

# Around the world with Type 1

Diligent diabetes self-management has allowed Christina Sanne to lead a life full of adventure, writes **Deborah Condon**

Christina Sanne was diagnosed with Type 1 diabetes when she was 17 years old, however this has not stopped her living all over the world and also running her own business.

Now in her 50s, Christina, who is originally from Northumberland in England, has been living in Dublin since 2007.

She recalls that even though her grandmother had Type 1 diabetes, her symptoms went unnoticed.

"I had got so thin that I was 17 but was fitting into trousers I wore when I was 12. I was also exhausted and I remember at the time, I was learning to drive but I couldn't get through a driving lesson without needing to go to the toilet," she says.

She was in her final year of school and eventually she was brought to her GP who confirmed diabetes and sent her straight to hospital. She spent the next two weeks there and says that she "took to it quite quickly".

#### **Cautious approach**

Christina describes herself as "very careful" when it comes to her diabetes.

"I think my parents were more freaked out than I was," she says.

"I moved to London the year after I was diagnosed and I didn't take risks with my



Christina Sanne

## LIFE STORY

health. I never got drunk because it just makes me feel sick.”

After getting married, her husband was offered a job in Moscow, so the family moved there for a year.

“I had a toddler and was pregnant and I didn’t really have the medical care that I should have had there. I was going to the embassy doctor and flying home to England for appointments. It was a bit of a risk,” she says.

From Moscow, the family moved to Luxembourg, then to Germany, then to New York, before eventually finding themselves in Ireland.

While trying not to take risks with her health, Christina admits that there have been times when she “hasn’t put the diabetes first” and like everyone else, she has days when her blood glucose levels are not where she wants them to be.

She uses the Dexcom 7 and at the time of this interview, she was just weeks away from starting to use a pump, something she admits she resisted for some time.

“I just didn’t want to wear a pump all the time. I was managing fine, but I was looking into it and I think my diabetes management will be much better,” she says.

### Varied experience

Having lived in so many places, Christina has lots of experience of health services for both diabetes and pregnancy, as her three children were all born in different countries.

“I had terrible morning sickness and all of my babies were big, over 10lbs, but I had no complications. I breastfed all of them and never had a problem with that,” she recalls.

In terms of her diabetes, Christina describes her experience of the Irish health service as “excellent”.

“I attend St Vincent’s Hospital and I have no complaints. In fact, almost everywhere that I have lived, I’ve had no complaints,” she says.

However, she admits that while her diabetes has been relatively straightforward, “it can be a pain”.

“You are thinking about it all day. They

say people with diabetes have an extra 180 thoughts a day and I really believe that. It can be relentless, but you have to learn to deal with it.

“Some days, I might feel ill or I might feel tired and I don’t know why, but then I realise it’s just because my blood glucose levels have gone up.

“But I’m used to it and I can’t remember a time before diabetes,” she says.



*Christina founded her business, Red Rufus, in 2010 and to this day makes all of the soft toys by hand, as pictured above. Red Rufus now supplies a number of shops throughout Ireland and the US. The company is named after its mascot Rufus, pictured left, Christina’s family’s beloved red setter who passed away in April 2022.*

Christina also admits that she used to be very worried that her children would develop diabetes, especially when they were younger.

“They are now all in their 20s so I’m slightly more relaxed, but I wouldn’t like it if they had it,” she says.

Christina and her family moved to Ireland in 2007 when her eldest child was in 5th class.

“She was coming close to the time of starting secondary school so we decided to stay,” she explains.

At that time, Christina loved to sew

and so she started to make soft toys for her children. This gradually grew into her business, Red Rufus, which sees her produce handmade soft toys that are sold all over the world.

When it comes to diabetes, she believes there “aren’t really any restrictions, but you have to be careful with yourself”.

“It’s very important to plan. I am always planning what is happening next,” she adds.

For more information on Red Rufus, visit [www.redrufus.ie](http://www.redrufus.ie)