

Bargaining for a cure

by Elizabeth Snouffer November 20, 2014

It's always rewarding when a person with type 1 diabetes stumbles upon the shop, reads the awning, and then comes inside to exclaim "I have type 1 diabetes! I can't believe that a store exists for us."— Liz Wolff, Founder and CEO of Cure Thrift Shop in New York City

Thrift store shopping was becoming popular well before the song "Thrift Shop" which comedically reflected the rise of recycling goods in today's edgy pop culture. Thrift shops have become such a significant industry that the Economist reported on the trend. It has become an industry where millions of people convey their commitment to "green" living, and in return receive the thrill of a real "find" plus the warm feeling of supporting a charitable concern.

Such is the goal of Cure Thrift Shop founder and CEO, Liz Wolff (diagnosed with type 1 diabetes at the age of 11) who sells beautiful second hand items while raising funds for the type 1 diabetes cure and helping others who live with T1D afford the cost of supplies. ALL profits from the shop benefit Marjorie's Fund and the Diabetes Research Institute Foundation.

I met Liz at a recent social gathering of woman living with type 1 diabetes and was so impressed by the East Village outlet, her dedication to the cause and her work ethic as a young mom (open 7 days a week), that I asked her to answer a few questions.



Cure Thrift Shop Founder, Liz Wolff, with her son.

Cure Thrift Shop opened in what year? What gave you the idea?

I am a fourth generation garbage picker/garage saler/thrift shop enthusiast. When eBay mania began, I was in college and made a living by selling the items that I found at thrift shops and estate sales online. Soon after I began selling, my cousins and neighbors asked me to sell their items on eBay as well. I created a small business for myself by selling other people's items on eBay and taking a percentage of what the item sold for. After a few years of selling solely online, I decided that I wanted to open my own thrift shop ! with an actual storefront. At the time, I was only 21 years old and while I knew plenty (or so

I thought) about antiques and vintage collectibles, I didn't know a thing about owning my own business. I decided to look for a job in a thrift shop to learn the industry. I was immediately hired to manage one of the largest and most well-known thrift shops in Manhattan. I worked there for close to two years. In 2007, at the age of 23, I incorporated, and exactly one year later, in July of 2008, I opened the doors to Cure Thrift Shop.

Why is thrift store shopping an obsession for many?

Thrift shoppers LOVE a hunt. There is no greater thrill (for thrifters) than to search through racks, bins, and shelves to seek the ultimate treasure.

What is the oddest thing that has been donated? What is the most amazing item that was donated?

We have received some of the most incredible donations over the years. We have also ! received some of the most bizarre. A few years back, a woman donated 10 huge boxes of books from her late boyfriend. As I was opening up the boxes and sorting through the hundreds of books, one of them rattled. When I opened the book, I found a gun sitting perfectly in the carved out pages. The bullets were not too far away, hidden in another book. I, of course, turned the gun over to the police and spent a few hours being interrogated in the police station. That was a memorable experience. Cure Thrift Shop supporters have been extremely generous with us. We have received incredible furniture from estates in Westchester and Connecticut that were worth hundreds of thousands of dollars. These types of donations generally come from a family with a child living with type 1 diabetes. It's incredible to see what such a tremendous donation of used furniture can do for the shop and the charities that we support.



Inside Cure Thrift Shop - warm and welcoming

What are best-selling second-hand items?

The best-selling second-hand items in our shop are fur coats, vintage and antique jewelry, contemporary designer clothing, and mid-century furniture. Our customers include college students, young professionals, interior designers, set designers, stylists, and anyone looking for a good deal on fantastic stuff.

What loyal VIPs visit the shop?

We are in a great part of NYC – in the East Village, just below Union Square. We are! fortunate to have several celebrity donors and shoppers. Marc Jacobs recently tweeted a photo inside of the shop and called Cure Thrift Shop one of his favorite places to visit in NYC. Chloe Sevigny, Julia Stiles, Rachel Dratch, and Piper Perabo frequently make donations to Cure. Some of our other celebrity shoppers include Mary-Kate Olsen, Gabe Saporta, Natalie Portman, Brooke Shields, Adrien Grenier, and Nicky Hilton. It's always so exciting to see a celebrity in my shop. Cure was recently seen on the second episode of House

of DVF on the E! channel. We've also appeared on various HGTV shows, and have served as the backdrop for movies, television shows, and commercials.

How many of your customers “get” what defines type 1 diabetes?

Do you explain the disease to people – do visitors want to know? Very few of Cure's customers actually “get” type 1 diabetes. I find myself explaining the disease at least 5 times a week, which I am happy to do. Of course, I am occasionally met with ignorant and misinformed remarks about supporting “obesity in America.” I have also been encouraged to try the Raw Diet to cure my diabetes way too many times!

What percentage of visitors actually are connected to type 1 diabetes?

About 10% of visitors to Cure are connected to type 1 diabetes. It's always rewarding when a person with type 1 diabetes stumbles upon the shop, reads the awning, and then comes inside to exclaim, “I have type 1 diabetes! I can't believe that a store exists for us.” I absolutely love meeting and connecting with these people. It makes my job and all of the work that I do feel even more important. I have also been approached by quite a few mothers of women in their 20's with type 1 diabetes, who want me to reach out to their daughters to serve as a friend and a role model to stay in control. While I don't view myself as a role model or anyone who has type 1 diabetes “figured out,” I am always happy to connect with other people living with diabetes to share stories, commiserate, laugh, cry, and compare insulin pumps and calloused fingertips.



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Ali Gilbertson (pictured) has been working with Liz for five and half years now

How much money do you raise for T1D charities (Marjorie's Fund – DRIF) annually?

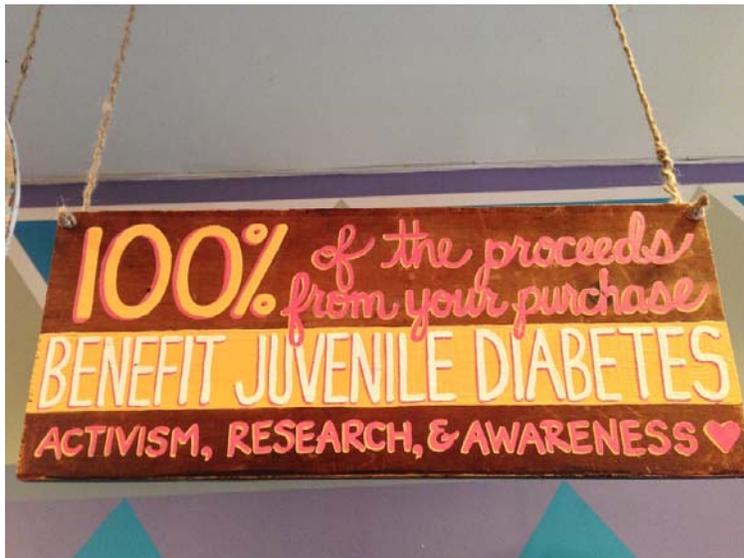
We have raised hundreds of thousands of dollars for type 1 diabetes charities throughout the years. More importantly, I feel that Cure Thrift Shop is bringing much-needed attention to this disease and the charities that we support – Marjorie's Fund and the Diabetes Research Institute Foundation.

Do you believe there will be a cure one day?

I do believe that there will be a cure for type 1 diabetes in my lifetime. I wasn't always completely convinced, but shortly after my son was born in 2012, I visited the Diabetes Research Institute in Miami for the first time. After touring the facilities, looking through the microscopes, and speaking to Dr. Ricordi and all of the incredible researchers and physicians searching for a cure at the DRI, I left feeling confident that a cure would be found – and soon. I have always maintained a positive outlook on my life – especially when it comes to diabetes. My only option is to have faith that a cure will be found and to enjoy every aspect of my life, with or without diabetes.

Please tell us about Marjorie's Fund?

Four years ago, a handsome and charming man came into my shop. He introduced himself as Dr. Jason Baker. During that conversation, I learned that Dr. Baker had type 1 diabetes and was an endocrinologist at Weill Cornell Medical Center. Shortly after that first introduction, I became pregnant and was extremely unhappy with the endocrinologist that I was seeing. I emailed Dr. Baker, asking if he would be willing to take on a type 1 patient who was six weeks pregnant. I met Dr. Baker in his Upper East Side office just two days later. I immediately felt connected to Dr. Baker. For the first time in my type 1 diabetic life, I left my visit feeling confident and good about myself. In the past, I had always felt guilty, judged, scared and insecure. Thanks to Dr. Baker's knowledge, guidance, and superb bedside manner, I now have a healthy two-and-a-half year old son (who was delivered on my 17th anniversary of being diagnosed with type 1 diabetes). During my frequent visits with Dr. Baker while I was pregnant, we would often discuss Cure Thrift Shop and all of the work that went into running a non-profit organization. I soon learned that Dr. Baker was forming his own non-profit called Marjorie's Fund for type 1 diabetics in resource-poor settings. I immediately felt drawn to the missions of Marjorie's Fund. The mission of Marjorie's Fund is to empower adolescents and adults living with type 1 diabetes in resource poor settings to not only survive their diagnosis, but to effectively control their diabetes and to thrive into adulthood. Marjorie's Fund is inspired by the spirit of Marjorie Namayanja, who was an ardent advocate for better healthcare and education for type 1 diabetes patients in Uganda. Marjorie's Fund envisions a world where all people with type 1 diabetes thrive, and a day when type 1 diabetes is cured. Last year, we happily made Marjorie's Fund one of Cure's beneficiaries. I also became a Marjorie's Fund board member to help grow the organization beyond the financial support from Cure Thrift Shop.



Cure Thrift Shop2 We understand Marjorie's Fund helps people in poor resourced environments such as those with T1D in Rwanda, but can you also discuss people who live in Greater NY (or anywhere in US) who have little access to T1D supplies/insulin and how MF helps them?

Marjorie's Fund is dedicated to expanding their support to people with type 1 diabetes in the ! US – especially in New York City. During hurricane Sandy, Dr. Baker and his team visited Far Rockaway, Queens to bring insulin and supplies to those who were in need. The hurricane prompted Marjorie's Fund to launch a New York City Initiative in October of 2013 to bring people with type 1 diabetes and their families together to discuss emergency preparedness and life with diabetes. Cure Thrift Shop and Marjorie's Fund have recently joined forces to hold "Team Type 1 Meet-Ups" to connect people with diabetes and their families in different age groups with various interests. The meetings are held in the shop, which offers a safe and fun environment for people to connect and share their stories.

Last question – when is your next sale? At Cure Thrift Shop, we LOVE deals and love offering them to our customers even more. We are launching a new color tagging system this week so that every day is a sale each day, a specific tag color will be half off. We are pretty excited to see how our customers react to this new sale system!

If you live in New York City or are visiting, I urge you to visit Liz and her team in the East Village for a little holiday shopping and a feel good experience.



Cure Thrift Shop is located In the East Village

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The Diabetes Research Institute Foundation

Marjorie's Fund