

**Life as a Parkinson's Care-Partner: How Can I still be me?
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After a loved one's diagnosis with Parkinson's how do we go on with life as care-partners? Reeling in shock, suddenly we are faced with a different life than we had imagined for ourselves. How can we still be "ourselves" in a "new" life?

Parkinson's brings about changes for *all* of us who live with it--changes in every aspect of our lives. In response, we can go on as if nothing has changed, until a crisis forces us in new directions, or we can take on the task of re-examining our selves and our lives, and make some adjustments for both the short and long run.

Both as a person and a professional, I have found that a progressive, degenerative disease challenges us to reconsider the fundamentals of life: Who am I? What am I *able* to do vs. what I *want* to do---or *used to* do? What is my place in work/family? What is my life all about now? How do I give my life meaning and significance? Again, It's not just the patient whose life has changed. The Parkinson's Partner's life has been dis-ordered also.

Okay, so not everyone wants to live "the examined life," let alone "the re-examined life," and questions like "Who am I?" seem so weighty and large. Nonetheless, I recommend taking a stab at it.

Initially, I couldn't do this myself. I was so devastated after my husband's diagnosis that I really couldn't look at the bigger picture. I was just trying to take in the very fact of my beloved husband going from exceptional health to declining into a debilitating, no-cure-in-sight life. My program was more like: Breathe. Stop crying. Eat. Try to sleep. Then, having had my feet knocked out from under me by PD once, I opted for re-thinking and re-gaining charge of my life as much as possible.

For my husband and myself, taking on the challenge of the re-examined life has enabled us to work out new directions, individually and together, that have brought us fulfillment, even joy and fun. That is not to say that the losses are not there, that we never rage and grieve, but that has become the smaller aspect of our lives. I definitely like it better this way. Wallowing in misery only means rolling around in the mud until you are smothered...yuck!

This piece originally appeared in *The Informant, Spring 2008* as a precursor to a caregiver's workshop that Carolyn presented to the Iowa APDA on October 15, 2008. The workshop explored ways we care partners can still be ourselves while rising to the challenges of life with Parkinson's.