

Cullinan would do almost anything to cure diabetes.

He Even Kiss

By Ann Volk

Eleven-year-old Cullinan Williams has done some amazing things. He's spoken with members of Congress and former President Bill Clinton. He's raised more than \$40,000 going door-to-door. He's even kissed a pig!

What Is Diabetes?

Diabetes is a disease that affects how the body turns food into energy. The body changes part of the food we eat into a sugar called *glucose*. Cells throughout the body use glucose for energy. A chemical called *insulin* acts as a key to let glucose into the cells. Insulin is made by special cells, which are found in the pancreas.

Sometimes the body's defense system, the *immune system*, does not work the way it should. In addition to fighting the bacteria and viruses that can cause diseases, the immune system tags the cells that make insulin as harmful. It begins to destroy them.

When too many of the cells have been destroyed, the body can't make enough insulin.

This process causes most cases of type 1 diabetes.



Learn more about diabetes on HighlightsKids.com.

It hasn't always been easy. "Let's just say the pig's nose wasn't too dry," recalls Cullinan.

So why does he do it? Since he was six, Cullinan Williams has had a disease called *type 1 diabetes*. His goal is to help find a cure.

Living with Diabetes

In people with type 1 diabetes, the body does not make enough of an important chemical called *insulin*. Most of these people have had diabetes since they were kids. So at a young age, they had to learn how to give themselves the insulin they need. Many people do this by giving themselves shots. Others may have a small pump with a soft tube that goes through the skin to give insulin when it's needed.

They must also give themselves a test several times each day to find out how much of a special sugar called *glucose* they have in their *blood*. To do this test, they must prick their finger or forearm.

These tests and shots are sometimes painful, but very important. Too much or too little glucose in the blood can make a person with diabetes very sick.

Cullinan's Mission

Cullinan had to learn the skills he would need to keep himself healthy. At age eight, he went to a camp sponsored by the American Diabetes Association. What he learned there changed his life.

At camp, Cullinan learned how to check his own blood sugar and how to give himself shots of

insulin. He also learned to be an advocate—someone who speaks out and works to support a cause.

Cullinan decided to raise money to support scientists who are trying to cure diabetes. When he came home from the camp, Cullinan and his dad went door-to-door to collect money for diabetes research.

The first year, he raised \$3,800.



ed a Pig



Cullinan Williams kisses a pig at Camp Discovery in Kansas. The American Diabetes Association holds Kiss-a-Pig events for people who raise the most money to fight the disease. The winner greets a pig with a kiss.

A year later he raised \$12,000. The next year, \$25,000. He has been the top fund-raiser in New York State.

Because of his abilities as a speaker and fund-raiser, Cullinan was named National Youth Advocate by the American Diabetes Association for 2001–2002. Cullinan has met with his senators, Hillary Rodham Clinton

and Charles Schumer, and with members of Congress to talk about diabetes and the need for a cure.

Cullinan has also worked to pass laws in New York State that increase money for research and help people with diabetes to get needed medical supplies. For his work, Cullinan was given the Central New York Citizen of the Year award. He was the first young person to receive this honor.

Searching for a Cure

There is no cure for diabetes . . . yet! But there is hope. Scientists have succeeded in putting cells from a healthy pancreas into people with diabetes. Many people who received these cells did not need insulin shots for more than a year.

Researchers are also working to create a device that will work almost as well as a healthy pancreas. The machine is being designed to give insulin and to check the person's blood glucose. Then it should be able to deliver insulin whenever the body needs it.

While the research continues, people with diabetes have to find a way to overcome the daily challenges posed by this disease.

"What gets me through every day is knowing that this is about more than me," says Cullinan. "No one should have to fight this disease alone." Cullinan encourages kids at diabetes camps to become advocates and to begin their own search for a cure.

Cullinan's work continues. He plans to take his message all the way to the White House.

Cullinan says he would love to meet the President. "I'd share what it's like to have diabetes—and how important finding a cure is to people affected by this disease."

People with diabetes and their families look forward to a day when the disease can be cured. Because of the work of Cullinan and his fellow youth advocates, their dream may become a reality.



Cullinan meets Senator Hillary Rodham Clinton.

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