Iowa Writers' Workshop. Her work has appeared in The Atlantic Monthly, Los Angeles Review and the Jerusalem Post.