

Parkinson's Warriors

Aliya and Sara's Story

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Aliya and Sara Reich

Sara Reich was diagnosed with Parkinson's Disease about 12 years ago, while her daughter Aliya was away for her sophomore year of college. Aliya was told what was going on when she returned for summer break, and her life has been different ever since. Different in terrible ways; she was watching her mother begin a struggle with a disease familiar to her family because both of her grandfathers also battled. But also different in positive and powerful ways.

Prior to her retirement in 2013, Sara was a dedicated AP and IB art teacher at a high school in Virginia Beach and was honored as a teacher of the month multiple times. She was a giver

who placed her students and her family first. She was active, especially so when she lived in Colorado, taking advantage of the landscape to hike and whitewater raft. Aliya said it best: when I interviewed her to write this piece, she said, "just make sure they know she is amazing."

Parkinson's took a lot of that away from Sara, and it scared her daughter too. Aliya wondered if she could ultimately end up with the disease as well, given the family lineage and some health concerns. Although she was familiar with the disease because her grandfathers had it, it was even more terrible to watch her mom face it. But then, an opportunity arose. At the Baltimore Running Festival in 2013, Aliya happened to walk by the Pacing for Parkinson's tent. She had been looking for a way to do something, to try to make a difference in the face of a difficult prognosis, and P4P was the perfect chance. Aliya got involved with the team by running the 5k in 2014. Her mother's disease was already inspiring a change in her; she found an unexpected love of running and was determined to make the most out of her own health. She subsequently registered for her first half marathon and joined the organizing committee for the 2015 season. She was determined to do all she could.

Aliya, like all of us who raise money and volunteer our time, wanted to take action rather than accept a tough situation. She had watched her mom, a beloved teacher and very active person, lose some of her freedom to a nasty disease. It drove Aliya to become a runner, and she is training for her first marathon this fall, representing P4P at the Baltimore Running Festival. When she feels tired while training, she thinks of how important it is to cherish her own ability, and how she can use it to honor her mom. It's also driven her to co-chair the Pacing for Parkinson's organizing committee for the last two years, which involves marshaling a large number of runners and volunteers and countless other logistical tasks, both minute and large-scale.

None of us can say they're thankful they or a loved one has Parkinson's. But there are those of us who have acknowledged a bad situation and grown from it. Aliya has become a runner and organizer. Our

individual stories and journeys are different, but we've all become part of a community of fighters, connected to others who have suffered, yet persist. We have become Parkinson's Warriors, fighting small and sometimes large battles every day. If you suffer from the disease, know that your fight inspires your sons, daughters, spouses, and friends. You are an example for all of us.

[Visit Aliya's fundraising page.](#)