

Jon's Story - 2023

Ten years ago I retired at age 65 from a 42 year engineering career. I was reasonably healthy and fit. I eagerly, but naively, envisioned a long carefree retirement of leisure and vigorous enjoyment of activities that I've loved. Colleagues wished me well. All raised a glass to my newfound freedom and bright prospects for the years ahead.

But a year later there began a little tremor in my hand. I compared symptoms with those of a friend with PD, finding way too many similarities. Months later my neurologist confirmed what I had been dreading. I have Parkinson's Disease. Damn!

The biggest sense of loss was my illusion of the future. "In five years I'll be a shuffling, shaking old geezer," I told myself and others. I hated the image. Still do. It's now been eight years since then, and I suppose I have become that shaky old geezer. But I don't see myself that way. I'm still me. I came to realize that none of us know what the future will bring. And I've never known what the future will bring, even though I lived as if I did. So, it became more important than ever to savor the present while preparing to fight the effect of this disease on my future.

Angels. If you are as fortunate as I am, you have a little network of people in your life who are supportive, understanding, cheerful and empathetic. Think of them as angels, giving you unconditional love, compassion and support. Angels of support can be your spouse and family, exercise class leaders, religious leaders, and friends. My wish is that every PD person has angels of support in their life, as I have. Find them and stay connected.

The folks here at Beat PD are very special angels. Starting with the amazing and tireless Michelle Hespeler, to Emily and each of the fantastic and vigorous trainers. And many more. They're on our side. Unconditionally.

Exercise: Our best medicine. I'm no athlete but I've long lived with the goal of embracing some form of exercise nearly every day. For us PD people the message is more important than ever. Here's a little of what's working for me:

- PD-focused exercise sessions. Meet some of your exercise angels here at Beatpdtoday. There's a strong focus on balance, core strength, aerobic fitness, and comradery. This is the bright spot in my PD life.
- Biking – Ride with friends if you like. I do. Most bike shops can guide you to riding groups or clubs. Or ride by yourself if you prefer. Spinning classes are a great supplement or alternative to any cycling program. Be safe and follow the rules of the road.
- Walk, hike or jog. Maintain your strength and aerobic capacity.
- Work exercise into your daily life. Mow the lawn, cut your firewood, and walk to the store.

Emotional Support. PD people need one another. Our diseases and lives vary greatly, so we benefit from sharing our stories and our empathies. Make sure to stay engaged in activities that you enjoyed pre-PD. You're still the same person and you have a lot to offer to your community. Don't withdraw from what you enjoy in life. Ever.

My PD story, like yours, is still unfolding. But for us PD people, we can still enjoy all that life has to offer. We only need to stay engaged with our physical health through exercise and our emotional fitness. And stay in touch with our angels.