

BOSTON COMMON

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Cause Celeb

Socialite Casey Johnson takes up a cause that hits close to home—juvenile diabetes, a disease she's battled since childhood.

BY ANNA CHESHIRE LEVITAN



Nicky Hilton and Casey Johnson



Johnson with children in Cambodia.

CASEY JOHNSON has partied with every A-list celebrity from New York to St. Tropez. She hangs with Lindsay Lohan and the ubiquitous Hilton sisters and is fiercely loyal to their unique brand of party-girl friendship. But this socialite, the heiress to the Johnson & Johnson fortune and the 26-year-old daughter of Robert Wood “Woody” Johnson IV and Sale Johnson, is different.

Johnson was diagnosed with type 1 juvenile diabetes when she was eight years old, and now, almost two decades later, she has opted for a dose of hard-core diabetes advocacy rather than trading shots of tequila with the glitterati. “Until about two years ago, I was living in total denial that I had diabetes and how serious it is,” Johnson says.

“I’ve finally realized that I’m not like my other friends. I just decided to get my act together.”

Johnson is no stranger to the realities of her disease and the need for awareness. She and her parents wrote *Managing Your Child’s Diabetes* in 1992, shortly after her diagnosis, to help people understand the disease.

Most recently, Johnson gave a speech honoring long-time friends Barbara Davis and the late Dana Reeves for the Los Angeles chapter of the Juvenile Diabetes Research Foundation (JDRF). “I got up on stage to say a couple of words about Barbara and Dana, and in my speech, I talked about what was wrong with me,” Johnson says. “I [said], ‘Who would have thought that the great-great-granddaughter of the founder of the largest pharmaceutical company in the entire world would end up with diabetes and its complications?’”

Following her personal testament that night, Johnson received a call from the Joslin Diabetes Center in Boston, the world’s preeminent center for diabetes care and research, asking if she would be the honorary chair of its upcoming event, Newport Under the Stars, which takes place September 28 and 29 in Newport, Rhode Island. The event includes an all-star golf tournament at Carnegie Abbey, a star-studded dinner auction with Johnson’s gal pals (yes, Lohan and the Hilton sisters are attending), and a 12-meter yacht regatta. “When I got the call from the Joslin,” Johnson says, “I thought, *God, I’m honored to be even considered to be honored.* I’ve asked absolutely every single person I know to give money, which I’ve never done before.”

Johnson is determined to make a difference in the lives of children, those who suffer from diabetes as well as those who live in other extreme situations. “I want to dedicate my life and my time—since I’m lucky enough and fortunate enough to be able to do it—to different causes and not necessarily all diabetes,” Johnson says. She mentions the Malawi Project and the Sherp Project, both nonprofits dedicated to helping children in Africa. Johnson is also in the process of adopting a child from Kazakhstan. “My life is just beginning,” she says. “I’ve done the socialite thing, and I’m ready to do this. This is what I want.”

Joslin Diabetes Center, 1-800-JOSLIN-1; joslin.org.