

# CAREGIVERS

Each family's caregiving story is unique with a common thread: The desire to care. We thank these families for sharing their stories so that others can learn from them.

## share their EXPERIENCES

### PETER'S STORY

## Living with Parkinson's

Contributed by Parkinson's Society Canada

When Peter Davison was diagnosed with Parkinson's disease in 2005, at 45 years of age, he didn't tell anyone. He saw himself as an adventurer, high-altitude trekker and marathon runner, among other roles. "To have a disease that was going to be debilitating in my life was very difficult to come to terms with," he says. "It took me over a year."

Once Peter allowed himself to reach out to the people closest to him, he discovered it was ok to surrender some

of the control in his life. He opened himself up to the new experiences of becoming a husband at 48 and a dad at 49, with the adoption of a baby girl, Hannah.

The prospect of Hannah arriving in Peter's life brought some moments of self-doubt. "Can I handle the daily routines of a baby in my life, with a stiff arm?" he asked. "Would the birth mother want her baby to be raised in a family with someone who has a

neurodegenerative disease? Would that be a deal-breaker?" It wasn't.

Sure, it may have taken him twice as long to change Hannah because of the stiffness in his right hand. And he has to step carefully when carrying Hannah up or down the stairs, because he's developing some stiffness in his right foot. But, Peter says, "Just because you have a disease doesn't mean you can't bring up a child and be a loving parent." ☀️



### LYDIA'S STORY



## Second chances

By Lydia Hopper

My husband and I divorced many years ago. I chose to stay focused on my kids and my job instead of getting into the dating scene. When my youngest son moved out I thought, maybe now's the time to focus on myself. I was open to dating, but had no idea where to go to meet somebody. My son suggested I give online dating a try. I felt silly at first—I mean, I'm 67, isn't that for teenagers? I was actually really surprised at how many nice people I met though a dating website for seniors. I had lots of fun chatting with all kinds of different

people and making new friends.

Brian, a widower from Woodstock, and I really clicked. We emailed back and forth for about a year before meeting in person. When we got together for coffee it felt like we'd known each other for ages, even though we were meeting for the first time. Would you believe that two years later we've bought a house together? It's wonderful to have someone to look out for me and keep me company...it's more than I could have hoped for. I'm so glad I took a chance on something different. ☀️

## RON'S STORY

# First class

By Jim Garcia

On my first day of college, the professor did the usual and made the students introduce themselves to the person sitting next to them. When I turned to my left I saw that I was beside a smiling older gentleman with grey hair and thick glasses.

"Hello! I'm Ron. I'm 72 years old," he said. He caught my hand in a strong handshake. I was really impressed that he was taking on the challenge of higher education when he could have been relaxing in a timeshare somewhere and I told him so. He smiled good-naturedly. "Well, I had to start working right away and I've always regretted not getting an education."

Ron turned out to have a wicked sense of humour and a real knack for



storytelling and we grabbed some food after class to keep up the conversation. He made friends with everyone he met, charming teachers and students alike with his quick wit and intelligence. When he finally got his degree four years later, the whole class got up and gave him a standing ovation. I've fallen out of touch with Ron now, but I've never forgotten him. He taught me that you're never too old to follow your dreams. ☀️

## EDITH'S STORY

# Childhood tales

By Kate McKenzie

I've become good friends with many of the ladies who live in a seniors' residence with my mom. They all have wonderful stories to share, but I have been particularly impressed by a woman named Edith.

Edith's parents both passed away when she was only 11 years old. Her oldest brother left school so he could work to support the younger kids. Edith soon dropped out too and was responsible for taking care of two younger sisters as well as for the cooking, cleaning and housework. Neighbours checked in on the kids from time to time, but it was during the Depression so people had their own problems to worry about. I can't believe the strength and bravery Edith showed at such a young age.

Edith's tales about her childhood are amazing, but she's been worried she will forget them as she gets older. A few weeks ago I typed up the anecdotes she has told me and put them in a binder for her. She was thrilled and can't wait to show them to her grandchildren.

I'm so glad I've gotten to know Edith and helped her to keep her stories alive. ☀️



## HAYLEIGH'S STORY

# A granddaughter's love

Contributed by Parkinson's Society Canada

Like many kids her age, Hayleigh Ireland loves to go grocery shopping with her grandmother, finding the items on the shelves and putting them in the grocery cart. But Hayleigh, nine, takes special pride in helping her grandmother.



Karen was diagnosed with Parkinson's disease in September 2000 and now uses a scooter to get around. Hayleigh already knows that "some people with Parkinson's have trouble walking and sometimes their hands shake."

For Grandma Karen, Parkinson's has meant being unsteady on her feet and tiring easily. She's had a chair lift installed in her home. Because of her hand tremor, she has had to give up some old hobbies such as ceramics and paint-by-numbers and develop new ones—the house has so many books, it could be a library. Having the four grandkids drop in once a week keeps her busy and helps lift her spirits. ☀️