Parkinson Pathfinder

Summer 2026 Virginia Chapter Edition

The Power of Play

apda AMERICAN PARKINSON DISEASE ASSOCIATION

Summer 2026 Virginia Chapter Edition

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COVER PHOTO

Ljubomir Medenica (LJ) has lived in Alaska since 2006. He worked as a professor at the University of Alaska Southeast and retired in 2024, when he was diagnosed with Parkinson's. After his diagnosis, LJ started playing ping pong intensively. Since then, he has attended two major international tournaments, the French Open (September 2025, where he won a silver medal in his group) and the World Championship in Italy (October 2025).

apda AMERICAN PARKINSON DISEASE ASSOCIATION
VIRGINIA CHAPTER

Strength in optimism. Hope in progress.

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APDA'S MISSION

Every day, we provide the support, education, research, and community that will help everyone impacted by Parkinson's disease live life to the fullest.

Sometimes the things that bring us the greatest benefit are also the things that simply make us smile.

Summer often invites us to slow down, spend time with those we love, and rediscover the simple pleasures that bring meaning to our days. In this issue of *Parkinson Pathfinder*, we explore a theme that may seem unexpected at first, but one that is increasingly recognized as an important part of living well with Parkinson's: the power of play.

When we hear the word play, we might think of childhood. But play is really about something much deeper. It is about curiosity, connection, creativity, movement, and joy. It is about finding activities that make us want to keep showing up—not because we have to, but because they enrich our lives.

In these pages, you'll discover how enjoyable movement can support both body and mind, meet individuals who have found renewed purpose through shared activities, and learn why fun and laughter are not distractions from the challenges of Parkinson's, but essential companions along the journey.

One of my favorite messages in this edition is that life with Parkinson's does not have to revolve entirely around symptoms and schedules. There is still room for friendship, music, competition, creativity, and quiet moments of connection. Sometimes the things that bring us the greatest benefit are also the things that simply make us smile.

My hope is that these stories encourage you to try something new, revisit something you once loved, or perhaps look at an old favorite in a different way. Because even in the face of Parkinson's, there is still space for joy—and perhaps that is one of the most powerful forms of resilience we have.

Wishing you a summer filled with moments that make you smile.

With hope and optimism,

Lianna Badran
Regional Director, Marketing & Communications

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The Power of Play

Why Enjoyable, Engaging Activity Matters in Parkinson's

When people hear the word exercise, they often picture something structured: a walking plan, a class schedule, a set of therapy drills, or time on a stationary bike. All of those can be valuable for people living with Parkinson's disease. But research and real-world experience point to something equally important: movement may be easier to sustain when it feels enjoyable, mentally engaging, and meaningful. In other words, play matters.

This article is not meant to suggest that every idea here is settled science, but rather to bring together research, observation, and reflections on movement that may resonate with people living with Parkinson's.

That idea is not just feel-good advice. It reflects a growing understanding of what helps people with Parkinson's keep moving over time. Exercise is one of the most powerful tools available for managing Parkinson's symptoms. It can support balance, flexibility, strength, mobility, and overall quality of life. Emerging research also suggests that regular exercise may play a role in slowing functional decline.

But Parkinson's care is not only about whether a person can exercise. It is also about whether they will want to keep doing it. That is where play comes in.

For someone with Parkinson's, play does not have to mean games in the traditional sense. It can mean any activity that combines movement with enjoyment, curiosity, rhythm, challenge, skill-building, or social interaction. Dance classes, tai chi, yoga, singing with movement, drumming, group fitness, interactive games, and recreational sports can all fall into that category.

This broader lens matters because Parkinson's affects much more than tremor or slowness. It can also influence posture, gait, balance, reaction time, multitasking, mood, and confidence. Activities that are playful or immersive often challenge several of those systems at once. A dance class, for example, may involve rhythm, balance, memory, coordination, and social connection in the same session. Tai chi blends controlled movement, attention, posture, and weight shifting. Music-based movement and drumming can add timing, cueing, and mental focus.

These are not just fun extras. They are meaningful ways of asking the brain and body to work together in real time.

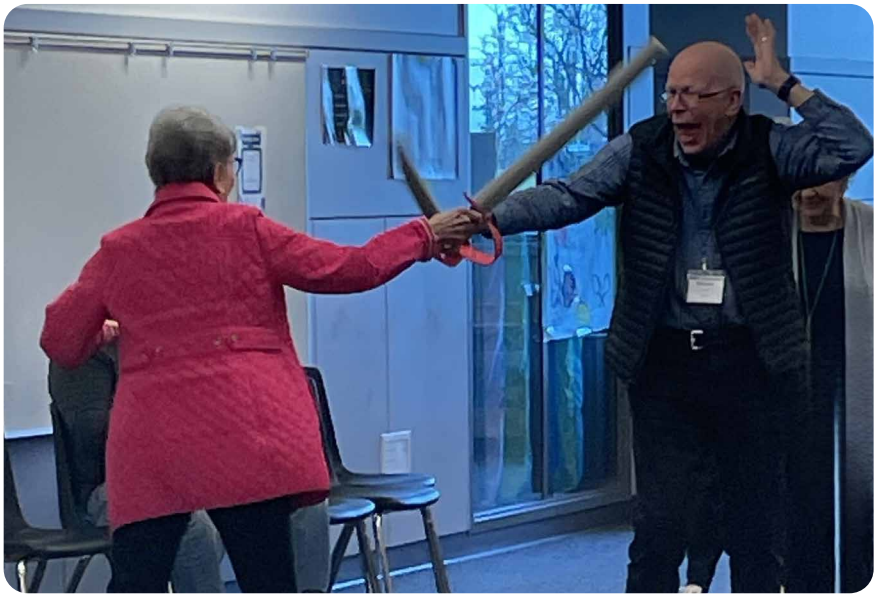
That has caught the attention of researchers. One area of growing interest is dual-task training, which combines physical movement with a second challenge such as attention, rhythm, or another cognitive task. This is especially relevant in Parkinson's because daily life rarely happens in a single-task environment. People walk while talking, turn while carrying objects, or move through busy spaces while processing information. Research suggests that this kind of combined

What Counts as Play?

Play can look different for everyone. For someone living with Parkinson's, it might include:

- Dance or movement classes
- Tai chi or yoga
- Drumming or music-based exercise
- Interactive fitness games
- Recreational sports
- Group exercise with a social element
- Activities that involve rhythm, timing, skill, or friendly competition

The best choice is one that feels enjoyable, appropriate for your abilities, and realistic to return to again and again. APDA's Upcoming Virtual Events calendar highlights programs such as yoga, tai chi, singing, and more.



training may help improve gait, balance, motor performance, and aspects of daily function.

Dance and rhythm-based movement have also drawn increasing attention. Studies suggest these approaches may support motor function, confidence, and quality of life. Exergaming and other interactive exercise formats are also being explored, with researchers examining how they may affect physical function, cognition, balance, and fall risk.

One of the most important takeaways from this body of research is that exercise does not have to be boring to be beneficial. In fact, enjoyment may be part of what makes it effective.

That matters because consistency is everything. A person may fully understand that exercise is helpful for Parkinson's and still struggle to stick with it. Symptoms, fatigue, motivation, transportation, access, and confidence can all get in the way. Research on exercise adherence shows that people are more likely to stay engaged when an activity matches their interests, feels achievable, and offers a sense of satisfaction or connection.

That insight is powerful. It suggests that the best activity is not always the one that looks most clinical or impressive on paper. It may be the one a person actually wants to do again next week.

This does not mean every fun activity is automatically safe or right for every person. Parkinson's symptoms vary widely, and exercise should be adapted to the individual. The goal is not to chase novelty for its own sake, but to find movement that is challenging enough to matter, safe enough to sustain, and enjoyable enough to become part of everyday life.

That may be one of the most hopeful messages in today's Parkinson's research: movement does not have to feel grim to be meaningful. Sometimes the activities that look the most joyful are also doing serious work.

For people living with Parkinson's, and for care partners helping support healthy routines, this opens an encouraging door. Movement can be purposeful without feeling punishing. It can be therapeutic without feeling like treatment every minute. And it can offer more than just physical benefits. It can build confidence, spark connection, bring variety to the week, and remind people that life with Parkinson's still has room for challenge, creativity, and enjoyment.

That is the real power of play.

A New Way Forward:

How One Playful Pursuit Changed Life with Parkinson's

Q & A with **Dwight Slade**

Living with Parkinson's often means adapting, adjusting, and finding new ways forward. Sometimes those ways come from unexpected places—a dance class, a golf club, a paintbrush, a ping-pong paddle, or another activity that brings movement and enjoyment together. In this conversation, one Dwight Slade, PWP, shares how discovering a playful pursuit helped restore confidence, spark joy, and bring a fresh sense of possibility to life with Parkinson's.

Can you tell us about the activity you discovered—or returned to—and how it first became part of your life with Parkinson's?

As much time as I spent in front of audiences and wanting their attention, off stage, I really don't like people that much. So, I was reluctant when Whitney and I started going to a local support group. But I was lured back by the free muffins.

It was at this support group that I learned about the YMCA Rock Steady class. A new friend, Dennis, said that you get to beat the holy hell out of the bag. There is something very cathartic about hitting that bag. I try to go to this class two days a week, and it's been several years now.

What drew you to this particular activity, and what made you want to keep going with it?

Now I love seeing the people at class. It's a group I never knew I needed, and now I don't want to miss it. At the end of class, we put our hands in for a cheer, which usually references something colorful about our hatred for Parkinson's. I feel a lot of camaraderie in that moment, and I carry it with me long after class.

In what ways, if any, has this pursuit changed how you feel physically, emotionally, or mentally?

Parkinson's has already taken so much from me. I want to keep up doing things that help my mental and physical strength. Getting to class keeps me moving, and it boosts my attitude.

Did it shift your outlook on Parkinson's or on what you felt was still possible for you? If so, how?

Well, when I'm with my PD friends, I don't feel so alone with the disease.

Were there any challenges, fears, or hesitations you had when getting started, and how did you work through them?

I found some negativity in people attending groups, or at exercise class, but I had to stop and remember I was there for me. Besides, it would be far more off-putting if I walked into a Parkinson's class and everyone was on cloud 9.

The first time we went to the indoor rock climbing class, they said guys a lot older than me were climbing the wall. Out of bravado, I said, "I can do that." It was excruciating, but the coaches were so encouraging, and I trusted them. Before I knew it, I was at the top, ringing the bell.

What would you say to another person living with Parkinson's who is hesitant to try something new, playful, or outside their comfort zone?

As a wise person once said, "Try not to take life too seriously." ■

Dwight Slade is an award-winning American stand-up comedian known for his sharp observational humor, intelligent storytelling, and energetic stage presence. He began performing at 14 alongside his longtime friend and fellow comedian Bill Hicks, helping launch a career that has spanned more than four decades. Slade has appeared on HBO, Comedy Central, and *The Tonight Show*, and has performed at major comedy festivals throughout North America and internationally.

A winner of both the Boston Comedy Festival and the Seattle International Comedy Competition, he is widely regarded as one of the Pacific Northwest's most accomplished comedians. He was diagnosed with Parkinson's Disease in November 2020. Dwight performed his last professional show in Alaska in September 2021, and his wife, Whitney Slade, was in the audience. Dwight and Whitney currently live in Boise, Idaho, with their Chihuahua Poodle Winston Slade.

Finding Light Again:

How Shared Activities Can Bring Joy Back into Life with Parkinson's

Q & A with **Whitney Slade**

When Parkinson's becomes part of daily life, it can be easy for routines to revolve around schedules, symptoms, and responsibilities. But joy still matters. In this interview, care partner Whitney Slade shares how fun, shared activities helped restore a sense of connection, lightness, and togetherness—and why those moments can be more powerful than they may seem.

"Dwight and I met in a comedy club, so our relationship started out pretty entertaining. He was a stand-up comic going on 40 years performing on stage, and I speak fluent sarcasm, pretty much exclusively. Between the travel (not all of it glamorous), brainstorming and writing together, and just the simple act of not taking ourselves too seriously, we always found the fun in both adventure and the day-to-day.

While "joy" isn't the first word that comes to mind when I think of Parkinson's, I believe there are still many ways to discover something new, or a new way of doing something you've always done, that brings a smile to you and your partner.

Before I share a few of the ways we find joy, I offer this tip: SLOW DOWN. The grand gestures, the extravagant trips, the surprises, and the dramatics are likely few and far between. Maybe they aren't over, but the sooner you start to let go of the expectation from your partner, the healthier your relationship will be. And you will start to let in the little things. The things that really matter and eventually the only things you and your partner can share.

I don't say this to be dismal. I say this to be real and to encourage you to start noticing them. The sooner you do, the more you will appreciate all the things you can still share together."

When did you begin to realize that fun and shared activities were more than just a break in the routine—that they were actually important for both of you?

When I felt like Parkinson's was starting to define us. I don't want every question to be about how we are doing with Parkinson's. Could it just be, " How are you doing?"

I started to think about what we used to love and how I could approach those things a little differently with Parkinson's in our lives. We both need activities

“I don’t want every question to be about how we are doing with Parkinson’s. Could it just be, “How are you doing?”

that have nothing to do with the disease. We have always loved getting massages and have found it to be the perfect combination for us. Between Dwight’s muscle soreness and my stress, we both need time to decompress and work out the kinks.

But I knew I wouldn’t enjoy my time off if he was home alone. And he needed me to advocate for him and be sure he was comfortable in a massage room with a total stranger. So, we started going to couples’ massage. One room, two therapists. The perfect outing.

They also know us very well at our neighborhood nail salon, where we frequently get manicures and pedicures together. These activities bring joy, relaxation, self-care, and a boost in self-esteem for both of us.

What kinds of shared activities have brought the most joy or lightness into your lives, and what made those moments meaningful?

We both love to read, but it has become too difficult for Dwight. And audiobooks are great, but we are listening separately. So, I started reading books aloud. We found that we looked forward to bedtime more. We could put our phones away, talk about the story’s progression, and look forward to hearing what happens next.

We also started recording stories together. Writing can become tricky, even on a computer, and Dwight doesn’t like the pressure of video, so we do voice recordings right on the phone or the laptop. We might be talking about a trip we went on, and I grab the phone and ask him if I can record the story. Or we may make a plan to chat about a chosen topic.

The stories range from a favorite memory of his mom to a funny story from early comedy days. Sometimes he just talks, and sometimes I dig deeper or make it more interview-style, which also helps to prompt more details. We can also transcribe the recording. I know I will treasure these forever, and we can share them with family and friends.

How have those activities helped your relationship beyond the day-to-day caregiving/ care-partnering role?

Even if just for a few minutes, he is my partner, my husband again.

Stopping to give someone your undivided attention is very intimate. It can be as simple as listening to a song that used to bring us joy and swaying together next to the dishwasher. Say “Hey, Google, turn it up” and embrace the moment, embrace your partner.

With this disease, we experience so much loss of the things we used to do. I am always searching for new ways to enjoy the old things we love.

We are big fans of Broadway and especially love the best seats. But sitting in the middle is a nightmare when you have what feels like a four-minute intermission to make it to the restroom and back to your seat. We now have some great ADA seats that let us quickly get up to the restroom line.

We used to love taking out our tandem bike; just being on the bike brought us joy. People would wave at us, and we adored the attention. Dwight had always been in the front seat, in charge of the brakes, gears, and direction. But now I ride in the front, and all Dwight has to do is pedal. We are together, with no risk of getting lost or separated, and we can still share this experience.

Were there any activities you tried that surprised you by how helpful or enjoyable they turned out to be?

Looking at old photos and remembering those adventures, talking about the best parts and the worst. It has helped me to remember how many adventures we had together, even in our short time before the diagnosis. I thought it would make me sadder, but instead I feel grateful. I'm not looking back thinking, " Oh, we don't have that anymore, I think, "Wow, we did some really cool stuff together."

We loved to take long walks along the river. Now we just go straight to our favorite spot and set up our chairs and snacks. We get the same result, just a little differently, and we can take in more of the best parts, listening to the water, watching our dog swim, and enjoying the wildlife.

What challenges have you faced in making time or space for these shared moments, and how did you work through them?

Everything about this disease is challenging. I have always been a planner, so this has been a big change for me. Making an appointment or plans with friends and needing to cancel at the last minute can be frustrating.

Living "a 36-hour day" and often feeling exhausted is tough. I work hard not to put expectations on the activities we do together. If we sit together in the sun for just 10 minutes, or if we do a voice recording and need to pick it up later, it counts. I cherish enjoying a frozen yogurt or singing together in the car. I just focus on being patient and flexible.

A few years ago, I was really starting to miss our travels. I'd never gone on an RV trip, and I thought that might be fun. Well, Dwight wasn't driving anymore, and so I was responsible for maneuvering this gigantic thing around. I avoided going in reverse for four whole days, but we did survive. If we try that again, I'll probably ask my friends with RV experience for some tips.

What would you say to another care partner who feels guilty prioritizing fun when life with Parkinson's already feels so serious?

There is no way of knowing how much time we have in this role. If we don't make time now, then when? And by the way, these activities are not just for our partners; they are for us too. This is the hardest job I've ever had, and at the end of the day, I judge myself harshly. The loudest voice in my head says I'm not doing enough. So, if I can bring some joy to our day-to-day, I feel that might be one of the most important things I can do.

Ping Pong for Parkinson's: Small Ball, Big Benefits

Table tennis is more than a pastime—it's a compact, adaptable workout that blends aerobic movement, quick footwork, fine motor control, and constant decision-making. For people living with Parkinson's, that mix targets four essentials: balance (weight shifts and stance changes), coordination (hand-eye timing through repeated rally patterns), reaction time (reading spin and speed, then responding), and confidence (frequent success, social connection, and measurable skill gains).

Early studies suggest that table tennis can be safe and feasible for people with Parkinson's and may improve motor symptoms, postural control, and self-reported well-being—adding to the growing case for sport-based, enjoyable therapy. (source: https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC8299968/)

Beyond the science, the community around the game is a powerful motivator. The nonprofit PingPongParkinson has helped turn local club nights into a worldwide movement led by and for people with Parkinson's. Chapters offer coached sessions, warm-ups tailored for rigidity and bradykinesia, and plenty of doubles play to keep rallies going.

According to the organization, there are now hundreds of chapters spanning dozens of countries, and an annual patient-led world championship that celebrates participation as much as podiums.

On the sport's global stage, the ITTF Foundation hosts the World Parkinson's Table Tennis Championships, bringing athletes together to compete, connect, and share best practices—from adaptive grips to pacing strategies between points. The event doubles as a living showcase of how structured play can nurture physical capacity and peer support.

Closer to home, chapter-run classes and senior-center programs make it easy to get started. Sessions are drop-in style, community-oriented, and designed for all abilities. Programs typically emphasize safety (spotters, barriers, stable footwear), progressive drills (from serve-receive to controlled rallies), and social time that reinforces attendance and confidence. To find details about a club near you, visit https://www.pingpongparkinson.org/usa-chapters

Getting started is simple: look for beginner-friendly sessions (or ask a local club to start one), aim for 1–2 hours per week at first, and prioritize doubles to maximize touches while minimizing fatigue. Use larger training balls or slower, controlled feeds to build rhythm; add gentle stepping patterns to challenge balance safely; and track small wins—longer rallies, cleaner first-ball contact, steadier voice projection during partner calls. Over time, those micro-victories on the table often translate into smoother daily movements and a stronger sense of agency.

In short, ping pong offers an unusually complete package for Parkinson's: targeted movement, cognitive engagement, and a welcoming community that keeps people coming back. Whether you join a local chapter night, a senior-center class, or aspire to the world championships, the message is the same—play together, improve together, and build confidence one rally at a time.

Ping Pong Near You

Learn more about Ping Pong Parkinson's at PingPongParkinson.org. Once there, navigate to Find a Chapter — PingPongParkinson to see if there's one near you!

No ping pong in your area? You can start a chapter by following the step-by-step instructions here: Start a Chapter — PingPongParkinson.

Creative Contributions

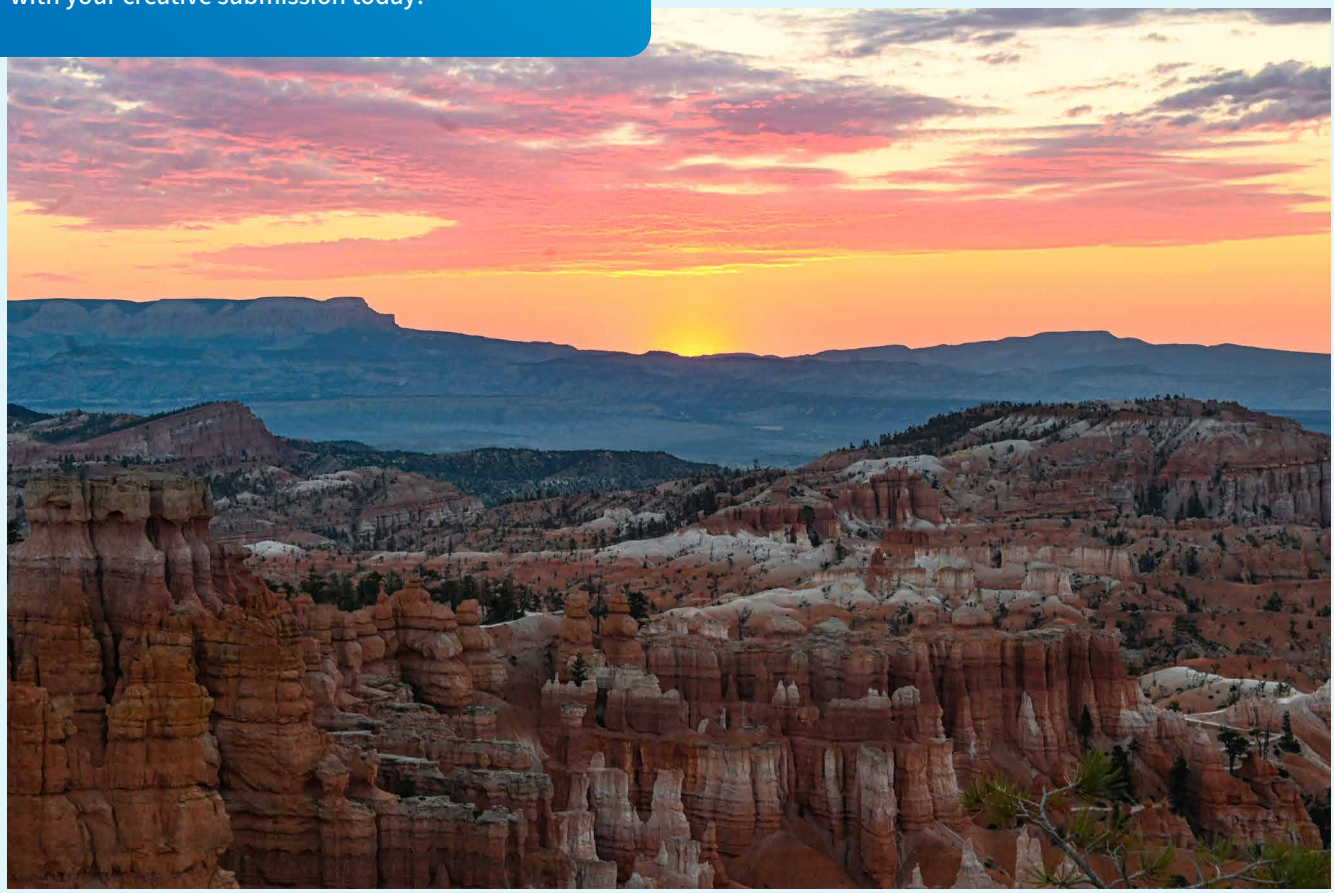
Art from the APDA Virginia Community

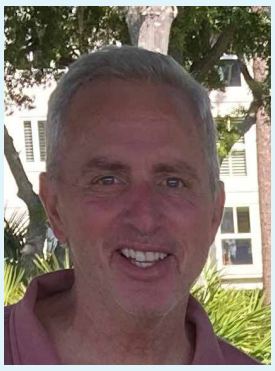
Do you like to draw, paint, or take photographs?
Are you a cartoonist or poetry master?
If so, we'd love to share your work here!

Email lbadran@apdaparkinson.org
with your creative submission today!

Mary Craig, Virginia Beach, VA
Photo title: **Bryce Canyon National Park**

I was diagnosed 15 years ago with PD, shortly after I'd retired from Virginia Beach City Public Schools with 32 years of experience. My neurologist told me to make movement a daily activity! I joined a Parkinson-specific gym, and I spend 4-5 days a week boxing, strength training, power moves, and cardio. PD progression has been very little in 15 years. I owe it all to movement. I love taking pictures, and last fall went to Bryce Canyon National Park, where this sunrise picture was taken.





John Baumann,
Williamsburg, VA

My name is John Baumann, and I am a person with Parkinson's disease. No — I am a proud person with Parkinson's. But I am also so much more. Not "was," but am.

I was diagnosed with Parkinson's at the age of 41. That's right — just 41 years old. I have now lived with Parkinson's for 25 years. And I truly mean lived with Parkinson's.

Before my diagnosis, I was living a wonderful life — a life many people would envy. I had a successful legal career that I loved, a wonderful wife, two children — a son and a daughter — and served on the boards of the Make-A-Wish Foundation and

Junior Achievement. My life was filled with concerts, travel, golf, softball, tennis, friends, and countless meaningful experiences.

Then Parkinson's reared its ugly head, and my life changed dramatically.

It has been difficult — at times, awful. But life is not defined by what happens to you. It is defined by whether you get back up after life knocks you down.

I once believed I would practice law well into my 90s. However, because of the cognitive challenges associated with Parkinson's, I was forced to give up the full-time practice of law at age 48. I could no longer safely play softball or tennis without risking serious injury from falls. And because it is not in my nature to do anything less than 110%, I fell often.

One by one, I had to give up many of the things I was passionate about.

Life is not defined by what happens to you. It is defined by whether you get back up after life knocks you down.

So, I picked myself up.

At first, I did not know what I could still do within my limitations. Every step became an adventure in discovery — a balance between activity and risk.

I began teaching an introductory law course at a local college. It was something I had always wanted to do but likely never would have pursued had I not been diagnosed with Parkinson's. I taught for 20 semesters before Parkinson's eventually ended that chapter as well.

Then I fulfilled another lifelong goal: I wrote a book about success, using examples both related and unrelated to Parkinson's disease.

I also returned to the courtroom to help friends with legal matters. I tried one case before a jury and another before a judge — and won both.

The next stop on my Parkinson's journey was motivational speaking. I began inspiring Parkinson's support groups throughout the United States and Canada. I was even invited to speak in Malaysia, Paris, and aboard an Alaskan cruise.

During this period, I also traveled extensively with my wife and experienced many incredible places around the world.

What did I speak about? After living with Parkinson's for ten years, I became serious about fitness. I was one of the founders of Rock Steady Boxing, an exercise program designed specifically for people with Parkinson's. Against the advice of some instructors, I also attended weekly kettlebell classes and eventually committed to hot yoga three days a week — what I affectionately called "90 minutes of hell."

I practiced yoga everywhere I traveled: Rome, Venice, Nice, Vienna, Athens, Paris, New York City, Hong Kong, and dozens of other cities.

I also dramatically changed my diet. Without giving it a trendy label, I simply focused on eating salads, vegetables, and line-caught seafood.

The effect on my Parkinson's symptoms was nothing short of remarkable.

I maintained this lifestyle for more than seven years. Unfortunately, during the COVID lockdowns, my wife and I lost momentum. My speaking abilities began to deteriorate, and the isolation was difficult for me. I thrive on activity and social interaction, and both suddenly disappeared.

Unable to participate in many of the things I once loved, I started watching movies on Netflix — lots of them. But I never stopped searching for purpose.

Eventually, the school system reached out to me, and I became a substitute elementary school teacher.

Throughout all of this, I continued moving and exploring new places to live. I relocated from Louisville, Kentucky, to Tempe, Arizona; Sarasota, Florida; and Williamsburg, Virginia. Living in different places has always brought me joy.

I was born on Long Island, New York, attended college at UMass, and earned my law degree from Cornell. Over the years, I have also lived in Boston, Houston, Corpus Christi, northern New Jersey, and Louisville.

In my keynote speeches, I often say that maintaining a positive attitude — no matter the circumstances — is your greatest asset.

That philosophy was deeply tested when I was unjustly confined to a psychiatric hospital for 12 days and then denied access to my own home. My Parkinson's diagnosis became a convenient excuse for a broken system more interested in insurance payments than patient care.

After many serious falls — including spending 21 hours on the floor of my condominium and another nine hours trapped in a bathtub — I made the difficult decision to move into independent living, where help is available within minutes if I need it.

Even there, life has continued to offer unexpected gifts.

I have met wonderful people, explored my artistic side through painting, and joined three choirs.

I still have so much more to say, but I will save that for another time.

— John Baumann

APDA Virginia Upcoming Events

Suffolk Optimism Walk

Saturday, September 12
Suffolk, Virginia

APDA Roanoke Conference

Saturday, September 19
Salem, Virginia

2026 Putting Out Parkinson's Golf Tournament

Thursday, October 29
Cedar Point Club, Suffolk

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The American Parkinson Disease Association (APDA) is committed to supporting people impacted by Parkinson's disease by increasing access to education and wellness, building community, providing support, and investing in research.

Including APDA in your will helps improve lives and costs you nothing today. Join other supporters in our APDA Legacy Society by including APDA in your will or trust, and invest in a brighter future for everyone living with Parkinson's.

August is Make-A-Will Month— a perfect opportunity to create your legacy.

Take the next step: Contact an estate planning attorney or create your will online for free using Giving Docs.

Reach out to us at **kwiesmann@apdaparkinson.org** or **757-495-3062** to learn more.