



PARKINSON'S WARRIORS VIGNETTE



MIKE BRUNO

As told to Aliya Reich

Mike Bruno, is the husband and care partner of wife, Bev Bruno, who has had Parkinson's for 24 years.

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

Bev was diagnosed with Parkinson's about 24 years ago. At the time, the Brunos didn't know what Parkinson's was; they were unfamiliar with the disease until they received the diagnosis. They were in denial for a good year or so and tried to hide Bev's condition. As more and more people started asking questions, especially family and friends, they started to tell people her diagnosis. Mike says, "the one thing about having PD in your family is that it's very important you have a good support system - family or friends - because you're going to need help."

For a number of the early years, Bev managed the disease well; she continued to work, drive, and take their children to school. But as the years went on, the disease became more debilitating. In 2008, she was having strong side effects and dyskinesia from her Parkinson's medication, so she decided to undergo Deep Brain Stimulation, or DBS, surgery, which implants a node in the patient's brain to help control tremors and dyskinesia. During this surgery, the patient has to be awake so correct placement of the node is ensured. The operation is typically done on both sides of the brain, but not always on the same day; when the doctor gave Bev that option, she decided to go for it - that's how all-in they were. A week later, they had to go back to the hospital to connect the wires to the neurostimulator and calibrate everything correctly. Once that was done, they were told, she'd have a 30 day honeymoon period where she'd feel like she didn't have the disease anymore, and that's what she experienced: no symptoms for about a month.



Above: Mike, Bev, their two daughters (Ashley and Brittany), two son-in-law's and three granddaughters.

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Above: Mike, Bev, their two daughters, and one of their three granddaughters

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**EVERY DAY IS A
NEW DAY**

After that, though, the disease began to return gradually. Around eight years ago, dementia began to creep in, and as of a year and a half ago, Bev could no longer walk on her own, and she is now using a wheelchair full-time. As a result, she can't do basic things by herself, so Mike has become her 24/7 caregiver. He says he's fortunate that he doesn't have to work anymore and he's able to dedicate himself to providing her care full-time. He says she sleeps a lot, so he does most things for them in the morning, before he wakes her up for her pills in the afternoon. "Every day is a new day," Mike says, and "there are new challenges each day. I pray every night and hope we wake up the next day."

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

"Supportive – it's so important to have a good support system. That, and compassionate."

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

Mike recommends that folks not be isolated; he says feels like he lives in a bubble sometimes, but that's not good for the patient's or the caregiver's health. "One of the most important things about being a caregiver is," he says, "you have to have a tremendous amount of patience. You're going to have good days and bad days. Especially with someone with dementia. You don't know what someone's thinking, you can't reason with it, but you have to be able to handle it." Mike says he couldn't do this without having family and friends, and he's lucky to have a good support system. He says he doesn't call on that system as much as he probably could, but he doesn't do things because he doesn't want to burden other people with what Bev is going through, especially now that she's so advanced in the disease.

Is there anything else you'd like to share?

Mike offers one more big piece of advice: to have patience and have a good support system, mentally and physically. "Just like P4P!" he exclaimed. Mike came across the P4P tent at the Baltimore Running Festival in 2012 after running the relay with his daughter. They started fundraising together – Bev wanted to find a cure for PD – so at first they did small fundraisers that got bigger and bigger over time. The largest was back in 2013, called "Rally in the Valley," was a big event at a mansion in Cockeysville that 550 people attended, and they raised \$35k for Parkinson's research! Their last event was in 2019.

