

# April is Parkinson's Awareness Month



Yvon Trepanier diagnosed with Parkinson's at age 47

## Living with Parkinson's

Grocery shopping is a nightmare for Yvon Trepanier – from the produce aisle to the checkout counter.

“Plastic bags are my worst enemy,” says Yvon. “I struggle to open them. If I’m buying grapes, I have to focus on one finger at a time to get all the grapes inside the bag.”

At the cash, it takes forever for Yvon to get money out of his wallet.

“You may think I’m not moving or that I’m very slow, but I’m calculating this finger has to get out of the way to do this, that finger has to get in there to do that. I have to focus on every single movement because the dexterity is not there.”

Yvon, 54, has Parkinson's disease, a neurodegenerative disorder that affects over 100,000 Canadians. The most common symptoms are tremor, slowness and stiffness, balance problems and muscle rigidity.

The average age of onset is 60, but some, like Yvon, can be diagnosed with young-onset Parkinson's, at age 30 or 40.

The diagnosis at 47 cut short Yvon's career as a high school teacher. By then, his students were complaining, “Mr. T., we can't read your writing on the board.”

Once proud of his facility with languages and his ability to write Japanese, Russian and Greek script, Yvon says, “That part of me is dead now, so I have had to mourn it and reinvent myself as a person who doesn't move very fast.”

He finds the hardest part of living with Parkinson's is the inner struggle that nobody else sees. “You're trying to look normal but you realize, oh, my face is probably frozen right now, so I'd better get some movement going to build a smile so this person can tell I'm still engaged in our conversation.”

Yvon chairs the advocacy committee of the Parkinson Society Canada, to help his Parkinson's “brothers and sisters.”

His latest personal challenge is to co-manage the 50-acre hosta farm he and his partner recently bought, a half-hour drive from London, Ontario. He figures it will keep him busy for the next 30 years.



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