



RYAN'S STORY

Written by Ryan Dreibelbis

As my dad's disease has progressed, it's gotten scarier. Sometimes my fear has caused me to be angry at my dad, causing a painful cycle:

1. Get frustrated with Parkinson's patient
2. Express frustration inappropriately towards Parkinson's patient
3. Feel guilty for getting angry at Parkinson's patient
4. Get angry at myself for getting angry with patient

Parkinson's patients sometimes don't realize their limitations and balance issues, and they put themselves at risk of physical injury. As someone who loves a patient, watching this is seriously anxiety-provoking. I imagine my dad accidentally injuring himself constantly. I watch him like a hawk everywhere we go, looking out for curbs and cracks in the sidewalk. I park my car as far from other cars as possible so he doesn't bang doors into them.

I'm only around my dad on occasional weekends, but I know full-time caretakers have all of those worries above and many more. It's easy to watch this day after day, get frustrated and scared, and then get angry. It's important to realize, however, that your loved one is processing situations differently because of their disease. For example, after one difficult moment my mom asked my dad why he did something that was potentially dangerous. He responded in a moment of clarity: "I don't know. I didn't even think about it." His disease didn't let him process that he was about to be injured. Hearing this story from my mom helped me let go of some of my frustration towards my dad. I was able to realize he wasn't being reckless or stubborn, it's just the disease.

Caretakers in a stressful moment may not process situations correctly either. Sometimes people react poorly because of that stress. I often react out of anger at my dad rather than compassionately because of stress, fear, or frustration. And that is okay. It is human. Take it a little easy on yourself.

Also important for caretakers is self-care. The patient is suffering, but caretakers are enduring a loss too. A loss of a loved one. A loss of shared dreams for families like retirements, vacations, or finances. Caretakers cannot forget themselves and their own care. Exercise, therapy, reading, or time with friends are a few of the options that can help. There are at least two patients to every case of Parkinson's, and they all need care.



Above: Ryan and his Dad

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