Bay Window

After being abandoned because of Parkinson's, I looked out at the world with new eyes.

BY LOUIS F. DECARO

If you told me 10 years ago I was going to be abandoned because I had Parkinson's disease, I would have said you're crazy.

I have long accepted that my body is failing me. I can barely get out of bed in the morning because my body "freezes" during the night, and each day I must cope with the tremors, muscle rigidity, loss of balance, slowness of movement, chronic pain, and fatigue that come with the disease.

My mind is different, though: it never stops trying to figure out how this all happened.

In July of 2002, while playing in an over-50 softball league, I noticed my left arm shaking. I didn't think much of it at first. Maybe I pinched a nerve? Maybe I was getting too old to play softball?

On July 19, 2002, after a series of test including two MRIs, I was diagnosed with Parkinson's disease. At the time, I had been happily married for almost 30 years.

But all that changed as my condition deteriorated. I was served a divorce action on October 25, 2004 and was told I had become a "burden." I spent most of the morning staring out of the bay window in the kitchen crying.

Eventually I decided to have my day in court. I felt I wasn't just standing up for myself but also for others cast aside because of illness. During the legal process, my Parkinson's was referred to as an "act" and a "ploy" to gain the court's favor. But after a seven-hour trial, the judge dismissed my wife's action in its entirety. I haven't seen or heard from her since.

The next day began like all the rest—I took a Sinimet while lying in bed, made my first cup of coffee, and stared out of the bay window. But this time I saw a world filled with opportunity. As I looked around the house I had called home for 20 years, I decided to redecorate. Thinking back, I had rarely had the time to express my creativity.

First I painted the living room a light palm green. It took me a week because it hurt to raise my arms over my head. Next I attacked the den, which I now call the Pink Room. It took me only four days. I was getting better at something I never really liked to do!

As my house began to make its transition, so did my outlook. I began to decorate the walls with paintings and family pictures. My house was coming back to life, and so was I.

The last room I decided to work on was the kitchen. One friend hung shelves for me. I tried to hang them myself but lost my balance and fell off the ladder. Another friend displayed plates, glasses, and straw baskets on them. I decided to tile the walls. And then there was the bay window. I decided not to do a thing to it. I wanted it to be a reminder of what a determined mind could accomplish.

Before I knew it, spring arrived. One morning I heard a mockingbird singing, and the next day I saw three robins scampering across the lawn. "Soon I will plant my flowers," I declared. I dedicated my garden to people who are alone because of illness.

Forty flats of flowers and two months later, my garden took shape and the crocuses began to open their little faces. By late August it was a testament to what a little faith and determination can do.

I continue to struggle living a productive life because of the disease's limitations, but I have learned that having the right attitude makes anything possible—and that planting lots of flowers means that if you fall, you don't have too far to go before you hit the ground. NN

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