

An Unexpected Journey

Today is February 13, 2008 and it's 3:31 p.m... Let's see that means it's been exactly 9 months, 11 days, and 4 hours since I heard the shocking words, "You have Parkinson's Disease." When the doctor spoke those four words, I remember feeling as if I was in a bad dream and then suddenly feeling a flash of anger. I couldn't believe this "so called" physician was allowed to put the "M.D." behind his name. My mind raced and between tears, shock and anger, I muttered "You mean the disease Michael J. Fox has?!" The doctor quietly replied, "Exactly". I thought to myself how in the world could a healthy 47 year old women have a brain disease. I went from thinking the weakness in my right hand and arm were all part of a bad case of carpel tunnel to suddenly hearing I have an incurable, degenerative brain disease. My husband and I looked at each other and I could see the fear and shock on his face. This scared me slightly more, since my darling husband has somewhat of a poker face normally. The doctor then proceeded to tell me that he was 90% sure of his diagnosis, but he would have to order a brain MRI to rule out the other two possibilities, which were tumor or stroke. Well, needless to say the MRI came back clear, which led me straight back to the BIG "P" word.

I knew I needed a second opinion, maybe even 3, 4, or 5! Thankfully I ended up at The Parkinson's Institute in Sunnyvale, Ca. where I received excellent care, was treated with respect and kindness, and most importantly given a sense of hope. My new doctor agreed with the original diagnosis, and my journey as an official PD patient began.

The last few months has brought on a flood of emotions. The first 2 to 3 months I felt as if the PD diagnosis was almost overwhelming. If my life were split into pieces of a pie, the PD

took up 90% of the pie. Every morning I would wake up with a sense of dread, and then I would remember, "Oh that's right, I have PD" I cried a lot and felt tremendous fear about my future. Thoughts would race through my head, "Will my husband be up to dealing with whatever lies ahead". "Will I be able to dance at my daughter's wedding?" (Mind you, she was only 12 at the time) "Will I have to eventually use a walker?" My mind buzzed with thoughts throughout most of the day and I somehow felt I was losing my identity. I once told a dear friend on a particularly bad day, that I felt I was living in a plastic bubble. I also felt angry that some of my future options might be taken away. I stopped going to church and placed my beloved cross pendants in the back of my jewelry box. God was no longer at the top of my list, which saddened me even more.

My turning point was when I found a local PD support group and began attending. I was very hesitant in the beginning to attend, the thought of seeing someone with severe symptoms scared the daylights out of me. I did finally attend a meeting and I was surprised to see so many lively, loving people. I now have a wonderful circle of fellow PDer's who share many of my own feelings. They have freely shared their insight, empathy and incredible wisdom with me over the last eight months.

Oddly enough, I am now beginning to see my Parkinson's as a strange backwards gift. The world is colored differently now. There is a richness and appreciation for all things big and small. I was racing up the driveway with my daughter the other day, and felt so blessed to be able to share that with her. Sunsets look more golden, raindrops feel more refreshing, the wind chimes seem to play a sweeter tune as they blow in the breeze, and one of the best things that has happened, is I have discovered I'm an artist! I feel compelled to paint, photograph, bead, garden and create beautiful things. Art has brought me peace and has also quieted my racing mind. It has been a form of meditation.

My relationships are richer than they have ever been, and I can now cut to the chase a lot quicker so I can get to the good stuff. I laugh deeper, listen better, and have a kinder heart.

I've always believed that we add a new color to our imaginary "rainbow" when we weather stormy seas. Tough life lessons are the ones that make us grow the most. Turns out all of my favorite people are the ones that possess big colorful rainbows.

My Parkinson's diagnosis has definitely been my greatest challenge so far... but I can now say I am a person with a large, multi-colored rainbow.

In short, it's been an unexpected journey, and like most journeys there have been a lot of bumps along the way. I continue to remind myself that I must take one day at a time, and most importantly to enjoy the scenery along the way.

C.D.

