

Laughing through life's adversities (27, 04, 13)

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My friend Gord is 80 years old, and the last few years have not been kind. He and his wife recently spent the day with Miriam and me. First, we had lunch and chatted at our house, and then, for an outing, I drove everyone to beautiful downtown Niagara on the Lake. Gord is not so mobile anymore; he plods along with a cane as I do, but in comparison, you might like to compare me to a NASCAR driver. He is slow. I headed for Starbucks on the main street, handy because it has some comfortable chairs and even free WiFi, but that was not our concern. We sipped coffee, and the ladies eventually took a stroll while Gord and I remained.



Gord and his wife sold their large home because they could not handle it any longer. He has difficulty with stairs as she does, and his Parkinson's is getting more pronounced. It's difficult for him to carry or move anything. Fortunately, they were able to relocate to an apartment. The extreme downsizing was difficult at first, especially for his wife.

Unfortunately, Gord can no longer drive which hurts because he was a former bus driver from which he derived much pleasure. Now, his wife does all of the driving, but she doesn't like to drive far and hates driving at night.

When alone, Gord shared that he didn't know what they would do if one of them died. Why do I share all of this with you? Simple. I have another friend, a former Toronto Star editor who lost his wife years ago, and he constantly reminds me that "this is not a dress rehearsal." In other words, *carpe diem*. Patrick is now a travel writer, and he travels the world. Often, he lives inside his truck-trailer for months at a time. What Gord and Pat have in common is a sense of humor.

Michael J. Fox is a famed actor, author, producer, activist and voice-over artist who also has Parkinson's. I have watched his career and enjoyed his roles such as Marty McFly from the *Back to the Future* trilogy (1985–1990); Alex P. Keaton from *Family Ties* (1982–1989) for which he won three Emmy Awards and a Golden Globe Award; Mike Flaherty from *Spin City* (1996–2000), for which he won an Emmy, three Golden Globes, and two Screen Actors Guild Awards; and Private Max Eriksson in the Brian DePalma film *Casualties of War*.

He was diagnosed with Parkinson's in 1991, and he disclosed his condition to the public in 1999. Fox semi-retired from acting in 2000 as the symptoms of his disease became more severe. He has since become an activist for research toward finding a cure. This led him to create the Michael J. Fox Foundation. If you have watched him in action, you know also that he has a good sense of humor. My theory is that without this trait, life's adversities can be hard to endure.

Gord will not pack it in. In Starbucks as his right hand shook in violent tremors, he asked me if NOTL had a car wash yet, and then suggested that with his asset-affliction, he would be a natural for washing and drying. Then, as we brainstormed further handicapped vocations, he came up with bartender, and suggested that with Parkinson's he would be ideal at mixing drinks.

I like to hang out around cheery people like Gord and Patrick, because their attitude helps buoy one's spirits. In fact, people who are handicapped are often quite adventuresome. A few years ago, I tried skydiving. It was a thrilling experience. Especially the part when my feet reached the ground. I have discovered that my disability (partial myelitis) has actually freed me to try extreme pursuits that I would not have tried before.

After Starbucks, we returned home and enjoyed Miriam's cooking. We finished the evening with an exciting game of dominoes, which was good for our hand-eye coordination and grey matter. At our collective ages, we seem to enjoy a lot of grey matter!

