

Man with Parkinson's Discovers Healing Properties of Art

By Judie Holcomb-Pack

Parkinson's disease struck Jerry Hayes with a vengeance. In good health until his 60s, Jerry and his wife, Beverly, were saddened and in disbelief when they heard the diagnosis of Parkinson's in October 2011. Jerry, an avid Wake Forest fan, attended many sporting events, enjoyed fishing at the beach and Salem Lake, and going out to eat at his favorite local restaurants. Then he started experiencing muscle weakness in his legs. Beverly noted, "Looking back, we now see signs of Parkinson's that were attributed to other things, such as COPD and the medications he took for it." Parkinson's patients have many symptoms to deal with, but often the first is loss of the sense of smell. "We blamed a lot of tell-tell symptoms of Parkinson's on side effects of prescriptions for COPD and asthma," Beverly commented. "Looking back you can always see things more clearly and it is now obvious Parkinson's began long before the diagnosis."

The Parkinson Foundation (www.parkinson.org) lists these 10 early warning signs of Parkinson's Disease:

- Tremor or shaking
- Constipation
- Small handwriting
- Soft or low voice
- Loss of smell
- Masked face
- Trouble sleeping
- Dizziness or fainting
- Trouble moving or walking
- Stooping or hunching over

Jerry experiences all of the above, along with nightmares, cognitive issues and trouble regulating his blood pressure and body temperature. Every patient is different. There is no "one-size-fits-all" treatment and no standard diagnostic tests for the disease. Researchers such as the Michael J. Fox Foundation are continually working for better treatments and a cure for Parkinson's Disease (PD).

Beverly has been relentless in researching Parkinson's and connecting with other people who are experiencing the many effects of the disease via



Jerry Hayes shows off finished painting



Jerry Hayes works on painting

social media. In November she read an article on Twitter about Parkinson's patients uncovering a creative side which is believed to be a combination of Parkinson's and the medications they take. Since Parkinson's is a neurological disease, it affects the brain and thought processes in different ways.

Their family decided to give Jerry art supplies for Christmas and on Christmas Day he painted his first picture using acrylics. Beverly was so impressed with how well the painting turned out and how much peace he experienced in the process, that she posted photos on her Facebook page. Friends saw the post and started asking if they could purchase a "Jerry original." From that first painting, the requests for his paintings has mushroomed. A friend immediately commissioned him to paint a picture for her child with the words "It is cool to be kind."

Amazingly, when Jerry is painting, he doesn't experience tremors or many other side effects of the disease. His style is abstract, colorful and expressive. He chooses the colors he wants to work with or he allows the person who wants the painting to select colors and Beverly mixes them on a palette. According to Beverly, the key to painting with Parkinson's patients is letting them express

themselves freely, not telling them what to paint.

Jerry retired after a successful career in sales, but noted, "Having Parkinson's is the hardest job I've ever had." The discovery of painting has restored his joy in life and boosted his self-esteem. He is very excited to have people ask him to paint a picture for them and appreciates all the support he has received.

Beverly commented, "We just wanted to give him an outlet, but it has turned into an opportunity to bring joy to others, as well as an awareness of Parkinson's Disease. We have realized that you can't

wait for all the storms in your life to pass; you have to dance in the rain and find joy in the journey."

Having almost lost Jerry three times due to complications from Parkinson's and COPD, their family feels blessed to have him with them today and grateful that he has discovered this wonderful gift. There has been improvement in his speech, cognitive skills and emotional health since he began painting – there is obviously healing that comes through art. "When you give of yourself to others, it improves something in you," said Beverly.

A friend, Elaine Rymal Hardacker, noted, "Incredibly, this man has found a silver lining living with Parkinson's."

For more information on the Hayes' family journey with Parkinson's, including links to Parkinson's organizations, follow Beverly's blog at www.writerunlive.blogspot.com.