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From a Place for My Daughters to a Lifeline for Me

By a Grateful Longtime Member Jim Wynn

The Madison Area YMCA has been part of my family's life for more than 30 years. When we moved to Madison from Brooklyn, we didn't know a soul. At the time, we had one young daughter—today, we have three grown daughters, all of whom started their journeys in this community through Y gymnastics. The Y was a place for them to play, learn, and grow. It fit our family perfectly.

For years, I saw the Y as something I gave to my children—a place for *them*. I worked out here, sure—but I never imagined it would become a lifeline *for me*.

A little over a year ago, my wife and I were on one of our usual hikes up in Maine. She looked at me and said, "You're not walking the way you used to." I brushed it off. But not long after, at my annual physical, I was hit with a diagnosis I never saw coming: Parkinson's disease.

At that moment, I was flooded with fear. I've been healthy all my life. How could this be happening? What would my life look like now? Suddenly, I was staring down a future with a degenerative illness. I remember thinking, *this is the disease that's going to be with me for the rest of my life*. And honestly? It kind of sucked.

When I was first diagnosed, I felt as low as I've ever felt. I didn't know what to do or where to turn. And then... *here came the Y*.

In the midst of that darkness, I stumbled across something on the Madison Area YMCA's Group Exercise schedule that I never expected: Parkinson's classes. *Here? At the Y?* I couldn't believe it. I walked in, signed up for a class, and that decision changed everything.

Now I take four to six classes a week—the Y has Rock Steady Boxing, Pedaling for Parkinson's, Yoga for Parkinson's, and Delay the Disease. I walked in not knowing a single person, and now I'm surrounded by a community of others walking the same path. We support each other, encourage each other, and sometimes laugh through the hard stuff.

And the instructors—Nikki, Patti, Peggy, and Susan—they're incredible, passionate, dedicated, and they push us to be our strongest selves. They push us, because they know that movement is medicine. I leave some of those classes dripping with sweat, and my doctor couldn't be more thrilled.

The Madison Area YMCA has transformed what could have been a lonely, painful diagnosis into something filled with connection, support, and strength. I never thought that the same place that nurtured my daughters would one day help *me* face one of my life's hardest challenges.

That's why I'm sharing my story. Because I want anyone facing something hard to know—you're *not alone*. The Y is here. And if it could lift me out of the lowest point in my life, it just might do the same for you.

This place is something special. I am so grateful to be part of it.

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MADISON AREA YMCA

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