

PARKINSON'S WARRIOR'S VIGNETTE

CATHY REES

Written By: Cathy Rees

Cathy Rees (ERYT500, MSN) is a yoga instructor at the Yoga Center of Columbia and teaches Yoga for People with Parkinson's Disease at the Retreat Center of Maryland.

Tell us a little about your relationship with Parkinson's Disease.

Before the pandemic hit, I had been teaching Yoga for People with Parkinson's (PWP) years before my mother was diagnosed with PD. The class was called Care Partner Yoga and it was my favorite class of the week because we made time to talk and recap the week. We learned about each other's families, previous careers, and told the stories about how couples met. We also shared community resources, offered advice, and simply engaged in general chit chat. While teaching the class, I witnessed fierce determination of students with PD. Some walked into class independently, others used a walker or a cane, and some were brought into class in a wheelchair. When the time came to do optional yoga poses on the floor, almost everyone, including those who came in via wheelchair, wanted to get out of their chair and find their way on the floor. It may have taken 10 minutes to get down, and 15 to get up, but they did it! It was incredibly empowering for everyone, especially me! I recognized that even though a person has PD, it doesn't mean that they must give up their will to do what they want to do. It takes grit, determination, and strength to be a person with Parkinson's.

When you think of the Parkinson's community, what word comes to mind?

Support. The supportive nature of the PD community is incredible. If there is something you need, or a question you have, People with Parkinson's and their care partners are right there to answer it for you with all kinds of resources. I had a question about constipation, and despite the sensitive nature of the



Above: Cathy and her mother, Jeri Owens

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Above: Cathy and her mother,
Jeri

question, I was inundated with recipes, exercises, and suggestions. No question is too personal. Everyone is willing to share their experience to make yours a little easier!

What's one piece of advice you would give someone with PD and their community?

Use your resources...they are available. Share your experiences and ask questions. And caregivers.... stick together. The progressive nature of the disease requires resilience. You're in this together for the long haul.

Is there anything else you'd like to share?

My mother was diagnosed a couple of years ago with PD. She is 90 years old. Immediately prior to her diagnosis, we took a cruise down the Snake River. On our flight there, she had odd reflexive-type movements, hinging forward from the waist, and kicking her leg forward. We were completely unsure of what was happening. She went to see a neurologist upon our return, and she was informed that she had Parkinson's disease. She started on Levodopa-Carbidopa and the movement disappeared until she needed another dose. I have been working with People with Parkinson's for several years, and I had never seen that specific type of movement disorder before. The doctor said it was new to her as well. It was then that I truly understood the adage "When you've seen one person with PD, you've seen one person with PD." Everyone is so unique. Because of this understanding, I let go of expectations and I try to make my yoga classes as varied and unique as possible, just like People with Parkinson's.

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