

Parkinson's Warriors

The Dreibelbis Family

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I think one of the biggest shocks for Parkinson's patients and their loved ones is that it's not just a disease. It's life-altering, and in my dad's words, it "humbled" him on a daily basis. In 2016, he was humbled yet again when Maryland required him to take a driving test. He failed, and his license was revoked.

Most of us don't think about how important being able to drive is. It becomes immediately clear if you lose your license. My dad wasn't working at the time and it bound him to our house. He lost his ability to do

spontaneous things: to help out my mom if she needed errands run, and to do so many of the things we all take for granted every day. It was more than losing trips to the grocery store – it was losing a sense of utility and freedom.

I think that trapped feeling was the worst part for him, and for the first time since he had been diagnosed, I was worried about my dad's mental health. He was mopey and spent most of his days watching cable news and Netflix. I've noticed my Dad's moods have a significant effect on his cognitive abilities. When he is excited, you practically can't tell anything is wrong – he processes things much better. Right after he lost his license, the opposite was true, and it was scary.

Although he was diagnosed in 2008, my family still wasn't discussing my dad's disease with anyone but a few close friends. With no job, no ride, no yoga, and few outlets, my dad was alone. I felt guilty, like I should be getting him places more often, and I know my mom and brother felt the same. My mom and I are there whenever we can be, but we work full time. My brother is a Marine assigned to Camp Lejeune in North Carolina. We simply can't be around as much as he needs us. It's a terrible thing to feel like you can't do enough for someone you love.

During the summer of 2016, my dad started walking about 20 minutes to the YMCA to get a workout in. At about the same time, my family began to tell people about my dad's Parkinson's in an effort to raise funds for P4P. And that's when something my family considers amazing started to happen.

After spin or yoga class, people started offering my dad rides home. If he saw someone he knew, he asked, but oftentimes people just offered – either because they had seen him walking or because word had gotten around about his disease. One of his main rides, Sandy, a neighbor, looks out for him at class and often takes him on errands so he can help my mom. We didn't know Sandy at all before this. She met him at class and reached out. A friend of Sandy's to whom my dad had never even spoken then

approached him at the gym and gave him her phone number and email in case he ever needed a ride.

People continue to come out of the woodwork. Some are people we have known for years through school or sports. But even casual acquaintances, people whose last names my dad can't remember, are driving him around. One even takes him to the grocery store when she doesn't need to go herself. She just sits outside and waits while he grabs a few things.

My dad says he's "grateful" and "humbled" by people's support. He never expected it, and says it's overwhelming. But one friend told him while giving him a ride, "it's kindness repaying kindness." He has simply always been a nice guy while coaching their kids or hanging out.

Nowadays, he gets a yoga class and some bike riding in almost every day, and he never has to walk home in the cold after. We always joke that besides the *little* Parkinson's thing, he's in the best shape he has ever been! Even more importantly, he has this new group of friends with whom he can socialize. My dad talks to everyone, and missing that might've been the worst part about being trapped at home for him. Now he has his "drivers" to talk to.

Many of us are approaching Parkinson's alone. My family did for eight years. We always expected to feel shame when it became public. We haven't experienced that in the slightest. My dad put it best when he said we've been "humbled" and "overwhelmed" by the love people have displayed. If you're fighting Parkinson's, remember that no matter who you are, there are people in your life, even random people, who are happy to reach out and help you.

Keep fighting the good fight,
Ryan, Dan, Laura, and Greg